

## Timothy Thliza Williams “A WAKE UP CALL”



It was a warm, sunny, and dusty Saturday morning, when a small group of MSF WaCA Associative members gathered under the cover of a large neem tree, preparing to embark on a voluntary health awareness raising campaign on Covid – 19 pandemic. I was glad to be part of a program with a public health approach. We were all filled with enthusiasm and also high-spirited as we set out to visit these so “Hard to reach areas”.

The ride was bumpy as we were greeted with rough terrains and meandering pathways. “If the state of these roads is this bad in the dry season, how will it be during the rainy season?” I wondered as we navigated through the deep gullies, the thorns, the shrubs, and the sand dunes. We got a heartwarming reception from some groups of men and women who were already seated. Excited children who had been playing in the sand ran towards us eager to be part of what was happening.

We talked to the people about the Covid – 19 pandemic, the need to protect themselves and others by frequent handwashing, wearing of face mask and maintaining a physical distance. We encouraged them to seek medical care for themselves and their family whenever they were feeling sick. We took this opportunity to speak to the men for the importance of ante natal care (ANC) visits. They were also advised to allow their pregnant wives to register/go for ANC in the primary health centers (PHC) to avoid complications.

Then came the moment of my encounter with a member of the community, who pointed out that the problem is not about them going to the Primary Health Center but the lack of human resources is the major challenge. In his words, “Due to the shortage of midwives, our wives can be at the Primary Health Center for the whole day without being attended to hence, we prefer traveling to Jahun”. I was broken by his words and pictured myself or a family in a similar situation, not being attended to in the hospital in times of dire need. He further said, "To worsen this, the closest Primary Health Center to us in this hard-to-reach location is two villages away from our home, which is the reason why we choose self-medication with herbs". I could only but imagine the terrible outcomes from such practices.

I encouraged them to keep utilizing the health facility in order to get the best for their women. From our end and with our team, we know now how we could be of more help to them; we will try to engage their policy-makers to work towards improving health services and accessibility.

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