



Nigeria

Saving women's lives, challenging gender norms

FACT BOX

Country	Nigeria
Sector / Theme	Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child Adolescent Health Plus Nutrition (RMNCAH+N)
Investment name	TA on demand for PHC systems, delivery/scale of high impact interventions
Investment number	INV-043440
Investment owner	Charity Change
Grantee	Technical Advice Connect LTD/GTE
Size of the investment	US\$29,106,165.00
Duration	2022-2026
Gender Mark	Gender intentional
Most significant result	Over one million women have joined the program.
Date of update	August 2024
Maternal health video: https://youtu.be/4PJJaYp6pQXw	

This case study highlights gender-focused interventions in Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child Adolescent Health Plus Nutrition (RMNCAH+N) in Northern Nigeria, to challenge the underlying structures and norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The investment is classified as gender intentional according to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Gender Marker tool¹. Key takeaways include the importance of:

- Engaging with local communities to comprehend the intricate gender dynamics at play.
- Empowering women and girls through improved literacy and financial access.
- Transforming men's perceptions of Antenatal Care (ANC).
- Gender sensitivity training for health care providers.

Context

Improving maternal and neonatal outcomes is a major priority in Nigeria, where maternal mortality and neonatal mortality rates are among the highest in the world. Technical Advice (TA) Connect is an innovative indigenous technical assistance delivery platform established to respond to States' TA priorities for improved health and social outcomes in Nigeria.² The limited decision-making power of women regarding healthcare utilisation, family planning, maternal and child vaccination is well documented. TA

Connect is implementing a gender-transformative group antenatal care Group Antenatal Care (G-ANC) programme in Kaduna, Kano, Gombe, Borno, Nasarawa and Yobe States.



To address the diverse health needs and promote equitable healthcare among women in Nigeria, TA Connect has implemented a comprehensive approach that includes several key initiatives:

How it works

- TA Connect conducted a gender needs assessment to ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of women, men, and gender minorities, followed by outreach and community mobilisation.
- Cultural competency training for healthcare providers on how to effectively communicate with patients from diverse gender backgrounds and how to provide culturally sensitive care that

¹ Gender Integration Marker: Gender Equality Toolbox. Available at: <https://www.gatesgenderequalitytoolbox.org/gender-integration-marker/> (Accessed: 30 September 2023).
² TAConnect Brief Welcome to TAConnect. Available at: <https://taconnect-ng.org/publications/taconnect-brief/> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

addresses the unique health concerns of different gender groups.

- Gender-sensitive health education with materials developed in a way that considers the different health needs and experiences of women, men, and gender minorities.
- Gender-sensitive data collection and analysis to help identify gender-based health disparities and inform the development of gender-sensitive interventions across states depending on context.
- Formation of cohorts, known as sisterhoods, such as the Na Allah group, which serves as a platform for open discussions on crucial topics related to maternal health and the overall well-being of unborn babies.

Justina Ushe's story exemplifies how TA Connect is empowering women to take an active role in decision-making and gain autonomy over their healthcare.



Justina Ushe attending a G-ANC session.
Photo: TA Connect

"When I attended my first antenatal (traditional antenatal clinic), I didn't know what pre-eclampsia was. When we went for antenatal, attention was not given to us unlike in this G-ANC. In my first pregnancy, I had an issue with pre-eclampsia, and I lost the baby. The G-ANC helped me a lot like learning the symptoms of pre-eclampsia, and how to prevent it. In this G-ANC, they will tell you what to do and what to eat. They will give you attention more than the previous one (traditional antenatal clinic). Previously you would leave your house at around 5 am just to get an appointment number then you end up coming back around 2 pm. There is no time to rest or to cook food. You would go out hungry and come back hungry."

- Justina Ushe - G-ANC Beneficiary³

Basirah Mohammed is a mother of two who experienced pre-eclampsia⁴ during her first pregnancy and persistent headaches during her second pregnancy. As a beneficiary of the G-ANC, Basirah has gained knowledge about birth preparation, money-saving techniques, and the importance of involving family members in the pregnancy journey.

Jemima Olokesusi is one of the pregnant women enrolled on the G-ANC in Kaduna state. She overcame the challenges of malaria and anaemia during pregnancy to give birth to a healthy baby. She attended the G-ANC meetings with her husband, Funsho. Through these meetings, they learned about the importance of direct observational therapy, maintaining a healthy diet, and attending scheduled appointments.

G-ANC has significantly bolstered support and comprehension of the ANC among men. Fatima and her husband, Sule Gayi, gained knowledge to support her during pregnancy from the G-ANC Take Home booklets. Sule Gayi supported his wife by assisting with domestic chores, taking her to health centres, and purchasing additional nutritious foods. According to Sule Gayi: "I am happy about the support that (my wife) received from the group as it has been so helpful. At home, we often study the G-ANC booklets from the facility together, which has helped me to better understand my wife's pregnancy journey."

Results

- Close to one million women have been empowered through the G-ANC cohorts to take decisions about their health.
- More women are now being appointed as primary healthcare facility managers positioning them for equality within the health leadership space.
- Working with various stakeholders has ensured that the programme is supported at the state level.
- Increased collaboration among healthcare providers and community-based organisations working on gender-related issues is opening the door to a more transformative approach to gender equality.

Next steps

To ensure gender integration is aligned with programmatic outcomes during project implementation, TAConnect will:

- Conduct gender analysis across states to understand the gender dynamics, gaps and barriers in PHC systems management, G-ANC programming, and MNCH services to strengthen the implementation of the investment.
- Develop a gender policy that outlines the organisation's commitment to gender integration.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of gender integration efforts to ensure that they are effective in achieving the desired health and social outcomes and ensure that the organisation is moving in the right direction.
- Co-create collaborative approaches with other partners to drive progress towards achieving better health outcomes.
- Continue to foster increased collaboration among healthcare providers and community-based organisations working on gender-related issues.
- Create a more robust gender-inclusive workplace culture.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEYdkvtvZT4&t=12s>

⁴ <https://www.webmd.com/baby/preeclampsia> (Pre-eclampsia is a serious problem that causes high blood pressure and excess protein in a woman's urine. It can develop any time during the second half of the pregnancy, during labour or up to six weeks after delivery)