



# Men as Change Agents in the Family Planning Discourse

→ “Nearly all male-focused programmes achieve behavioural outcomes such as increased contraceptive use, antenatal care visits, deliveries with a skilled birth attendant, or spousal communication around family planning” (Rottach, Pappa, Dayal & Das, 2017). It is on this basis that Nigeria Health Watch, in collaboration with its partners sought to address the role of men in helping Nigeria meet its Family Planning (FP) 2020 Commitments. **‘The Elephant in the Room: Men as Change Agents in the Family Planning Discourse’** was the theme of the year’s first Health Watch Forum on April 18, 2018.

The two-session townhall-styled forum also sought to inspire men to support their partners in seeking FP Services and encourage them to take responsibility for FP without depending on women. No perspective was left out in the quest to ignite change in the family planning sector by inspiring action through advocacy and innovation. The dynamic group of speakers, panellists and delegates looked at the issue of family planning from all angles - from government to civil society, policymakers to advocates, faith leaders to development partners.

With Nigeria’s ever-increasing population - estimated to be just over 194 million people (Worldometers, 2018) - and its attendant consequences, the importance of the discourse could not be overemphasised.

Dr. Ifeanyi Nsofor, Nigeria Health Watch’s

Director of Policy and Advocacy, who moderated the Forum, laid the facts bare: “The land mass of the country is not increasing; we are struggling with basic infrastructure, yet the population continues to increase.” According to him, this presented a dire situation where more people will be struggling over increasingly limited resources in the country. For Dr Diene Keita, Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), it was not all gloom: “Nigeria is the first country in Africa to budget for family planning services.” But she was quick to sound out that a lot still needs to be done, as maternal deaths due to pregnancy and childbearing in Nigeria are an estimated 576 deaths per 100,000 live births (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013).

The broad consensus at the Forum was that despite technological advances, there was still a need to focus on men as strategic targets for family planning services. It was suggested that FP2020 should be used to increase gender balance when structuring family planning services, with men having a significantly increased role. The concept of family planning should be pushed as a resource planning tool and the best way to reduce maternal and child mortality, as well as a way to reduce high-risk births. This is key In the Nigerian context, where men are often the decision-makers in families and determine women’s access and use of family planning services.

With family planning often seen as a woman’s

role and with men playing a peripheral role, the submissions that most messaging and services are currently targeted at women was not surprising. This was captured succinctly by, Florida Uzoaru, founder and chief executive of Slide Safe: “From my experience and that of others we know, the service providers sometimes allow their personal sentiments regarding male involvement in family planning to affect the information they give. This can negatively affect uptake.”

There were propositions that family planning services should be remodelled to make men more comfortable, alongside the retraining of health workers. The revelation that the Federal Ministry of Health had developed training manuals on family planning and had a re-orientation programme for health workers by Dr Adebimpe Adebiji, Director Family Health at the Federal Ministry of Health was then good news.

No doubt, engaging men directly will also help increase acceptance of family planning services. The Marie Stopes initiative that targeted men and resulted in an increased uptake of family planning services in Katsina and Gombe States as revealed by Effiom Effiom, Country Director of Marie Stopes International Nigeria (MSION) was a step in the right direction. For Effiom, it was unsustainable not to involve men in conversations about family planning especially if progress will be made on set targets



## 1 Role of education to increase uptake of family planning services

### DISCUSS REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES

Informal forums such as 'School of Husbands' – existing in Mauritania and Niger – should be explored for men to discuss reproductive health issues. Men will open up to men and this can lead to an increase in acceptance of family planning services.

### EXPAND MALE INVOLVEMENT

Education should also be extended to adolescents and younger boys in both formal and informal settings. This becomes even more relevant as research has found young boys in secondary schools as being sexually active.

### BRIDGE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE GAPS

The Population and Family Life education curriculum developed for schools needs to be implemented. Existing clear gaps in knowledge in young and older adolescents need to be bridged. In this vein, the language used in family planning needs to be sensitive to avoid stigmatizing and discouraging young people from seeking sexual and reproductive health education.

### SEX EDUCATION STARTS IN THE HOME

Young people need to have people they can trust to give them the information they need about sexual health. This has the potential to contribute to the prevention of teen pregnancies. Schools should not have to shoulder all the responsibility. Sex education should start in the home.

*"We have developed training manuals on family planning and are having a re-orientation programme for our health workers."*

– Dr Adebimpe Adebiji, Director Family Health, Federal Ministry of Health

## 2 Cut your coat according to your cloth; The economics of family planning

### THE MONEY IN YOUR POCKET

For men, there are financial consequences of not planning families. Large family sizes will impinge on scarce resources. Nonetheless, the messaging here should be carefully couched so as not to put an economic value on something that is understood to be priceless - a child.

### EMPOWER WOMEN

There is an obvious upside to men investing in their wives and daughters. When a woman is engaged in a productive venture, it reduces the time she spends having babies. Once she starts bringing in money, the family is better off. This leads to less financial pressure on the men in the family.

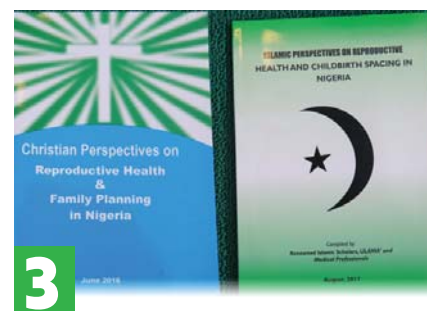
### CONTROL FAMILY SIZE

There is a need to make arguments that resonate with men. Men who understand the economic value of family planning and child spacing, will champion the cause without hesitation. Planned families have the potential to be poverty free.

### HAVE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN YOU CAN AFFORD

Family planning is now about having the number of children you can afford to optimally care for. This is the message that needs to be taken to people in the rural areas and other less engaged populations. Men have to show greater responsibility here.

*"When men know the economic value of family planning and child spacing, they champion the cause."* – Dr Ejike Oji, Chairman, Association for the Advancement of Family Planning



## 3 THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION TO FAMILY PLANNING

### MALE MOTIVATORS NEEDED

There is a need for male motivators who can go back into the communities to educate men and tell them about the dangers of having too many children. Just as it is with the women, men should also be actively targeted.

### BELIEFS HAVE TO CHANGE

We need to change beliefs - a girl will marry young and end up pregnant at an early age, the family and extended family decides if and when she goes to hospital. If she dies, then the men can just marry again. Justice has to be the underlying factor. Men should see other women as their daughters.

### RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE INFLUENTIAL

Religious leaders are critical gatekeepers. Engaging them on the importance of family planning will influence the decision making of men.

### NEED FOR CLARITY ON RELIGIOUS COMMENTARY ON FAMILY PLANNING

Hypocritical attitudes of religious leaders on sex education and family planning need to change. Clarity on 'what should be and not be' should be pursued by religious leaders to avoid ambiguities.

### COUNSELLING SESSIONS ARE KEY

Premarital counselling sessions on sex education and family planning methods for young people going into marriage are impactful and should be encouraged.

*"Most clerics are hypocrites. I always tell our clerics, if you don't practice it, don't preach it."* – Rev. Isaac Gbadero, First Baptist Church, Zaria

*"We do not view family planning as child spacing alone, we view it as having a manageable family."*

– Sa'adatu Hashim, Amirah, FOMWAN

*'We all hope for rain because we want to have children, but we fear the lightning because we know that thunder is coming.'*



SA'ADATU HASHIM, the Amirah of the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) in Kano



COOL STUFF

'Hard facts resonate with everyone. Financial consequences of not planning families have more value in conveying the message to men.'

DR. EJIKE OJI, Chairman, Association for the Advancement of Family Planning, (AAFP)



**Hashtracking**  
APRIL 1 - 30, 2018

**4,769**  
POSTS

Number of tweets with the #NaijaMen4FP hashtag

**26.4 million**  
TIMELINE DELIVERIES

Total number of times that people saw posts containing the #NaijaMen4FP hashtag

**772**  
CONTRIBUTORS

Number of users who posted with the #NaijaMen4FP hashtag

**1.87 million**  
REACHED

Number of unique users who saw posts containing the #NaijaMen4FP hashtag

**'Men are the primary decision-makers in family size and the methods their partners use.'**

EFFIOM EFFIOM, Country Director of Marie Stopes International Nigeria

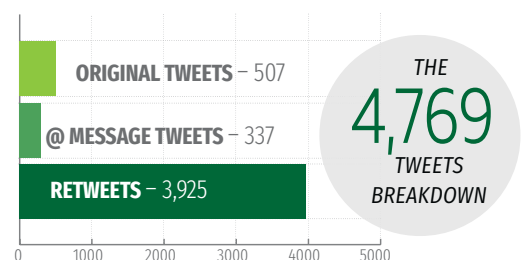
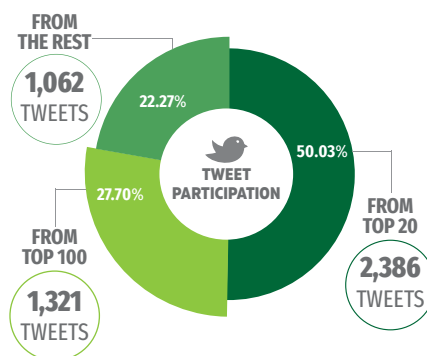


**'You plan your family, you end poverty.'**

DR ADEBIMPE ADEBIYI, Director Family Health, Federal Ministry of Health

**'Family planning is about sexual relations. What is missing is male's involvement.'**

DR DIENE KEITA, Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)



## CALL-TO-ACTION

Create more research looking into the role of men in family planning

See family planning as a resource planning tool and the best way to reduce maternal and child mortality.

Extend family planning partnership to men and groups made up mainly of men.

Remodel conventional family planning services and make men comfortable in health centres.

Scale-up training for service providers.

Increase the number of FP service health care providers.

Put up the investment case for family planning.

Private sector should provide services, not just money

Raise awareness of the dangers of having too many children in rural communities. Target men.

Further sensitisation on the need for people to have only the children they can manage.

Develop appropriate culturally sensitive information especially for adolescent boys.

Educate youths about appropriate behaviour

Bridge the knowledge gap in young boys on how to avert unwanted pregnancies.

Establish multi-channels including religious and family education.

Mentor adolescents. Advance the dialogue to their level.

Need for strong political will. Government should provide incentives to have fewer children.

Need to invest in the clerics and get them to understand what is going on.



Panelists at the first session - 'How Do We Accelerate Action to Meet Nigeria's FP2020 Commitments?' (R-L): Dr Laz Ude Eze, Executive Director, Pink Oak Trust; Dr Diene Keita, Country Representative, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Dr. Ifeanyi Nsofor (moderator); Effiom Nyong Effiom, Country Director, Marie Stopes International Nigeria and Sa'adatu Hashim, Amirah, Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Kano.



Panelists at the second session - 'How Do We Engage Men to Support their Partners in Seeking FP Services?' (R-L): Rev. Isaac Gbadero of First Baptist Church, Zaria; Florida Uzoaru of Slide Safe; Dr Adebimpe Adebisi, Director Family Health, Federal Ministry of Health; Dr. Ejike Oji, Chairman, Association for the Advancement of Family Planning (AAFP); Mrs Charity Ibeawuchi, Senior Technical Advisor, Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative (NURHI) and Dr. Ifeanyi Nsofor (moderator).

## SHARE OF VOICE

"As much as a whole lot of students in the campus populations know about condoms, utilization does not match ownership and ownership does not match knowledge."

- DR LAZ UDE EZE  
Pink Oak Trust

"At Slide Safe we started talking about sex education on social media because it provides anonymity. Language used around sexual and reproductive health needs to be sensitive."

- FLORIDA UZOARU  
Slide Safe

"Not all men are ignorant of family planning."

- CYRIL MBAH  
National Coordinator,  
African Initiative Against  
Violence and Poverty

"Empowerment is also about psychological empowerment when people have access to education. Empower them with information, such as the consequences of a termination of pregnancy."

- DR. FATIMA B. MUHAMMED  
Society for Family Health (SFH)

Family planning: Let politicians buy-in. If politicians add it as a precondition for benefiting from dividends of democracy will the people believe? will men comply? some of us actually believe politicians blindly. either way, we win

- BENJAMIN UBIRI  
via @Benjaminubiri  
11:26a.m. - 18 Apr 18

"We need to thread the fine line and ensure that men do not feel demonised by messages about family planning."

- DR. KOLAWOLE OLATUBOSUN  
Public Health Practitioner

"Organisation focus to provide the services or to channel policies or models our systems. Collaboration needs to have stronger synergies."

- WALE BALOGUN  
Marie Stopes Int'l

"We must take family planning as a serious development strategy for Nigeria to move forward."

- MRS CHARITY IBEAWUCHI,  
Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative (NURHI)

"We need to focus on adolescent and young and in school, but also those who are not in school or in an accessible location?"

- ONUH DAVIDSON  
Youth Development Specialist

"We should also consider the health of the women, and the possibility of depression in having all these children. We will help reduce the level of maternal mortality."

- NNENNA OKOYE  
Nurse

Family planning is a family issue. It concerns men and boys as much as it concerns women and girls.

- ANYANWU LILIANLJEOMA  
via @lilianyanwu  
7:51 pm-18 Mar 18

