

## KEY MESSAGES

Sustaining political and financial commitment to MNCH issues require effective advocacy efforts.

Key contextual influences for effective MNCH advocacy are:

- political cycle,
- availability of evidence on the issue,
- effective links with powerful and interested champions,
- willingness of interested groups to undertake advocacy on the matter.

Effective advocacy processes involve

- Forming groups, Building relationships with media, champions/influencers, Effective mobilization of citizens
- using relevant evidence.

The entrenchment of MNCH on the political and financial agenda through advocacy, influenced the provision of MNCH services at the subnational level (Anambra State)

## IS ADVOCACY AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR PRORITIZATION OF MNCH IN NIGERIA? A REALIST PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

The SURE-P MCH (Subsidy Reinvestment program for Maternal and Child Health) was a Nigerian government intervention to improve MNCH indices but was suddenly withdrawn by a new government in 2015. Following this sudden withdrawal of SURE-P, how have subsequent MNCH programs been sustained? Does advocacy play any role in enacting and implementing policies for MNCH services in Nigeria? What makes advocacy effective? The World Health Organization describes advocacy for health as a 'combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance and systems support for a particular health goal or programme' (1).

### What did we do?

We conducted in depth interviews with key informants at both National and sub-national levels (Anambra State), reviewed relevant documents on health-related advocacy and mapped advocacy events post SURE-P.



Figure 1(L) Family Planning advocacy core groups in the TCI (the challenge initiative).

### What we found

1) Despite maternal neonatal and child health (MNCH) remaining a national and international priority, sustaining administrators' and citizens' interests, political and financial commitment to MNCH issues often requires high-level and effective advocacy activities. This was affirmed by one of our respondents who stated: "So, advocacy is a powerful tool because most of these people you know they are not health workers, the governor is not a medical doctor, so it is not like he doesn't know, but when you come to him as an advocate and you are able to give him facts looking at indices and looking at what is on ground, telling him the gaps and everything, he will understand and he will quickly key into it". **P2SL02 (program officer)**

2) Five contextual determinants of effectiveness of advocacy measures for MNCH include:

- Political interests and cycle (to align MNCH-related change with changes in government),
- Availability of evidence on MNCH issues,
- Link with global and national policies
- Effective links with advocacy champions and
- Willingness of interested groups to undertake advocacy on MNCH.

*“one of the biggest problems in Nigeria has been issues of governance and policy inconsistency, and we have seen this inconsistency coming by the cycle of democracy governance in Nigeria. So, when you change the government, their priorities automatically change, their attention changes”. (P2NL05 Implementing partner) “if you are going to advocate, it means you advocate on very firm evidence, so if you are advocating on faulty evidence, even if someone listens to you, it may not sound very convincing to attract investment or will to it” (P2NL05, Implementing partner)*

3) Effective advocacy processes involve forming advocacy groups (to gain more influence and power and for possible diversification of advocacy agenda), building relations with media (for adequate dissemination of advocacy agenda and result), champions/influencers (to maximize result), implementers (ensuring the availability of MCH services), effective mobilization of citizens (for demand creation) and using relevant evidence.

*“yes, we have found out that when groups come together, they tend to create a common objective and have a composite position in advocating to the government or partners. When you do parallel advocacy for instance, sometimes you create so much distraction”. (P2NL05 Implementing partner)*

4) The entrenchment of MNCH on the political and financial agenda through advocacy, also influenced the provision of MNCH services at the subnational and national level (Anambra state)

*“I think so, because a lot of activities involving the state are happening more and more often unlike before. You know a lot of interactions in the state either through meetings or workshops or visits are happening more from my experience now than previously”. (P2SL03 program officer)*

### **Policy Implications**

Effective advocacy should be context-specific and should involve leveraging existing links/relations and using available evidence at the right time for its maximum effect on different decision makers and other stakeholders. Although this can be complex and difficult in many cases, it requires consistency and tenacity for results to be achieved. It therefore becomes imperative that advocacy activities should be widely supported and encouraged at the national and subnational level for effective policy enactment and implementation.

### **Reference**

1. World Health Organization. Advocacy strategies for health and development: development communication in action HED92.4. 1992;(November):1–22. Available from: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70051/1/HED\\_92.4\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70051/1/HED_92.4_eng.pdf)

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