



IHVN NEWS

A NEWS PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN VIROLOGY, NIGERIA



VSLA Initiative Empowers Vulnerable Households

by Blessing Ukpabi



Women of The Lord is my Shepherd Village Savings and Loans Association at their monthly meeting in Gbagalape, Abuja.

"It is not okay to use ten fingers to eat." These were the words of Kehinde Esther, the Coordinator of The Lord is My Shepherd Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) at Gbagalape, a border community between the Federal Capital Territory and Nasarawa State. Esther's words express a guiding principle of the VSLA initiative supported by the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN).

In 1,200 communities in the Federal Capital Territory, IHVN has supported the establishment and smooth running of 718 VSLA groups. These groups empower households economically and enhance the well-being of women and children.

According to IHVN Senior Program Officer Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Ms. Safia Sani, the VSLA program encourages women to meet regularly, save together, and leverage

each other's support for the financial stability of their homes.

"They contribute money to a common purse monthly, can give out loans to meet member needs, as well as encourage a culture of saving among members. IHVN works through community-based organizations to build the capacity of members of these associations on financial management and healthy living. Some vulnerable members of VSLA with businesses are also financially empowered," she said.

For the Lord is my Shepherd VSLA, plans are underway to buy land or invest in a grinding machine for processing cassava.

The Association has about 80 members who contribute N1,000 monthly when they meet on the first Thursday of every month. Mrs. Kehinde says that members of the VSLA hope that their investment will bring in more resources. The

group desires to make more interest than what they get from loans their members take.

"In 2022 when we started, we contributed till the end of the year and shared the money and interest amongst ourselves. This year, we will not share the money but invest it. We are happy that the Community Based Organization, New Hope Agency, which has been supporting us, is willing to guide us through the process of investment and even possibly growing to a cooperative society," she said.

The Gbagalape women are already excited about future possibilities of financial empowerment for members. During their meetings, a regular chant is, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!"

A beneficiary of the VSLA initiative in Orozo in the Federal Capital Territory, Mrs. Rhoda Matthew, says that IHVN has also given her a grant through New Hope Agency (NHA) to boost her sewing business.

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From the Chief Executive Officer

It is once again a pleasure to present the IHVN July to September 2023 newsletter featuring reports of our programs to empower caregivers and their families for healthy living, support the country to provide quality laboratory services as well as prevent and treat tuberculosis.



All these are in line with the Institute's mission to provide excellent health service implementation, capacity building, research, and equitable access to quality health services through innovative and evidence-based health services. Enjoy your reading!

Yours truly,
Dr. Patrick Dakum
Chief Executive Officer,
Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria

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VSLA Initiative Empowers Vulnerable Households

As the recently appointed Coordinator of the Orozo VSLA association, she advises women to use money wisely and participates in health talks done during their meetings on the 30th of every month.

"We are not to use money that comes our way anyhow. Our children often have impromptu needs. When we invest, we are able to use money from the profit we make."

Rhoda says that she used her savings for a weaving machine and to pay her daughter's school fees. Her daughter recently gained admission into a tertiary institution to study nursing.

Rhoda and other members of her VSLA recently decided to start using their savings every school term to pay school fees, rather than wait for the yearly disbursement of their savings and interests. Rebecca Amos, another member of

the Orozo VSLA, is motivated that her children are in school despite her meagre income. Rebecca is a petty trader who sells items like corn, firewood, and groundnut. "I don't wait till our meetings on the 30th of every month to give my donation, I give money as I get it. Sometimes, I contribute N100 and N200 to the association's purse," she says.

NHA Program Officer, Mrs. Ifeoma Okonkwo, says that during VSLA meetings, her community-based organization trains members on skills like beverage making and preparing healthy meals like soya beans powder.

"Vulnerable families, including families with caregivers living with HIV have gained knowledge and skills for financial independence through VSLA activities," she notes.

Ms. Sani adds that IHVN's multifaceted approach to building the capacity of families

has yielded positive outcomes in financial management and healthy living.

"By collaborating with community-based organizations, IHVN has empowered VSLA members with essential skills, including financial literacy. This has proven instrumental in sustaining the economic gains achieved through the program.

Overall, IHVN's VSLA initiative stands as a beacon of hope for vulnerable households in the Federal Capital Territory. Through targeted interventions, the program has elevated the economic prospects of households and fostered a culture of resilience, financial independence, and community-driven progress.

The Institute remains steadfast in its commitment to expand and strengthen these initiatives, ensuring a brighter and more sustainable future for the communities it serves," she says.

IHVN donates a Droplet PCR Machine to NCDC

By Huldah Kigun

To strengthen Nigeria's capacity for multiple disease testing and surveillance, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has donated a Droplet Digital PCR machine to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC).

The machine, which is the first of its kind in the country, is equipped to generate over 20,000 small droplets for multiple disease testing and carry out surveillance using wastewater as well as other sources to provide insight into disease hot spots. The equipment from Bio-Rad can also be used in addressing exciting biological research questions.

IHVN Senior Program Officer, Dr. Monday Tola, who handed over the equipment to NCDC, at the National Reference Laboratory in Abuja, said that diseases including monkey-pox and COVID-19 can be diagnosed using the machine.

"The machine can test 20,000-minute droplets



NCDC Director General, Dr. Ifedayo Adetifa discussing with trainees about the use of the donated PCR equipment for waste water surveillance.



IHVN Senior Program Officer, Dr. Monday Tola presenting the equipment to NCDC Head of Reference Laboratory, Dr. James Avong while LASEC staff look on.

so you won't miss anything in the laboratory test, and it can test multiple diseases at a go," NCDC Head of Reference Laboratory, Dr. James Avong, said "This equipment is a new

technology that will help in environmental human survey; effluents can be gotten from waste and can be analyzed. By using the machine, we will be able to identify the different strains of COVID through waste.

When there is also an outbreak of any new disease, this equipment will enable us to detect it fast. For us at NCDC it is a breakthrough to have this equipment, we are going to utilize it as much as possible in surveillance and prompt response to diseases."

After the installation of the equipment by LASEC, more than 20 laboratory engineers and technicians from APIN Global Health Initiatives, NCDC, and IHVN received a two-day training on its use. The training featured practical sessions on utilizing the machine.

The PCR machine was bought with funding support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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Biotechnicians Receive Training on Laboratory Equipment Maintenance

By Luret Dakum

To enhance the skills of biotechnicians to maintain laboratory equipment across the country, the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria (IHVN) has conducted a five-day training on calibration and certification of biosafety cabinet (BSC) equipment.

IHVN NSF Enhanced Accredited Biosafety Cabinet Certifier, Mr. Olatokun F Ayobami, said that BSC equipment is the main containment equipment used to safeguard laboratory workers and the environment against infectious biological materials.

"The training is to build the capacities of staff of Implementing Partners and the government," he said.

Participants were taken through lectures and



Trainees participate in a hands-on session on the maintenance of a bio-safety cabinet maintenance.



NSF Enhanced Accredited Biosafety Cabinet Certifier Mr. Olatokun F Ayobami facilitating a session at the training.

practical sessions on installing, using, and performing basic checks for Bio-safety cabinets.

IHVN Senior Technical Adviser, Laboratory Services, Dr. Sam Peters urged participants to utilize the skills gained at the basic certification training. "This is the first time this kind of training is being held in Nigeria. I urge you to hold firmly to what you have learned," he said.

A trainee, Mr. Nsiffiok Sebastian Okon noted that the training has equipped them and spurred them to advance towards being internationally certified Biosafety Cabinet Engineers. "The training has been very instructive with a lot of opportunity for hands-on sessions," he said.

Lagos Mainland LGA Commemorates National TB Testing Week

By Joy Onuoha

According to the World Health Organization, "Close to 4,400 people lose their lives to tuberculosis (TB) daily, and close to 30,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease."

Nigeria is among the 14 high-burden countries for TB, TB/HIV, and Multi-Drug Resistant TB, and it is ranked sixth among the 30 high-burden countries globally and the first in Africa. Nigeria also records 400,000 TB cases yearly.



USAID TB-LON 3 Screening Officer, Blessing Mmaduabuchukwu, carrying out screening for TB on the streets of Lagos Mainland Local Government Area.

The outreach in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area (LGA) involved the distribution of IEC materials, screening at the DOT clinic, facility outreach in collaboration with hospital staff, screening in schools, and collaboration with the Yaba School of Technology for screening.

USAID TB-LON 3 Community Mobilization Advisor, Dr. Abiola Alege said that during the activity, 245 individuals were screened, out of which 37 presumptive cases were identified.

As part of activities to commemorate the National TB Testing Week from 14th to 20th August 2023, the Institute of Human Virology

Nigeria (IHVN) collaborated with the Lagos Mainland Hospital, Yaba to conduct a TB screening outreach that identified 16 individuals with tuberculosis.

She added that the 16 people identified with tuberculosis identified have been linked to healthcare facilities for treatment and care.

Project to Reduce Still-Births in Nigeria Kicks-off

by Blessing Ukpabi

According to UNICEF's January 2022 data report, Nigeria ranks second among countries with high stillbirth rates globally at 42.9%, as of 2021. To address one of the root causes of this challenge, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has begun implementing the Improving Nigeria's Capacity to Use Data on Registered Stillbirths for Decision-making & Planning (SPEED Project).

The project, which will run from September 2023 to December 2024, is aimed at making data on stillbirths more visible and accessible for evidence-based decision-making.

At a meeting with stakeholders to kick off the project, the SPEED Project Principal Investigator at the IHVN International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Mrs. Oghome Emembo, said that the project will collaborate with stakeholders to, "publish a stillbirths Data Analytics and Visualization Tool (DAVT) on the FMOH website, showing stillbirth trends in Nigeria, and other indicators useful for policymaking." She added that the project will advocate for policy, system, and process changes to reduce stillbirths in the country.

"We will also develop a comprehensive data report, using findings from analysis of FMOH DHIS 2 (District Health Information Software) stillbirth data, and conduct a health economic

assessment to examine the feasibility of proposed policy options based on findings," she said.

IHVN Assistant Director, Dr. Evaesi Okpokoro said that IRCE can support data analysis for the project's success. "We have a strong data unit that will support data analysis from this project to encourage evidence-based decision-making." Stakeholders from the government, health facilities, women and faith-based organizations, and the media at the meeting, committed to support project objectives.

Head of Department Newborn Branch, Family Health Child Division at the Federal Ministry of Health, Mr. Abdullahi Jatau, who represented the Director of Family Health, said that the project will greatly impact policy change.

The project is being implemented with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health & Vital Strategies Program



Stakeholders engaging in a group activity on project deliverables.



Principal Investigator for SPEED Project, Mrs. Oghome Emembo addressing stakeholders at the meeting to kick off the project.

News in Brief

IHVN Participates in NISA Conference 2023



IHVN Senior Technical Adviser Pediatrics, Dr. Nadia Sam-Agudu, facilitating a session on "Developing a Pipeline of Early Career Implementation Scientists in Nigeria" at the 8th NISA Conference in Abuja.

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) has participated in the two-day 8th Annual Nigeria Implementation Science Alliance (NISA) themed, "Bridging the Implementation Science Gap: Strategies for Successful Translation of Evidence into Practice."

The conference, which was held in Abuja and attended by public health experts, and researchers from within and outside the country featured panel discussions and presentations on implementation science. IHVN co-hosted a session on "Health System Integration: Addressing the Role of Context in Implementation Science" and presented six abstract posters at the conference.

PHOTO GALLERY



Trainees learning how to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers at a training organized by the IHVN Strengthening Global Health Security Agenda in Nigeria (SECURE-Nigeria) Project



IHVN Chief Executive Office, Dr. Patrick Dakum with the Executive Director International Research Center of Excellence (IRCE), Prof Alash'le Abimiku at the 8th Annual NISA Conference held at NAF Conference Centre in Abuja



A cross-section of participants at the No Means No training of instructors to educate young men on sexual and gender-based violence prevention.



IHVN Chief Operating Officer, Dr. Patrick Dakum, and Chief Operating Officer/Managing Director, Dr. Charles Olalekan Mensah at a workshop to prepare for the Global Fund Grant Cycle 7 from 2024 to 2026.



IHVN Staff discuss the achievements of the Sexual Reproductive Health Project implemented in FCT, Nasarawa, Rivers and Katsina States during a Close-Out meeting.



TB screening ongoing at a community Nursery and Primary School in Orok Annam LGA, Akwa Ibom State

Aje Comprehensive Junior High School Launches TB Club

By Joy Onuoha

Tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment of childhood TB in Nigeria remains a major challenge in the national tuberculosis (TB) intervention program. Nigeria is the country with the third highest burden of childhood TB globally. Despite an estimated 77,000 childhood TB cases in 2020, Nigeria has notified 8,441 childhood TB cases.

As part of her grass root approach to reducing the prevalence of TB in Nigeria, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) USAID TB LON 3 program in collaboration with The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Lagos Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has inaugurated a tuberculosis health club at Aje Comprehensive Junior High School, Sabo Yaba, Lagos.

During the investiture of TB champions at the school, Former National Coordinator, of the National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control Program (NTBLCP), Dr Adebola Lawanson said that the students will stand as advocates. She urged them to go into their environment, help their peers and spread the information on TB thus reducing discrimination and increasing the uptake of tuberculosis services.

“We did a survey that revealed that only 30% of the populace are aware of tuberculosis, its control and prevention. It is important to sensitize the children so they can in turn

sensitize their colleagues. The essence is that the children take the information that TB is preventable, curable, and treatment is free to their immediate environment.”

Principal of Aje Comprehensive Junior High School Sabo, Yaba, Mr. Ladipo Adelele noted that the initiative was good. “Anybody can be infected especially as we interact with students and teachers, some are not aware they may



Participatory session by the students of Aje Comprehensive Junior High School at a sensitization program in the school.



IHVN staff educating the students about tuberculosis.



TB advocates take a group picture with Former NTBLCP National Coordinator Dr Adebola Lawanson after their investiture.

have it.”

The School Health Officer, Mrs. Ibrahim Olawale said that the newly inaugurated TB club will be integrated into the health club, which will add to the knowledge of the students, “It is a nice one to sensitize the students about TB, they are from a community and will go back and sensitize others.

In the health club we discuss health-related matters and this initiative is a good one to avoid the spread of tuberculosis”, She said. The TB Advocates were given exercise books, bags, and other packages.

A total of 76 students were screened, while 19 presumptive cases were identified.

IHVN, Synlab mark World Hepatitis Day

By Luret Dakum

To mark World Hepatitis Day, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) and Synlab have provided sensitization, and free hepatitis and HIV testing at Nyanya Motor Park in Abuja.

More than 200 transporters, passers-by and passengers benefitted from the activity which was themed, "We are not Waiting."

IHVN Senior Program Officer, Mr. Yaro Daniel, said that "HIV and Hepatitis are related. More than 325 million persons are affected worldwide and less than 10% know their hepatitis status. Sensitization and testing are important. Present yourself



A motorist asking questions during the sensitization at the motor park.



Motorist being tested for HIV and Hepatitis.

in the nearest healthcare facility to get tested. Prevent contact with infected blood to prevent Hepatitis," he urged.

Synlab Area Operations Manager, Kelechi Unagwu, noted that people not infected should get vaccinated. "We want people to know their status and take appropriate action. IHVN is a very important partner

involved in health programs to eradicate communicable diseases," he said.

Pam Chuwang who got tested at the outreach said, "I am happy because they have brought the test here to us and we do not have to spend money going to the hospital and still pay to get these tests done."

Spotlight on the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Program

With Mrs. Jummai Musa

Orphans and Vulnerable Children's Program activities have expanded over the years. In a bid to strengthen families, especially those infected and affected by HIV, we work in four domains including the Household Economic Strengthening (HES) domain which has empowered 70,000 households with income-generating activities.

For the health domain, we are working towards achieving the UNAIDS goal of 95-95-95. In the safety domain, we protect children from any harm and any form of molestation, neglect, violence, and so many other vices. In the school domain, we integrate children who are of school age into the school program, we do that through block granting and payment of examination fees.

To protect the rights of the child, in 2019,



Mrs. Jummai Musa

IHVN launched the child protection policy to support community-based organizations in promoting the rights of children with a standardized approach. IHVN implements the program through community and faith-based organizations. We work with children and their households; children who have been abused, and children who are at high risk of being abused or violated.

We categorize them according to their

needs, then we provide interventions leveraging on any available resources.

This involves working with the government for birth registration and working with health facilities for children to be immunized at the right time. Our activities also include advocacy awareness and child protection services in our supported communities.

At the grassroots, IHVN works with facilities and communities and with the local government to get their support for a budget line for OVC activities that includes the protection of children. Before now, we worked with UNICEF to see that we strengthen the children's protection system in Nigeria. Then, with the local governments, we collaborated with stakeholders to have a strong committee on ground, especially the child protection networks.

Community Mothers-Love Parties Provide HIV Services to Women

by Luret Dakum

More than 300 pregnant and lactating women in Chibiri and Gaube communities in Kuje, Abuja have received free HIV testing and counseling services at Mother's-Love Parties organized by the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN).

Mothers-Love Party, which is an IHVN initiative, is a gathering for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children in communities to sensitize them on care for their babies, personal and environmental hygiene, the importance of immunization antenatal care. In such parties, IHVN also provides delivery packs (mama kits) for pregnant women with items such as sanitary pads, gloves, and cotton wool, amongst others.

IHVN Senior Program Officer, Mrs. Helen Mutong said "By organizing Mothers-Love Parties, IHVN aims to increase awareness, enhance access to services, and ultimately reduce the transmission of HIV from mother to child. This strategic approach ensures that all pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and pediatric patients receive the necessary support and care for a healthy outcome in line with the overall Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) strategy."

During the mother's love parties in Kuje, free malaria, hepatitis B, and syphilis tests were also provided for attendees, including children

between the ages of 1-14 years.

Mrs. Mutong added "we have seen that some pregnant women do not go to the hospital to access care, so we are bringing care to them. Most of the women would rather have their children through Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). We work with the TBA to ensure safe deliveries and referral to the nearest health facility."

Other strategies being adopted to reach women in communities include collaboration with religious leaders to create awareness about the need for HIV testing especially for pregnant women. One of the pregnant women who got tested, Mrs. Ona, (pseudonym) expressed her joy at the initiative. "Most

times, we do not have transport to go to the hospital and when we go, they give us a list of things to buy so we just decide to have our baby

at home, but today, IHVN has shared these packs that have everything we need for delivery, so I am very happy," she said.



Mothers at Gaube community sing a song to dramatize the danger signs at any stage of pregnancy.



Pregnant mothers in Chibiri community receive mama packs distributed at the party.

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