A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF AN EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATIVE, CSOs AND MEDIA ROUNDTABLE ON FINANCING FOR NUTRITION IN SOKOTO STATE ORGANIZED BY CIVIL SOCIETY LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY CENTRE (CISLAC) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S FUND (UNICEF) HELD AT DANKANI PALACE HOTEL SOKOTO, SOKOTO STATE ON 2ND OCTOBER, 2018.

Preamble

The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre in partnership with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) organized a Roundtable Dialogue on Budgeting for Nutrition. The Dialogue aimed at bringing under one roof the state’s executive, legislative, CSOs and the media to identify opportunities for financing nutrition, understand existing efforts by the State towards increasing domestic investment for nutrition and address nutrition emergency, giving cognizance to the importance of timely release of funds. The meeting drew participants from the Sokoto State House of Assembly, State Ministries of Education, Women Affairs, Agriculture, Finance, Sokoto State Primary Health Care Development Agency, civil society groups and the media.

At the end of the Roundtable, the following observations were raised:

Observations

1. Sokoto state ranks among the twelve (12) states of Nigeria with high malnutrition prevalence thereby putting the state at risk of set-back to socio-economic growth and development.

2. Sokoto state is not doing enough to match UNICEF’s intervention to address malnutrition in terms of adequate budgetary provisions and timely releases. This situation continues to create gaps in nutrition management efforts in the state.

3. The state adopted the national action plan on nutrition by setting up a Food and Nutrition Committee at the state and local government levels, however, the committees ceased to function overtime as a result of non-releases of funds.
4. Even as malnutrition continues to pose a threat to human development, it has not been given adequate publicity in Sokoto state. This has led to a lack of sufficient awareness on its implication.

5. While CMAM has been identified as an effective approach that offers both preventive and curative measures in nutrition management globally, Sokoto state has not shown enough commitment to the programme as the few CMAM centers in the state are funded by development partners.

6. It is difficult for civil society organizations to track and monitor government’s actual budgetary allocation and releases for nutrition because it is not earmarked in a budget line but embedded in lump-sums of other health headings.

7. Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) and routine drugs which are currently being provided by UNICEF in a number of CMAM centers is an effective supplement for revitalizing malnourished children and breaking the malnutrition cycle however, UNICEF’s intervention is largely inadequate.

8. There are other cheap and cost-free approaches to mitigate malnutrition in children such as Exclusive Breast Feeding programme, however, a lot of families especially those in the rural areas are not adequately informed about this measure thereby contributing to the increase of the menace.

9. There is low political will on the part of the government of all the north-west states to release funds for nutrition even as releases are made to other sectors.

Recommendations
1. There is the need to galvanize efforts and address nutrition management with every sense of importance and urgency to curb malnutrition prevalence in Sokoto state.

2. There is the need for CSOs and the media to engage the planning and budget office as well as the state’s House of Assembly Committee on Appropriation towards improved nutrition budgeting and timely releases to match government’s counterpart funding commitments to UNICEF programmes.

3. It is pertinent to set up a civil society forum of nutrition experts which will meet on timely basis to map out clear advocacy objectives in engaging relevant stakeholders to revamp the Food and Nutrition Committee as well as serving as a platform to continually engage nutrition discussions.

4. There is the need for the media to consistently report and expose the malnutrition situation in Sokoto state as this would not only create awareness but also serve as citizens voice in demanding for better nutrition management.

5. Sokoto state should adopt a collective strategy involving its key ministries and agencies such as Ministries of Health, Education, Budget and Economic Planning, Women and Children Affairs, relevant House of Assembly Committees and other relevant stakeholders to scale up CMAM approach in the state.

6. In order to ensure accountability and efficiency in nutrition funding in the state, there is the need for CSOs to liaise with the Planning and Budget office and House of Assembly to ensure nutrition allocations are clearly itemized in the budget.

7. Government and relevant stakeholders as a matter of urgency must take ownership of efforts to save its own citizens by matching UNICEF’s programme in procuring and administering RUTF supplements.
8. The civil society, media and relevant government agencies must step up sensitization to families across the state to educate them on the benefits of Exclusive Breast Feeding and subsequent nutritious food supplements.

9. Stakeholders should begin to drive advocacy towards the establishment of State Nutrition Agency as this would prompt adequate budgetary allocations and releases for the management of nutrition.

**Action points:**

- The State House of Assembly to liaise with the civil society group to galvanize the creation of governance and accountability structure on nutrition.

- The State House of Assembly to facilitate increase in budgetary allocation and strengthen oversight activities on release of nutrition funding.

- The civil society group to intensify efforts on policy and legislative advocacy on increased budgetary allocation (at least 15%) to health sector.

- Media to adopt holistic approach to unveil challenges bedeviling adequate and timely release of funding for nutrition.
• Stakeholders Advocacy Forum on nutrition should be constituted to engage government on continuous budgetary allocations, timely releases of funds as well as implementation and monitoring of nutrition activities.

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