

Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) Painting a grim picture in the upper fringes of Northern Nigeria

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For more than fifteen years, serious efforts have been made to make a dent towards reducing the high infant and high maternal mortality rates in Nigeria. According to the National Demographic Survey (NDHS), the infant mortality rate in Nigeria in 1992 stood at 114/1000 live births which has come down to 86/1000 as shown in a survey carried out in 2010. This statistics is considered very high and Nigeria can certainly do better if the right approach and strategy using a combination of Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) and promotion of Infant and Young Child Feeding Programs to tackle the problem are adopted. The most recent NDHS statistics in Nigeria (2009) shows that under-5 mortality was 138/1000 live birth which is considerably high and according to the Paediatric Association of Nigeria, 90% of child deaths in Nigeria are preventable! The underlying cause of high infant and child mortality figures is poor nutritional practice which has become exacerbated by the fast degradation of Nigeria's health facilities. It has been globally established that 53% of child deaths is as a result of preventable malnutrition. Until a few years ago, the high prevalence of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in Northern Nigeria was not reported. Studies carried out in Kebbi, Katsina, Gombe, and Jigawa states have revealed the existence of a silent nutritional emergency that threatens the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goal number 4 in Nigeria. SAM prevalence in many of the Local Government Areas in Gombe state was as high as 7% and all these happening in the absence of emergencies such as natural disaster (drought, famine, earthquake, or war). This silent emergency in Northern Nigeria is being tackled by the efforts of UNICEF through the supply of plumpy nuts and basic medicines.

Biography

In the immediate past 18 years spanning 1994 to 2012, Dr John Egbuta worked as UNICEF Health and Nutrition Specialist in various countries (Iraq, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria) and officially separated from UNICEF in 2008. Dr Egbuta is currently a Consultant and Expert in all aspects of International Nutrition for Development (Micronutrients Deficiency Elimination, Community Management of Acute malnutrition, CMAM; and Infant and Young Child Feeding, IYCF). He is also involved in assisting countries on MDGs that are related to Nutrition.

He has recently completed a 6-month consultancy on Nutrition Strategy Development with UNICEF Pakistan (September 2012 to March 2013). Prior to joining UNICEF, he was Senior Lecturer, Department of Clinical Chemical Pathology, University of Jos, Nigeria from 1984 to 1994. He has a Ph.D. degree in Clinical Biochemistry with emphasis on Clinical Nutrition. His initial trainings were at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu and the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland where he received M.Sc. degree in 1984. He bagged a Ph.D in Clinical Biochemistry from the University of Jos in 1990. He has 19 scientific publications in reputable international journals and remains actively involved in contemporary medical and nutritional research.