

Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme (VOS)

Improving maternal health services for the underserved

Information brief

June 2018

Background

The Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme (VOS) is an initiative of the Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics of Nigeria (SOGON), the umbrella professional organization of gynaecologists and obstetricians in Nigeria. The scheme aims to support frontline health workers especially in rural areas or underserved facilities deliver quality maternal and newborn health services.

In Nigeria, over 100 women of childbearing age die every day during pregnancy or delivery due to, amongst other reasons, shortage of skilled birth attendants. The VOS is helping to address this gap by deploying volunteer gynaecologists and obstetricians to underserved facilities and communities and assisting health workers in the facilities provide safe, quality services.

VOS KEY FACTS*	KOGI	EBONYI
Date VOS established	Sept 2015	Dec 2015
No of enrolled volunteers	19	24
No of adopted facilities	28	34
No of facilities visited	16 (57.14%)	30 (88.24%)
No of visits carried out	50	113
No of health workers mentored or trained	38	104
No of patients attended to	118	546

*Covering October 2016 to March 2018

'Formally inaugurated by Kogi State Governor in May 2016

VOS under MCSP

SOGON started the VOS in collaboration with the National Primary Health Care Development Agency, and successfully implemented it in Lagos State. However, the scheme gained impetus in Ebonyi and Kogi States in late 2015 under the Maternal and Child Survival Program (MCSP), a global program funded by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to introduce and support high-impact health interventions in 25 countries, including Nigeria.

The ultimate goal of MCSP is to end preventable deaths of mothers and children within a generation.

With support from MCSP and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health in Ebonyi and Kogi states, a number of SOGON members in both states were mobilized and deployed as volunteers to supervise, train and mentor health workers in selected health facilities, so that the health workers can provide quality obstetric and newborn care.

Under MCSP, SOGON is also facilitating rollout of Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) in both Ebonyi and Kogi states.

43 volunteers of the VOS adopted 62 underserved facilities, paid 163 visits to 46 facilities, and supported 142 frontline healthcare workers to attend to 664 patients



A volunteer guides healthcare workers to attend to a pregnant woman at a primary health center in Ebonyi State

VOS – Improving Maternal Health Services for the Underserved

VOS Impact

From providing on-the-job training and mentoring for frontline healthcare workers to carrying out antenatal consultations and delivering babies through caesarean sections, volunteers enrolled in the Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme have contributed to the efforts at saving and improving the health of Nigerian women and their children.

Case Story: Cesarean Section Right on Time

Margaret [not real name] was 38-week pregnant, bleeding from the vagina, leaking amniotic fluid, and having a high blood pressure when she arrived at the General Hospital in Obangede, a semi-urban town in Kogi State north-central Nigeria.

The young medical team at Obangede tried to deliver her but her condition worsened. With two previous caesarean section deliveries, she needed specialist care, so she was referred to the Federal Medical Center (FMC) Lokoja in the state capital.

However, getting to FMC would take more than two hours, putting Margaret and her baby at serious risk as further delays to receiving care could be fatal.



Then came Dr Grace Ogoke, a consultant gynaecologist and a member of the Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme in Kogi State. She had travelled to General Hospital Obangede being her assigned hospital in the scheme to support the hospital frontline staff and

improve their delivery of maternal health services.

Dr Grace immediately assessed Margaret and led the hospital team to perform an emergency caesarean section on her. With the benefit of her experience and guidance, Margaret was safely delivered of a healthy baby girl.

Today, Margaret and her baby are alive and thriving – thanks to a volunteer who visited right on time.

“She is a God-sent doctor,” says Margaret’s husband, happy that his wife and daughter are alive.

“The thing I enjoy most in the volunteer scheme is the challenge I face when helping people and the satisfaction I get when they appreciate the effort I put into their lives.”

– Dr Agboeze Joseph
Federal Teaching Hospital (FETHA), Ebonyi

Challenges

Reaching some of the health facilities adopted by the volunteers, especially those in rural, hard-to-reach areas, posed a huge challenge in the implementation of the scheme. Regrettably, a number of visits planned by the volunteers could not hold due to insecurity in some areas.

Lessons Learnt

By rescheduling visits by volunteers to coincide with antenatal care clinic days, volunteers were able to reach and serve more clients. Enrolling Senior Registrars (doctors about to qualify as gynaecologists) in the scheme also helped to increase the number of facilities covered and women and newborn reached. In addition, introducing quarterly on-the-job training helped in enhancing the skills of birth attendants and in providing basic emergency and obstetric care.

Going Forward

The Volunteer Obstetrician Scheme has moderately improved the delivery of maternal health services initially in Lagos State, and now in Ebonyi and Kogi States. SOGON is thus working towards sustaining the scheme and scaling it up across Nigeria.

SOGON leadership is vigorously promoting the scheme during its annual general meetings and scientific conferences and similar events, while current volunteers always share their experiences at such forums to encourage wider participation.

More senior registrars of obstetrics and gynaecology are also encouraged to join the scheme to up the number of volunteers and the impact of the scheme.

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