

Preventing Epidemics in Nigeria:

Story Ideas for Journalists

Nigeria must take responsibility for epidemic preparedness

Nigeria relies heavily on foreign sources to keep her people safe from disease outbreaks like Lassa fever and COVID-19. The World Bank's Regional Disease Surveillance Systems Enhancement (REDISSE) Project, for instance, is currently funnelling US\$90 million into efforts to strengthen Nigeria's epidemic preparedness. Yet, despite the financial and technical support from multilateral institutions, governments and philanthropies, major parts of our National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) will remain unfunded without significant public investment. In the coming months, our government has an opportunity to step up and take responsibility. As the Buhari administration drafts its 2021 budget proposal and negotiations begin, decision-makers should be reminded that robust domestic investments are crucial to safeguard our health security.

Sources: Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), NAPHS, World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO)

Will epidemic preparedness be prioritized in Nigeria's next budget?

President Buhari in 2018 assented to a bill that granted NCDC additional authority and resources to coordinate efforts to safeguard Nigeria's health security. Yet funding remains low – even during the COVID-19 pandemic – and the agency depends on international support to expand its programs. In the coming weeks, government officials will craft a 2021 budget proposal. Will FMOH and the Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning (FMBNP) approve a budget increase for NCDC and other government entities tasked with keeping Nigerians safe from disease outbreaks – and what will the National Assembly do as it takes up the 2021 budget later this year?

Sources: FMBNP, FMOH, NCDC, Senate Committee on Appropriations, and other committees with jurisdiction over health and budget matters

Nigeria's JEE and ReadyScore: Why policymakers should care

In 2017, a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) led by WHO concluded that despite commendable progress, additional investments are needed to ensure Nigeria's readiness to find, stop and prevent epidemics and other major health threats. A follow-up assessment in November 2019 generated a ReadyScore of 46 out of 100 for Nigeria. While Nigeria has received praise for making vaccines available to her people, she scores poorly in many other areas – from real-time surveillance of emerging health threats to biosafety and diseases that spread between animals and humans – threatening lives and economic development. The JEE outlines a spectrum of preparedness gaps and solutions. Areas of continued poor performance should be highlighted so that decision-makers can make informed decisions to keep Nigerians safe from disease outbreaks and other health threats before they get out of control.

Sources: WHO, Joint External Evaluation of IHR Core Capacities of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, PreventEpidemics.org, NCDC, FMOH, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and other government institutions with oversight over technical areas featured in the JEE

Nigeria's NAPHS: Putting the plan into action

Nigeria's National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) serves as a roadmap to fill preparedness gaps identified by the JEE. The plan, released in December 2018, generated much excitement, and it raised expectations that additional resources would be allocated toward epidemics preparedness. What progress has been made, and what concerns remain? How does Nigeria's progress compare to other countries that have completed a NAPHS? And, what can lawmakers do to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to keep our communities safe from disease outbreaks?

Sources: NAPHS, NCDC, other government institutions with oversight over technical areas featured in the NAPHS

Nigeria's porous borders: Enter, ready or not?

Nigeria shares enormously porous land borders with her neighbours. And while Nigeria has been classified as "not ready" for the next epidemic, our neighbours are even less prepared: Cameroon's ReadyScore is 38; Niger and Benin's is 34, and Chad's is 29, according to PreventEpidemics.org. Nigeria is a signatory to a cross-border agreement that allows for communication and coordination with her neighbours during public health events. Yet, Nigeria's JEE urges further actions to strengthen cross-border collaboration and other reporting and information sharing mechanisms.

Sources: PHS, FMOH, NCDC, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, PreventEpidemics.org

How federal, state and local authorities can more effectively collaborate to strengthen preparedness

As part of its job to lead federal efforts to find, stop and prevent disease outbreaks, NCDC tracks major diseases such as Lassa Fever, Meningitis, Cholera, Monkeypox, Yellow Fever and COVID-19. These efforts require collaboration between federal, state and local government authorities. And although resources tend to be scarce at all levels, government officials of all stripes acknowledge that health security is crucial to a functioning health system. Where do political decision-makers stand on the need to strengthen collaboration across levels of government to keep Nigerians safe from disease outbreaks and other health threats before they get out of control?

Sources: NCDC, Legislative Network for Universal Health Coverage in Nigeria, Nigeria Governors' Forum, National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, and other state and local government units contributing to health security

Funding the COVID-19 response in Nigeria

Nigeria has been severely hit by the spread of COVID-19 and the associated sharp decline in oil prices. Contingency funds have been released to NCDC and other agencies responding to the outbreak, and additional funds were distributed for the testing, treatment and isolation of patients. A fiscal stimulus package in the form of a COVID-19 intervention fund was approved by President Buhari, and the CBN is coordinating a private sector special intervention initiative targeting service providers in the health sector. A grant was received from the European Union and from the IMF, the largest emergency financing package, so far. How are the funds being spent? Is there enough transparency in government spending, and is Nigeria efficiently and effectively responding to the pandemic with the influx and resources? Are there lessons learned to inform and improve epidemic preparedness and response?

Sources: IMF, Devex, FGN