



IHVN NEWS

A NEWS PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN VIROLOGY, NIGERIA



Community Centers Reach Key Populations With HIV Services

By Blessing Ukpabi

According to the 2018 Nigeria HIV/AIDS Indicator and Impact Survey (NAIIS), the prevalence of HIV among female sex workers in Nigeria is between 13 to 15%. Female sex workers are considered key populations in addressing HIV globally, because of their exposure to high risk sexual behaviors. Other key populations are men who have sex with men, transgender people and people who inject drugs.

Mary is a female sex worker living in Abuja who identifies stigmatization, confidentiality and transportation costs as challenges that affect access to HIV treatment in health facilities. However, as a person living with HIV since 2013, her relief is the one-stop shop HIV service center that the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) is supporting in her community.

The IHVN supported center is run by DIADEM Consults with funding from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). At the Center, Mary and other female sex workers receive prevention care and treatment services to reduce the transmission of HIV.

The center is located close to Mary's residence and saves her the worry of transportation costs.

"The staff treat us well, there are no long queues and HIV medications are always available. I meet my peers during support group meetings and the staff there encourage us to adhere to our HIV treatment," she said.

"They teach us that if we stop taking drugs, our virus levels will go up, but if we adhere to treatment, we will stay healthy. They also teach us how to prevent re-infection. We do not always know the HIV status of our clients, so it helps when we get condoms at the center. There, we are taught how to use condoms and given lubricants as well. They tell us to be careful when using needles and sharp objects" she said.

Apart from easy access to HIV services, Mary is also encouraged to remain in treatment through follow up calls from the center.

"I take my drugs well and I feel strong. Treatment is free too," she said.

What attracted another female sex worker, Victory, to the center is the friendly way in which she was told about her HIV positive status when a friend recommended the center to her last year.

"The people working here are friendly. They educated me about HIV. I asked them if I was going to die immediately but they assured me that HIV is not a death sentence. I started taking antiretroviral treatment and it is really helping," Victory said.

IHVN Prevention Lead, Mrs. Comfort Ochigbo, says that with more people on treatment, the likelihood of people living with HIV transmitting the virus when suppressed is reduced.

"Key populations need these services to stay healthy and also to reduce HIV transmission. When we interrupt HIV transmission in these populations, we will go a long way in reducing the spread of HIV in the larger community."

She explained that IHVN supported One Stop Shops also reach out to men who have sex with men, transgender people and people who inject drugs.

"We provide not only HIV treatment but pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to those who are not yet infected to prevent transmission," she said.

Amira, a transgender woman, attests to the availability of free pre-exposure prophylaxis at the center where she accesses HIV medications in Gwarinpa, Abuja. She has even introduced a friend to the center.

"When I told my friend about pre-exposure prophylaxis available in the one stop shop, she followed me to access the services. When she came, she was tested for HIV and given PrEP after she tested negative," Amira said.



A health care provider, Mr Solomon discusses with Mary in her community in Mabushi, Abuja.



Amira at a laboratory in a one stop shop in Abuja for her viral load test



Dalhatu receives PrEP from a one stop shop center in Abuja

From the Chief Executive Officer

In Nigeria, although key populations such as female sex workers, people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men comprise 3.4% of the population, they account for about 32% of HIV infections.

These populations are therefore critical in HIV control. IHVN offers a variety of prevention and treatment services to key populations in the Federal Capital Territory, Nasarawa and Rivers State through One-Stop-Shops and drop-in centers.

This edition shares the progress being made in addressing HIV through these centers.

There are also reports of our implementation activities across the country.

Happy reading!



Yours truly,
Dr. Alick Dikson
Chief Executive Officer,
Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria

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Community Centers Reach Key Populations With HIV Services

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Amira added that she is willing to introduce others to the one stop community center where she accesses HIV medications because they are like family to her.

"As a member of the key population community, going to a regular hospital is not safe. Even if I go, some people will start preaching to me about my gender identity and personality. Here, they just accept me as family and I feel at home."

Amira also gets free treatment for sexually transmitted infections as well as transportation support.

Another transgender woman, Godiya, added that viral load tests are free at the IHVN supported center.

"They really care a lot about their clients. I started taking HIV medications in December 2019 and I always get free drug refills and viral load tests here at the One Stop Shop."

An additional service that Emmanuel, a member of the Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) community, receives is delivery of drugs at his door step when he is unable to go to the center.

"When we are unable to go to the facility for treatment, they send it to our doorstep. I take my HIV medications daily. The last viral load test I did here shows that I am doing well and the virus is undetectable," he said happily.

"I see the facility as my second home; whenever I have issues, I run to them. Any time I have challenges with my treatment, they guide me on what to do," he added.

Emmanuel now refers other community members to



Emmanuel discusses with a care provider at a one stop shop in Nyanya

the center. "Recently, I encouraged some to go there for cryotherapy treatment for anal warts. Many of them turned up, though at first, they were shy," he said.

Constant encouragement from staff at the center is what has kept Chidi, another member of the MSM community, motivated to remain on treatment.

"The staff talk to me and counsel me. Taking drugs every day is not easy. They give me hope," he said.

Mrs. Ochigbo, adds that the community centers are also supported by the Institute to conduct community outreaches to settlements with high numbers of Key Populations.

Dalhatu, a person who injects drugs, says that he first learned about PrEP after one of such outreaches to his community in Kpaduma by IHVN supported organization - Reach Care Foundation. Since then, Dalhatu has continued to access PrEP services to prevent HIV.

"I access PrEP services, treatment for sexually transmitted infections and regular HIV testing at the Reach Care Foundation One Stop Shop," he said.

Mr. Solomon, a counselor at one of the One Stop Shops in Abuja, said that PrEP is only given to clients who are HIV negative.

"For clients who are living with HIV, we give them free condoms and lubricants, teach them condom negotiation skills, and organize support group meetings to encourage them to live healthy lives. Currently, 1,500 key population members and their partners access HIV prevention and treatment services at our center," he said.

According to Mrs. Ochigbo, these one stop shop community centers have continued to improve access to health services to female sex workers, MSM, transgender women and other key populations community members.

"We have 17 one stop shops in the Federal Capital Territory, Nasarawa, Katsina and Rivers States. Combination prevention package of services are offered at these centers including HIV testing services, PrEP, HIV antiretroviral treatment, viral load testing, mental health, gender-based violence services amongst others" she said.

Eight-Year-Old Miracle Gets a Miracle by Lawrence Wakdet

When Mrs. Gift took her eight-year-old daughter, Miracle, to General Hospital Okomoko in Etche, Rivers State, her case seemed helpless. Mrs Gift had taken Miracle from one faith center to another because she thought that her daughter was suffering from a spiritual attack. Meanwhile, Miracle remained weak, lacked appetite and weigh only 15kg.

Miracle was quickly admitted at the hospital.

Tender Life Rescue Initiative, a community based organization and Widows and Orphan Empowerment Initiative (WEWE) collaborated in ensuring that Miracle was linked to adequate counseling, nutrition and educational services when it was discovered that she was HIV positive.

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) supports both organizations with funding from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to cater for children infected with and affected by HIV

to live healthy, safe and stable lives. Miracle immediately started HIV medications.

Five months later, Miracle's weight improved to 24kg. With the consistent care and treatment she has received, she is healthier, strong and looks ahead with hope for a bright future. Her mother has also organized a church thanksgiving service to celebrate her recovery.



Miracle before treatment



Miracle, nine months after she started treatment



Officers of Tenderlife Rescue with IHVN OVC Team and Miracle and her mother in the middle.



Miracle and her mother receiving adherence counseling from a health worker in Okomoko General Hospital in Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State.

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IHVN CEO Urges Health Journalists to be Change Agents

by Blessing Ukpabi

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), has urged the media to be agents of behavior change by communicating accurate and timely information to the public and to decision makers.

The CEO, who was represented by IHVN Senior Program Officer, Pharm. Moses Haggai made these remarks at the 5th Annual Conference of the Association of Nigeria Health Journalists (ANHEJ) in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. He said that effective communication is one of the best practices required to sustain public health programs in the country.

"Information dissemination is critical in mitigating the spread of communicable diseases. We have seen its importance in fighting HIV and creating awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic. The media is a critical stakeholder in sustaining health awareness, and in promoting a healthy society," he said.

Pharm. Haggai further called on the more than 50 health reporters at the conference to advocate for greater commitment by the

government to fund programs in the country.

"Media needs to ensure that the government understands their role of ensuring proper funding for health by telling compelling stories that will bring about government action," he said.

ANHEJ President, Mr Hassan Zagi said that the conference themed, "Improving Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccine in Nigeria Beyond 2021: The Role of the Media," was aimed at encouraging the media to intervene in key national issues.

"This year's conference is so peculiar because of the issue of people not wanting to take COVID-19 vaccine. We know that it is the sure way to go to stay safe."

Mr Zagi added that the conference has brought health reporters together to strategize on educating the public about COVID-19 vaccine.

"We have been writing about it but



IHVN Senior Program Officer, Pharm Moses Haggai addressing Journalists

we felt the need to bring together stakeholders to brainstorm to communicate better. We are looking at the option of going from community to community to sensitize people to take the vaccine," he said.

He thanked the IHVN for supporting the association in organizing the conference. Representatives from the Federal Ministry of Health, World Health Organization, Nigerian Union of Journalists, West African Health Organization amongst other organizations, and veteran journalists, made presentations at the two-day conference.

IHVN Participates in 2021 National TB Conference

by Ritnen Gomwalk

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has participated in the 2021 National Tuberculosis Conference themed, "Sustaining a Resilient TB Response in Nigeria: Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 and Other Diseases." The hybrid virtual-in-person conference was held from 9th to the 11th, November 2021, and had over 1,500 health care workers in attendance from all over the country.

The conference was aimed at creating an avenue to foster research, technologies, innovations, collaborations, integration, awareness about tuberculosis as well as to promote best practices in tuberculosis (TB) programming in Nigeria.

Staff of the Institute made oral and postal presentations on TB preventive therapy among children and adults, tuberculosis

management in the private sector, decentralizing access to tuberculosis management, mapping of hotspots coverage and diagnosis amongst other topics. IHVN Communications Manager, Mrs. Uzoma Nwofor chaired the conference Logistics and Planning Committee and said, "I believe the objectives of the conference were met. I was pleased that my team and I were able to effectively and efficiently provide technical assistance. We also ensured that all logistics was properly planned and executed."



IHVN Strategic Information Officer, Mr. David Meshak; IHVN Program Officer Dr. Seun Adeyemo; IHVN Program Manager, Dr. Tafeklat Ali; Pharm Access Staff Dr. Ademola Serrano; IHVN Program Manager Strategic Information, Dr. Charles Ohikwail; IHVN Manager Communications, Ms. Uzoma Nwofor; and IHVN Communications Assistant, Ritnen Gomwalk.



IHVN Program Manager TB (second left) participating in a panel discussion during the conference.



IHVN Senior Program Officer Dr. Temitope Adetiba, giving an oral presentation on, "No One Left Behind: TB Care to Underserved Nigerians Through Private Sector Participation."

TB: IHVN Partners Over 19,000 Private Sector Health Providers

by Luret Dakum

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has partnered with over 19,000 faith-based health facilities, community pharmacists, patent medicine vendors, private-for-profit health facilities, private-standalone laboratories and traditional healers to find and treat tuberculosis in 21 states of the country.

IHVN Program Manager, Global Fund Public Private Mix Project Dr Taofeekat Ali, said in an interview that the Institute has engaged 471 faith-based facilities, 2,677 private-for-profit health facilities, and over 16,000 community pharmacists, patent medicine vendors, private-stand-alone laboratories and traditional healers.

"As Principal Recipient for the Global Fund Public Private Mix Project, we are working with sub-recipients like Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria, KNCV, The Leprosy Mission of Nigeria and Damien Foundation Nigeria to involve the private sector in finding and treating tuberculosis. The states involved in this project are, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Rivers, Plateau, Anambra, Enugu, Edo, Delta, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Benue, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, Kogi, Nigeria and Sokoto States. When we started the project in 2019, the total number of cases that were notified in the private sector were about 2,500. We have moved from that figure to 11,838 cases notified in 2021," she said.

Dr Ali added, "Nigeria ranked 6th in the high TB burden countries globally. When we profile our situation, we see that the private sector came as top of the list as the place to go to find missing cases, because we know that one in two or three persons who are ill will first go to the private provider to get treatment for any ailment."

35-year-old Patrick Lawrence is, a welder in Nasarawa State, and is one of the beneficiaries of this private sector partnership.



Patent Medicine Store Owner, Zainab Dankisaya at her store in Nasarawa State.



IHVN Senior Program Officer, Dr Temitope Adetiba mentoring TB survivor, Mr Patrick Lawrence on being a community advocate.

He walked into a Patent Medicine Store in Dankisaya that was supported by the project for cough medications after drinking warm water for days to cure his cough. Instead of reflexively providing cough medications, the owner of the store, Zainab Dankisaya screened Patrick for tuberculosis. Zainab had earlier been trained by the institute on counseling and screening clients for tuberculosis.

Zainab counseled and screened Patrick. Then, she referred him to Mararaba Gurku Nasarawa Medical Center Nasarawa, a public health facility, for TB testing, which confirmed that he had tuberculosis.

Patrick commenced free treatment immediately at the hospital and his treatment was monitored by health facility staff.

"I used to get phone calls from facility staff who made sure that I was taking my drugs and informed me when I need to collect more drugs. When I was sick, I was very weak and thin. I could not work because I was not strong enough but now, I am strong and able to work. I have completed the six-month treatment for tuberculosis," Patrick said.

Patrick is now a TB survivor and advocate for treatment of tuberculosis. "Because of me, one of my friends stopped drinking and smoking," he narrated.

Zainab is happy to be part of the process and used the skills that she has learned in relating with clients.

"I am happy with the program, because the challenges that I had before was how to disclose to a client who has tuberculosis. Now, I can calm them down. My clients are telling others, even in places like Keffi and Masaka. They say, 'come to Hajia's place to find out if you have tuberculosis,'" she said.

According to Dr. Ali, as more private sector providers are engaged to provide tuberculosis services, the Institute is working to overcome challenges such as high turnover of skilled personnel in the private sector.

"Private facilities do not often have the requisite number of staff to manage patients like we have in the public sector. Even when they are available, they live within a short time. what we are doing is to provide constant training when there is staff attrition. we also try to keep them interested in the programme with incentive package that we provide," she said.

AMLSN Visits IHVN

by Blessing Ukpabi

The executive Committee of the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN), has paid a courtesy visit to the new Institute of Human Virology Nigeria Campus in the Cadastral Zone, Abuja.

The committee, led by its National President, Professor James Garba Damen, said that the association seeks to strengthen its partnership with the Institute in capacity building of medical laboratory scientists, research, and support for its laboratory at the AMLSN national secretariat in Abuja.

"We appreciate IHVN's partnership in supporting our dear country in the fight



The Executive Committee of the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN), has paid a courtesy visit to the new Institute of Human Virology Nigeria Campus in Abuja.

against infectious diseases, in the training program you designed for intern Medical Laboratory Scientists on Molecular Diagnosis, and in quality management system. We appeal for the continuation of the programme," Prof. Damen said.

While receiving the team, IHVN Technical Advisor Laboratory Services, Mr. Abubakar Abdullahi, and Senior Technical Advisor, Laboratory Services, Dr. Sam Peters, said that the Institute is committed to excellence in the medical laboratory science profession in the country.

During the visit, The AMLSN committee was taken on a tour of the research laboratories under construction at the IHVN campus in Abuja.

PHOTO GALLERY



Senior Program Officer, Gender-Based Violence, Mrs Derby Collins-Kalu interacts with an adolescent during a sensitization health talk on gender-based violence at Federal Government Girls College Bwari, FCT.



(L-R) Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Professor Alash'ie Abimiku, IHVN Chief Operating Officer/Managing Director, Dr. Charles Olalekan Mensah and IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum during the IHVN annual cookout.



Facilitators interact with parents and caregivers during IHVN Family Matters! Program activity aimed at empowering caregivers and parents of adolescents with positive parenting skills to better communicate sexuality and sexual risk prevention to their children



IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum, receiving an award of Brotherhood and Friendship Peace Ambassador from Modibbo, my Brother and Friend Project.



IHVN moves its headquarters from Maina Court, Central Business District to its new seven story Twin Tower Campus located off CITEC road, Abuja.



IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum, speaking at the Institute of Advanced Medical Research and Training (AMRAT) Sensitization Seminar.

News in Brief

IHVN Holds Staff Retreat *by Blessing Ukpabi*

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has held a yearly retreat for its staff to strategize and plan towards its 2021 Fiscal Year, which runs from October 2021 to September 2022. Staff from the head office in Abuja and from state offices met at different locations to review progress made in providing HIV and tuberculosis care and treatment in the country.

While addressing staff at the Federal Capital Territory Staff retreat, IHVN Chief Executive Officer, Dr Patrick Dakum, said that the use of evidence-based strategies, including technologies to reach communities, will ensure the achievement of the year's targets. Dr. Dakum enjoined staff to work as a team to promote collaboration with the government for quality health interventions. Representatives from government agencies and partners also participated in the retreats.



IHVN Staff in Nasarawa state engage in sports activities during the staff retreat.



IHVN Deputy Director PEPFAR Programs, Dr. Oche Yusuf discussing with staff at the FCT staff retreat in Abuja.



IHVN Chief Operating Officer and Managing Director, Dr. Charles Olalekan Mensah addressing staff at the Rivers State staff retreat at Ibom Hotel and Golf Resort in Uyo, Akwa Ibom



Staff pose for a group photograph at the Katsina State retreat.

IHVN Staff Participate in Interstate Learning on Key Population Services *by Lawrence Wakdet*

A six-person delegation from the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria's, Katsina office have undertaken a five-day learning visit on Key Populations (KP) to the Rivers Surge Project. The purpose is to compare notes on establishing a result-oriented KP program in Katsina State. The team, which was led by IHVN Senior Program Officers, Mr. Ngozi Ajaero and Mr. Ahmad Datti, visited One Stop Shops and Drop-In-Centers at

Rumukrushu and Eleme as well as communities being served by HIV Testing Services in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area.

The Technical Lead of Rivers State Program, Pharm. Makshwar Kumtap and the LGA Saturation Lead of the Rivers SURGE Project, Dr. Stanley Idakwo, ensured that experience sharing and mutually beneficial innovations were highlighted.



IHVN staff from both Rivers and Katsina state in Port Harcourt discussing key populations interventions

D.R.E.A.M.S Girls Clubs Mentor Over 300 Girls for a Better Future *by Safia Sani*

For 17-year-old Benedicta Addra, the club is helping her to be more respectful to her parents and concentrate more on her studies. "I used to go out with my friends and indulge in bad things. I gained knowledge on the effect of teenage pregnancy through the club and I have decided to change my ways. I have started concentrating on my studies and avoiding bad friends so that I can achieve my goals. I am also able to guide and advice my peers," she said.

Sunday Martha attends D.R.E.A.M.S club

in Akwanga and says that she has been empowered to make the right decisions with helpful skills.

"The club that changed my life for good. Before, I did not know about abstinence but now I know that it is the safest way of preventing us from HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy. I choose to abstain."

D.R.E.A.M.S, which is targeted at adolescent girls and young women, is stimulating change in the community one girl at the time. According to IHVN OVC Program Officer, Safia Sani, the

implementation of the program since October 2019 has given IHVN the opportunity to see to it that no adolescent girl or young woman is left behind.



D.R.E.A.M.S girls learn how to bake in Karu, Nasarawa State

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IHVN Marks World AIDS Day 2021



by Luret Dakum & Lawrence Wakdet

To commemorate World AIDS Day 2021, Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has offered free HIV counseling and testing as well as sensitized the public on preventing HIV.

In the Federal Capital Territory, IHVN organized an outreach at Kuje Area Council with traditional and religious leaders in attendance.

At the event, IHVN FCT Regional Manager, Dr Fadimatu Mishara said that the Institute has worked with the Area Council since 2011 to fight the disease.

"I want to say that we appreciate all stakeholders in helping us achieve the results that we have seen over the years. We had 40,000 people on treatment in 2019 but have moved to 80,000 people in 2021," she said.

A team from IHVN also visited the Kuje Minimal Security Correctional Center.

In Rivers State, along with the Rivers State Ministry of Health, IHVN commenced a week-long event to mark the day with sensitization programs on Wave FM, Naija FM, Garden City FM and Rivers State Television.

Sensitization activities were also held in communities across 23 Local Government Areas in the state.

The IHVN Rivers Surge Project led by its Project Director, Dr. Olayemi Olupitan, joined the Rivers Agency for the Control of AIDS, the Rivers State AIDS and STI Control Program to participate in an awareness creation rally.

Other stakeholders participating in the rally included the Rivers State and Degema Local Government Secretariat, civil society organizations, Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, and the media.



(L-R front row) IHVN Nasarawa State Manager, Dr Yakubu Sambo, Executive Director Nasarawa State AIDS Control Agency, Dr Ruth Adabe-Bello, National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) Zonal Director, Lawrence Kwaghaga, participate in a walk with other stakeholders in Lafia as part of activities to commemorate World AIDS Day 2021.



HIV testing in progress at Kuje Area Council Secretariat to mark World AIDS Day 2021



IHVN FCT Regional Manager, Dr. Fadimatu Mishara addressing stakeholders at an event in Kuje Area Council Secretariat to mark World AIDS Day 2021.



(5th left): IHVN Rivers SURGE Project Director, Dr Olayemi Olupitan, flanked by IHVN staff at a World AIDS Day Rally in Port Harcourt.

There were brief stops at Choba, a student community where HIV testing and counseling was provided, and the University of Port Harcourt.

In Nasarawa State, IHVN staff in partnership with the State Ministry of Health and Network of People Living with HIV in Nigeria (NEPWHAN), the National Youth Service Corps and other stakeholders organized a road walk from the Ta'al E-Library to the Ta'al Conference Hotel in Lafia.

The theme for the 2021 World AIDS Day was 'End Inequalities, End AIDS through Sustainable Financing.'

This is to draw attention to inequalities in access to essential HIV services and the need to address them head-on.

D.R.E.A.M.S Girls Clubs Mentor Over 300 Girls for a Better Future *by Safia Sani*

Girls below the age of 18 years in Nigeria face harmful cultural practices, gender-based violence, early marriage, early pregnancy and different forms of exploitation. These harms deter and limit them from achieving their full potentials. To promote gender equity and advocate for social change in communities, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) with funding from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is implementing a project to bring girls together in social clubs. The goal of the D.R.E.A.M.S girls club is to prepare and support girls to be Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS Free, Mentored and Safe.

In five LGAs, IHVN is working with community based organizations to established clubs to

serve as safe spaces in the community for girls to thrive, be visible, honored and respected. According to the IHVN Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Lead, Mrs. Jummai Musa, the initiative is making a huge difference for girls because they are being empowered with knowledge, as well as skills to guide them on a path towards accomplishing their goals and meeting their needs. More than 385 girls are now enrolled in D.R.E.A.M.S clubs in Nasarawa State.

"The goal of the initiative is achieving a better future for the girls by investing in them," Mrs. Musa said.

The meetings are held at least once a month and are facilitated using the Mental Health & Well Being for Adolescent Girls and Young Women Manual, and the Adolescent Girls Community Guide Manual. They discuss topics such as Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs) and HIV/AIDS, Sexual abstinence, self-esteem, resilience, and financial Education. The sessions are made interactive and fun through dramatization, storytelling, recitation of poems and co-facilitation. The girls are also assigned a role model from either a school or within the community to mentor them. IHVN OVC Program Officer, Safia Sani, said that during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, "girls who participate in D.R.E.A.M.S clubs were able to connect with their caregivers to



D.R.E.A.M.S club meeting in progress at Keffi, Nasarawa State

discuss sexual reproductive health issues because they were empowered to do so. The capacity of the girls are being built to transfer the knowledge received to their siblings, friends & neighbors for a wider reach in their communities. The girls can speak out and are not afraid to be heard.

We have schools clamoring for the program, we have students eager to join the club and schools initiating sensitization talks on important topics, all due to our D.R.E.A.M.S program," she said.

Mr. Leonard Chinweike is the head of the Social Science department at GSS Tundun Gwandara, one of the schools with the D.R.E.A.M.S girl's clubs. He said that he has seen the impact of the club in his school. "Through the club, the students are doing extraordinary things to improve the standard of education. The show of humility, wisdom, dedication and kindness has led them to the right path. They are inspired academically."

16-year-old Goodness David lives in Agwan Sabo and is one of the D.R.E.A.M.S girls. She said that since she started attending the club in October 2020, she is now more confident and able to communicate with her parents.

"Before now, I wasn't free with people and I didn't know how to talk to adults, even my parents. At home, I couldn't relate freely with them but through the club, I learnt how to talk with my parents any time I am having any problem with my personal life. I used to have low self-esteem, I was shy and couldn't talk in public but through the club, I learnt how to talk without being discouraged and being afraid. I can talk to adults and ask them about some questions," she said.

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D.R.E.A.M.S girls participate in a bag making skill training in Karu, Nasarawa State

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