Umunnakwe Chiamaka "THE LESSON"

"It is not the question of going to the facility or not. Most times when we get to the Primary Health Care facility, there is no one to attend to us, and when the health personnel eventually arrive, they do not attend to us immediately. They wait for other women to arrive first before attending to us", she explained to me as she adjusted her headscarf. "This is not encouraging as we have to travel long distances most time on foot to get to the health facility. Also, sometimes during the rainy season, the roads are flooded and we can't leave our homes…" she continued.

It was a hot Saturday in November, the dry harmattan wind blew frequently causing dry leaves to fall. I brushed the dust off my face as I stood listening to her. It was true that the village was remote and lacked basic amenities. In fact, that morning me and my colleagues had traveled for over an hour from the main road to get there. This is aside from the poor road network; I imagined how bad it would be during the rainy season.

The week before, we had embarked on a community awareness raising program, creating awareness on public health issues and the recent outbreak of diseases including Lassa fever, yellow fever, and especially the Covid – 19 virus. I was excited about the opportunity and looked forward to it. We had visited two villages that day before arriving at this one and we have heard similar stories from women, having difficulties accessing healthcare.

This woman approached me after the campaign to share her challenges. She complained about the distance of the facility from her home and how difficult it was getting there. A few of them used the local oxen-cart while others used a motorcycle. However, the majority had to walk to the facility. I imagined a case of eclampsia; it will be risky for a convulsing woman to travel such a distance on a motorcycle. Also, there is just one primary health center for the health needs of over nine villages. I thought of all the risks these women face and my heart sank.

I encouraged her to persevere and be patient with the health workers and hopefully, with time the government would provide other nearby Primary Health Centers. It was not much but she smiled and thanked me, she was grateful enough that we were there to help out in the little way we could. That day I learned a very important lesson. I learned that sometimes, it is enough to just be there and lend a listening ear.

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