

## Extended Abstract on Primary Healthcare System and Infant Mortality

The national health policy regards primary health care as the framework to achieve improved health for the population. Primary health care services include health education; adequate nutrition; safe water and sanitation; reproductive health, including family planning; immunisation against five major infectious diseases; the provision of essential drugs; and disease control. Infant and childhood mortality rates are good index to measure the health and socio-economic status of a nation. In most developing countries today, mortality is higher at infancy than any other age groups. The infant mortality rate of 75/000 and childhood mortality of 98/000 and maternal mortality of 545/100000 births is unacceptable. These high rates could be attributable to worsening socio-economic situation in the country and the failure of health programmes and interventions. The expected result are to examine if the PHC system is performing up to the desire standard; know the trend of infant and childhood mortality rates; identify determinants of infant/childhood mortality; and make appropriate recommendations.

The state of the Nigeria children today is very worrisome. A large number of children are dying thereby putting into question the various health and population policies of the government. Infant and childhood mortality rates are good indexes to measure the health and socio-economic status of any society. Generally speaking, infant and childhood mortality rates in Nigeria are on the decline as recorded by various National Demographic and Health Surveys, but it is still high by world standard. This contrasts sharply with the abundant human and natural resources available in the country. Unfortunately, poverty, ignorance, environmental hazards, and uneven distribution of government amenities, especially health services have been the bane of development planning in Nigeria. While a lot of poverty alleviation/eradication programmes are mounted by the government their impact are hardly felt and poverty rate has ever been on the increase. Poverty is one of the most important determining factors of childhood mortality. It also impact negative on health care utilization such that its reduction is a goal that must be achieved.

The primary health care system is adopted in the country to address the challenges in infant/childcare, maternal/reproductive health and make family planning available to wide spectrum of Nigeria population. Ironically the primary health care system failed to meet its target or objectives. Nigeria is presently grappling with the reality of high population growth rate which is among the highest in the world. The high fertility rate and birth frequency is as a result of high infant and childhood mortality rates. A high number of children are born so that some of them could survive the high mortality rate and support their parents in old age. Human reproductive behavior is predicated on so many factors. As much as there is element of fatalism, there is also the issue of rationality. Parents want to prove their virility and have children for social security, contribution to household economy etc. sometimes reproductive decisions are shouldered in socio cultural factors. The economic meltdown, high cost of living and unemployment have not in any way make parents to have fewer numbers of children. This is probably because the “wealth transition model” of J.C Coldwell has not taken root in Nigeria. Children are highly valued and contribute early to family income. This study is limited to Benue state, although it has a national focus. Benue state is located in the north central of Nigeria. It has

a population of over five million people. It is predominantly rural and agrarian society. It is called the food basket of the nation. It also has the highest prevalent rate of HIV/AIDS infection. Two local government areas are selected from each of the three Senatorial district for study. Five communities were studied in each local government area. The criteria for selection are that the community should have a comprehensive primary health care center and even distribution. A total sample size of 360 respondents was drawn from six LGAs. Focused group discussions were also held in the six LGAs consisting of four per LGA. This study which is an abridged version of my Doctoral Thesis shall be analyzed based on the following objectives: identifying major factors affecting Infant/childhood mortality, assessing the policies and measures aimed at reducing the death rate, assessing the influence of primary health care system on child care and maternal health, identifying the level of knowledge and practice of family planning among others. To find out if increasing population growth impacts negatively on economic development of Benue state. To examine how the primary healthcare system can reduce both the increasing birth and death rates. Some preliminary results show a high correlation between poverty and Infant/childhood mortality; high level of apathy towards utilization of primary health care facilities for the reason that most health workers divulge sensitive health information about patient Knowledge of modern familyplanning methods is high but the use of contraceptive is very low. Appropriate policy recommendations that could be immediately drawn are that government should show a lot of commitment to enforcing strategies that enhance child survival, play less politics with health programmes .