

REPORT of the official launch of the Female Genital Schistosomiasis Society of Nigeria (FGSSON)



Date:
30th March, 2022

Venue:
University of Abuja Teaching Hospital,
Gwagwalada, FCT-NIGERIA

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Background

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are communicable diseases associated with poverty and prevalent in areas that have poor sanitation, inadequate or no safe water sources and substandard housing conditions. The NTDs are estimated to affect over one billion people worldwide. The majority of affected persons live in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The World Health Organization recognises 20 NTDs. Schistosomiasis, Lymphatic Filariasis, Onchocerciasis, and Soil-Transmitted Helminths, among others.

In Nigeria, it is estimated that 122 million persons are at risk of one or more of

these NTDs causing debility, limiting human potential, and impairing economic growth, especially in vulnerable groups such as women/girls and children. In children, NTDs impair children's intellectual development thereby affecting educational capacities and contributing to the declining national productivity and worsening poverty index across the country.

Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS), is a complication of chronic infestation of *Schistosoma haematobium*, a neglected gynaecological disease entity among the NTDs that affects women and girls. An estimated 56 million women/girls are affected in Africa with the majority in Nigeria. FGS is a major disease of public health importance that is often misdiagnosed, under-reported and rarely discussed even among healthcare providers. Aside from the pilot study done in Ogun state, Nigeria in 2016, no study on the burden and epidemiological mapping of FGS in Nigeria. FGS is preventable, treated and curable but due to a low level of awareness, and missed diagnosis owing to clinical symptoms in a semblance of STI and Cervical cancer, associated morbidity and mortality with FGS have continued to worsen.

Figure 1: Cross section of participants paying rapt attention during the guest lecturer's presentation.



FGSSoN

To address the growing concern caused by FGS, the Female genital Society of Nigeria (FGSSoN) was created in October 2021 to create demands for FGS services through community awareness and enhance capacities for FGS prevention, surveillance, testing and case management among healthcare providers. FGSSoN metamorphosed from a network to a duly registered not-for-profit, non-governmental society with

volunteers cutting across the 36 states of Nigeria plus the FCT. The FGSSoN will work collaboratively with the NTDs/Schistosomiasis control programme of Nigeria and other stakeholders in the NTD/FGS response in a bottom-top approach to see to the control

Figure 2: Launch MC, Dr Sule Samson & members of the high table



of FGS in Nigeria and beyond. The official launch of the FGSSoN is the first step in helping the society begin her technical assistance to the NTDs control programme as regards shaping policy direction, advocacy, resource mobilization, capacity building and the provision of an integrated service delivery approach to the FGS response in Nigeria.

Objectives

- To create heightened awareness and sensitize stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond on the birth and activities of FGSSoN as a not-for-profit non-governmental organization in the NTDs/FGS implementation space.
- To increase FGSSoN visibility and confer legitimacy on FGSSoN as a Society.
- To unveil the FGSSoN official logo and websites.
- To secure FGSSoN stakeholders' commitment, buy-in and sustained funding support to the Society.

Key deliverables

Key deliverables

	Status
1. Created heightened awareness and sensitize stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond on the birth and activities of FGSSoN as a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization in the NTDs/FGS implementation space.	Achieved
2. Increased FGSSoN visibility and confer legitimacy on FGSSoN as a Society.	Achieved
3. Unveiled FGSSoN official logo and websites.	Achieved
4. Secured FGSSoN stakeholders' commitment, buy-in and sustained funding support to the Society	Ongoing

Participants at the FGSSoN launch

A total of **258 persons** (Male: 137; Female: 121) were in attendance both **online** (total: 130 (male: 81; female: 49) and **physically** (total: 128 (male: 56; female: 72). Participants were drawn from the Nigerian NTD/Schistosomiasis Control programme, Academia, WHO, Sightsavers, Countdown partners, Fast package, Bridge to development, END Fund, Global Schistosomiasis Alliance, US CDC, & USAID, Bill & Milinda Gates Foundation, NTD Advocate, Bruyere Research Institute, & Schistosomiasis Control Initiatives.

Launching Key highlights

Registration/Introduction of the Executives & Guest: The launch started with individual registration by participants both online and those physically present at the event venue. Executives of the Societies were recognised, welcomed/ or invited to the high table. Special/ or guests from the academia, civil societies, NTDs implementing partners both local and international, the organized private sector, funders etc. were all recognized and welcomed to the launch. The launch event was anchored by Dr Sule Samson, the event's master of ceremony.

Welcome address: Dr Rabi Ibrahim gave the opening address. He welcomed all participants

and guests to the launch of the first society in Nigeria and Africa, the Female Genital Schistosomiasis Society of Nigeria (FGSSoN), which is taking on the responsibility to support the poor and vulnerable women and girls affected by the Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS) and other NTDs, in general, to alienate their sufferings and reduce to zero, the catastrophic cost associated with genital schistosomiasis among this vulnerable gender.

Guest lecture: Insightful lecture on FGS in Nigeria: The Gap presented by Dr EMMANUEL, Opeyemi. He gave a well-articulated I with a clear link between Global Public Health/ Social determinants of health-related to NTD lectures/FGS control. He stressed that to achieve the SDG's goal there is a need to focus on NTDs control. Using a successful business model approach, he shared current critical gaps in FGS control in Nigeria while shaping a clear vision to help the country control FGS. He ended the

Figure 3: FGSSoN President, Dr Rabi Ibrahim during one of his sessions.



discussion by emphasizing the different areas of play for the newly formed FGSSoN in FGS programming in Nigeria.

FGSSoN: Present & Prospect: The President of the society, Dr Rabiuh Ibrahim gave an insight into the overall processes that gave birth to the society from the capacity building programme with the Geneva Learning Foundation and her supporting partners, to the society being initially conceived as a network and her subsequent transformation to a society with volunteers cutting across the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria and 36 states plus FCT. Society is very well positioned to help the poor and vulnerable women/girls affected by FGS in Nigeria and beyond. He submitted that although much of the current strides in the society's efforts to tackle FGS in Nigeria have been through the voluntary contributions of members across the country, he envisioned a society that will have her work expanded through contributions and

Figure 4:FGSSoN first Vice President, Dr Hameedat, O. Abdussalam during the unveiling of FGSSoN logo & website



donations by spirited individuals and organization to be able to meet her many ambitious programmes/activities spread across the country and in support of the National NTDs/Schistosomiasis Control programmed in Nigeria.

Question and Answer session:

The lecture was very well received as participants (participants online and those physically present at the venue of the event) asked various germane questions summarily cutting across implementation research, FGS diagnostics, predisposing factors, advocacy and resource mobilization, need for multisectoral partnership in FGS programming in Nigeria. The question received clear responses to the satisfaction of individuals who asked the questions delivered during each of the lecture sessions.

Unveiling the FGSSoN logo & Website: The FGSSoN official logo and website URL address were unveiled during the launch by Dr Hameedat, O. Abdussalam, FGSSoN's first Vice-president. The spirit and letter behind the society's logo were succinctly explained by the VP. She also did a run through the Society's websites (<http://fgsofnigeria.com.ng>) touching on key filters. Prof Mustapha Jamda Abubakar was on the ground to support the VP during the official unveiling of the Society's logo.

Goodwill messages: Goodwill messages were delivered by local and international NTDs donors, implementing partners and advocates who joined either physically or virtually through their NTDs focal persons or representative. The Programme Manager, Dr Nebe, O (Nigeria NTDs/Schistosomiasis Control Programme); Prof Mustapha Jamda Abubakar (Community Medicine, University of Abuja), Prof Sadiq (Centre for Disease Research and Control, Bayero University Kano), Dr Amadou Garba (WHO AFRO NTDs focal person), Dr Julie Jacobson (Co-founder Bridges to Development), Dr Anouk Gouvras (Director of communications and programmes at Global Schistosomiasis Alliance) were among those who gave their goodwill message.

Figure 5: FGSSoN Gen. Sec. Dr Ajayi O Abdullahi



Figure 6: Guest Lecturer, Dr EMMANUEL, Opeyemi



Closing remarks: The Society's General Secretary, Dr Abdullahi, O. Ajayi gave the closing remark. He thanked everyone for their contributions towards making the launch a reality and a success. International and local Donors and people who contributed in kind or cash towards a successful launch were all appreciated. The meeting was brought to a close at about 2:00 pm after participants sang the second stanza of the Nigeria National anthem.

Next Steps

A. Next steps for the National NTDs/Schistosomiasis Control Programme

- Commit to declaring NTDs/FGS as a disease of national public health problem and provide leadership in driving the overall response approaches and processes
- Convene a national stakeholder meeting to review strategic NTD documents and guidelines to incorporate the FGS response plan and mobilise resources (human, materials and funding) for the overall response
- Conduct national epidemiological mapping for FGS to ascertain the true burden of the disease in Nigeria.

B. Next steps for FGSSoN

- Support the NTDs programme to commit and coordinate FGS response and support overall FGS activities in Nigeria including the review of the NTD national master plan and other guidelines, SOPs, and training manuals to incorporate FGS.

Figure 7: Cross-section of participants during the FGSSoN Launch



- Conduct FGS situational and ongoing data analysis, provide technical assistance at the national to develop an M&E framework and tools, produce supporting IEC materials and publications
- Mobilize domestic resources and galvanize NTDs stakeholders to commit to funding NTD/FGS response in Nigeria
- Commence full implementation of FGS activities at the national and sub-national level
- Provide technical support at the national and sub-national levels for the rapid scale-up and uptake of the FGS response plan in Nigeria

C. Next steps for NTDs Donors/ Partners

- Commit to a sustained partnership with FGSSoN in areas of advocacy, resource mobilization, implementation of strategic interventions, operational research,

Appreciations

The President and the entire FGSSoN team wish to immensely thank: The Task Force for Global Health, Bridges to Development, FAST Package, Grand Challenges Canada, Sightsavers, Global Schistosomiasis Alliance for their TA support, hand-holding and funding support before, during and after the FGSSoN launch. WHO, NTD focal person, Dr Garba, thank you for your support and your presence virtually during the launching

event. Dr Julie Jacobson, Profs Jamda & Sadiq, Dr Anouk Gouvras and many of our other partners and support groups are too numerous to mention, we say THANK YOU!

FGSSoN is very appreciative of your efforts and contributions. Please do oblige us, we will be coming back to knock on your doors again for guidance, technical assistance and monetary and material support for our numerous other projects/activities.

To the national NTD/Schistosomiasis control programme thank you for your buy-in and leadership. Please remember that in FGSSoN you have a hand to hold and a shoulder to lean on.

Thank you everyone for being so supportive.

Photo-gallery

Figure 8 Ms Olaniya, Ilera Foundation



Figure 9: Dr Nebe, O. National NTD/Schistosomiasis control programme



Participants asking question



Figure 10: Members of the high table



Figure 11: Rapt attention during one of the sessions



Figure 12: Ogun State FGSSoN Coordinator



Figure 13: Prof Mustapha J. A giving his remark

