
Measures to address the escalating COVID-19 crisis in Nigeria include the enforcement of movement restrictions in Lagos State, Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), and Ogun State - the regions at the epicenter of the pandemic in the country. All schools, universities and businesses in these states have been closed, except for businesses selling essential items such as groceries and medicines. Several states across the country including Adamawa, Bauchi and Kaduna states have also imposed similar lockdowns. All airports in the country are closed to international flights until at least 23 April 2020. These measures have been accompanied by the announcement of the Government’s approval of N15 billion ($38.6) million to support national efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The Federal Government also announced that cash transfers will be made to the most vulnerable, targeting an identified 10.65 million people across the country, and that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) would receive two months of food rations.

This brief highlights some pertinent gender considerations and recommendations to inform immediate responses to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

IN BRIEF

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA**

Women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing increased gender-based violence including domestic abuse, as a result of prolonged periods of confinement within homes and increased tensions within households due to economic hardships. Police reports from China suggest a threefold increase in domestic violence since the COVID-19 outbreak began. The closure of schools for an extended period is also likely to lead to increased drop-out rates among girls, which can increase the prevalence of child marriage in communities where early marriage is already widely practiced. Furthermore, with health and law enforcement services burdened with responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, access to GBV and sexual and reproductive health services will be limited.

**Recommendations**

- The Federal and State Governments should support the development and dissemination of messages specifically targeted to, and easily accessible by vulnerable women, including women with disabilities (through use of sign language, local language). Messages should recognize women’s roles as caregivers and communicate information on when and how women can access health facilities.
- The Government of Nigeria, and relevant communication bodies, including the National Orientation Agency, should partner with women’s organizations, networks and local influencers to raise awareness and disseminate information to vulnerable women, including those in remote areas.
- The Ministry of Health, donors and other partners in the health sector should scale-up efforts to enhance access by vulnerable women and girls to healthcare facilities.

**INCREASED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)**

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**Recommendations**

- The Government must work with relevant partners, including women’s organizations and networks, to disseminate information on how to access GBV and sexual and reproductive health services, including hotlines, in a constrained environment.
- The Ministry of Education and partners in the education sector should support the distribution of home-schooling resources and materials as part of efforts to ensure continuity of girls’ learning and education.

**WHY APPLY A GENDER LENS TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN NIGERIA? WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?**

**Inadequate access to information and health services**

Traditional gender roles ascribed to women often means that they are primary care-givers for sick family members, a situation which exposes them to the risk of contracting and transmitting the coronavirus. At the same time, many women and girls living in rural areas, poor urban settlements, and IDP camps often have limited access to reliable information and adequate healthcare. As primary care-givers for sick family members, women’s access to accurate and reliable information and their access to adequate healthcare is critical, to enable them protect themselves and their families from the virus.

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The front-line health professionals and workers most exposed to the infectious diseases are likely to be women: nurses, nurse aides, teachers, cleaners and those providing care to the sick, though they are very often not at the forefront of decision-making in the management of health crises. This is even more so for the most marginalized women and girls, including women with disabilities, women in IDP camps, prisons and detention centers. Yet, understanding the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different categories of women and drawing on their contributions to shape planning response interventions and resourcing is necessary for attaining sustainable outcomes. Evidence from previous disease outbreaks demonstrates that the availability of data that addresses the gendered dimensions of the outbreak support the development of more effective policies and solutions.

**Recommendations**

- The expertise of the Ministry of Women Affairs must be solicited to inform the work of the Presidential Taskforce and other national-level pandemic coordination efforts, and similar mechanisms established at state levels

- Government and international partners should engage women’s groups and networks as part of outreach and coordination efforts to ensure they are part of decisions-making to drive health solutions at all levels

- Community engagement teams established to support outreach efforts should be gender balanced and include young women. Existing structures through which women mobilize and lead, such as peace committees, camp management structures and cooperatives should be harnessed to shape and guide local response effort

- The Federal and State Governments should systematically support direct targeted to vulnerable women (cash or food transfers), with priority attention to women in the informal economy and female-headed households

- The Federal and State Governments should prioritize economic stimulus packages to support socio-economic recovery for the most vulnerable women. This includes developing targeted women’s economic empowerment interventions and facilitating cash transfer programmes to mitigate the impact of the outbreak and supporting them to recover and build resilience to future shocks

- The Government, private sector and development partners should adopt affirmative procurement measures through the procurement of goods and services from women-owned businesses and cooperatives

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