

Guest Presentation

Building Sustainable Eye Health Systems. What Has the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN) Been Saying?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This is a review of the resolutions in the communiqués of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN) in the past ten (10) years and the strategic plans of the Society and their alignment with the health system building blocks, in order to draw the attention of members of the OSN to the need to implement the resolutions in the communiqué and the strategic plans.

Methods: A compilation and retrieval of all communiqués issued or published at the end of the annual general meetings and scientific conferences (AGM/SC) of the OSN in the past ten years was done. Document analysis on all available communiqués and the two strategic plans of the Society; Vision for the Future I & II was carried out using quantitative content and thematic analysis.

Findings: The Society held its annual general meetings and scientific conferences consistently in the ten years under review, a virtual AGM held in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic. An analysis of the resolutions contained in the communiqués, revealed that 20% of the resolutions were focused on service delivery, 10% on Human resource, 2% on medical products vaccines and Technology, 4% on Health Information System, 10% on Health System Financing, 25% on Leadership and Governance and 29% on Health Promotion and Partnerships. There was no documented evidence of any functioning implementation committee or monitoring and evaluation report on the resolutions or strategic plans.

Conclusion: The OSN has continuously addressed the eye/health system building blocks through its resolutions and its strategic plans but has not made any concerted efforts in areas of implementation. It is hoped that this paper will draw the attention of the national body and state chapters of the Society to the need to set up mechanisms for the implementation of the OSN strategic plan and communiqués.

Keywords: Communiqué, Strategic Plans, Implementation

INTRODUCTION

The Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN) came into being in 1969. It is said to be one of the first associations to commence annual general meetings and scientific conferences in Nigeria. Its first conference held six years later in 1975. For each conference, a theme and subthemes are selected in line with the focus of health care around the world and the perceived eye health issues on the top burner at the time. The Society has the following aims and objectives;

- (i) To promote high ethical standard of practice of Ophthalmology in Nigeria,
- (ii) To promote research, and advance the pursuit of knowledge, in the science and technology of Ophthalmology in Nigeria,
- (iii) To promote and advance the care of the blind, the visually impaired, and those at risk of visual impairment,
- (iv) To establish linkages and partnership with other Medical and professional bodies that will further the aims and objectives of the Society,
- (v) To promote the welfare and interaction of all members of the Society,

- (vi) To hold an Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference for the growth of the OSN and its members,
- (vii) To collaborate with other international bodies involved in the global effort at prevention and eradication of avoidable blindness or promoting education, research and advancement knowledge in the field of Ophthalmology,
- (viii) To consider and express views on all proposed legislations and national issues especially those affecting eye care delivery, training and eye health education in Nigeria.¹

of the proceedings of the conference and recommendations or resolutions to address the issues and challenges raised at the meeting and for improving the Society's goals. This is usually published in one or two of the national newspapers (Figure 1) and circularized to relevant stakeholders in eye health.

The Vision for the Future I; the first strategic plan of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria to preserve and restore vision was developed in 2005. It was adapted from the strategic plan of the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) and presents the vision, mission and goals of the Society. It also contains guidelines for the practice of eye health, training of medical students and continuing professional development for ophthalmologists. Bruce Spivey, MD in the foreword of the plan, wrote that the Vision for the Future I, is "One of the most forward steps taken by any national Ophthalmology society in the world" and that "Ophthalmologists have the training, and with it the responsibility, to lead the eye care team. It is our moral and professional responsibility to do so in a dedicated and effective manner"³

The Vision for the Future II was developed after 12 years of the first strategic plan. Dr Bade Ogundipe, OSN President (2018 – 2021) in the preface, noted that the Vision for the Future II was developed in cognizance of the need to review the existing plan; interpret the necessary metrics to guide the implementation and present appropriate timelines for every activity in the plan⁴. The plan addresses and simplifies the role of ophthalmologists in improving eye health in the country. These strategic plans thus establish the platform for continuously building the eye health system in Nigeria.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a Sustainable Healthcare System as a system that improves, maintains or restores health, while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and leveraging opportunities to restore and improve it, to the benefit of the health and well-being of current and future generations⁵. Building Sustainable eye health systems can be described using both the sustainable healthcare system and the health systems building block frameworks. The sustainable healthcare system framework presents five distinct categories; (i) long term



Figure 1: Published Communique of the Ophthalmological Society September 2016

Objective vi sets the platform where all of these objectives can be articulated for action. A communique is an official announcement or statement, especially one made to the media.² It is an important tool used to capture the mood and observations during any formal meeting of large bodies such as the annual general meeting and scientific conference of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria. The communique so issued contains the summary

strategic perspectives and innovations, (ii) institutional accountability and individual responsibility, (iii) institutionalization of environmental concerns (iv) disease prevention and health promotion and (v) quality⁶. A sustainable health system reflects a commitment to improving the lives of the people and communities we serve, for generations to come⁷. Both strategic plans of the OSN address all areas of the framework excluding the institutionalization of environmental concerns. Health Care System is the organization of people, institutions and resources that deliver health care services to meet the health needs of target populations⁸. WHO presents six building blocks of a health care system (i) Human resource (ii) medical products vaccines and Technology (iii) Health Information System (iv) Health System Financing (v) Leadership and Governance (vi) Service delivery. In the recent time, a seventh block, Health Promotion and Partnerships has been added in recognition of the importance of people in the schema of any health system. This block may be referred to as "individuals, households, and communities as civil society, consumers, patients, payers, and producers of health through knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and practices"⁹, thus ensuring a people centred health care system. In this paper, building sustainable eye health systems is considered using both the sustainable health system and the health systems building block frameworks. The Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN) has set the platform for building sustainable eye health systems through its strategic eye health plans and its communiques. The OSN communiques in the past 10 years (2012 to 2021) and the strategic plans were reviewed and their relevance in building sustainable eye health system in the country discussed. The author having being part of the executive committee at different times in the past ten years in addition to being part of the strategic planning team for both the Vision for the Future I and II strategic plans notes that over the years, discussions and recommendations following the annual general meetings and scientific conferences have been repetitive. No established mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the resolutions

from the communiques or the strategic plans of the Society have been put into effect. This paper offers a bird's eye view of what the OSN has been saying. It is hoped that this presentation to the generality of members will cause a rethink about the resolutions and the strategic plans and draw the attention of the executive body to the importance of these documents prepared by members which can change the eye health landscape if implemented and monitored.

METHODS

An internal desk search for all published and unpublished communiques released by the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria between 2012 and 2021 spanning a period of ten years was conducted. All published and unpublished communiques of the OSN were retrieved directly from personal emails received on the subject from the OSN secretariat. Communiques from missing years were retrieved from two former Secretaries and a former Vice president (Chairperson of the OSN Communique drafting committee).

An online literature search for published papers relevant to eye health, health system building blocks, the use of communiques and qualitative/quantitative document analysis was also carried out. The two published strategic plans of the Society, the Vision for the Future I and II were retrieved and included as documents for analysis.

Document analysis was carried out using quantitative content and thematic analysis. A content analysis was conducted on all resolutions contained in the communique. Those with similar themes were grouped together and quantified accordingly. These themes were further matched with the health system building blocks. The information derived from the communiques include: the conference year, conference location, theme, subtheme, number of resolutions, categorization of resolutions, frequency of occurrence and alignment with the health system building blocks.

The Strategic Plans of the Society, Vision for the Future I & II were analyzed for scope and content. Special note was made with respect

Table 1: OSN AGM/SC Theme and Subthemes 2012 -2021

Year	City	Theme	Subtheme
2012	Lagos	Building a world alliance for Sight	Eye Health Programme sustainability in Nigeria
2013	Asaba	Aligning with the national strategic health development plan	Promoting Universal Access to Eye health.
2014	Ibadan	Universal Eye Health	Generating Evidence for Eye Care Rehabilitation of the irreversibly blind
2015	Jos	Building partnership for eye care	
2016	Port Harcourt	Technology for Ophthalmic Care in the Developing World'	
2017	Kaduna	Sustainable Development Goals and Eye Care Delivery in Nigeria	
2018	Abuja	Advancing eye care beyond 2020	Recent Advances in Eye Care Global Trends and Changing Practice Pattern in Eye Care" and Diabetic Retinopathy: When All Hands Must be on Deck
2019	Calabar	Universal Eye Health: Leveraging on Integration, and Collaborations.	
2020	Virtual	AGM only	Enhancing Training and Practice through Technology and Vision Care for the vulnerable
2021	Ilorin	People Centered Eye care	

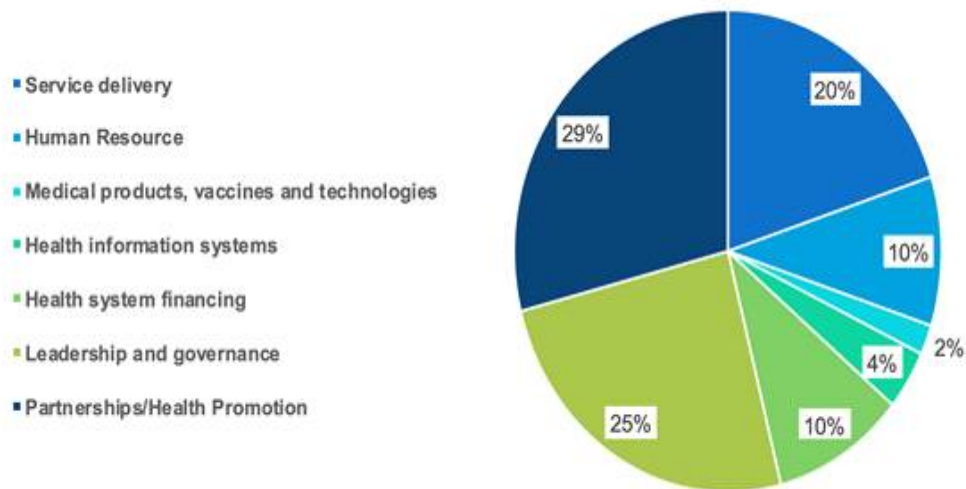


Figure 2: Health system building blocks and the OSN resolutions (2012-2021)

to whether a section/component on monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plans was included in the document.

FINDINGS OF THE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS:- WHAT HAS THE OSN BEEN SAYING?

In the past ten years, only eight communiques were issued or published by the Society. Only seven were accessed and reviewed. The communique issued at Ibadan in 2014 could

not be accessed. In 2020, the AGM was virtual with a reduced scope because of the COVID 19 pandemic and there was no scientific conference. No communique was published or circulated following the 2021 conference at Ilorin. It was noted that the themes and subthemes were largely in the public eye health domain (Table 1).

The resolutions focused on the following areas; Primary Eye Care, Provision of quality Eye Care, Partnerships/Collaborations - with media and other bodies, Health Promotion and advocacy,

Development of subspecialty groups, Childhood blindness, Vision Rehabilitation and Low Vision, Leadership and Governance, Eye Health Financing, Human Resource Eye Health Information System, Eye Bank Project, Medicines and Technology and Eye Health Research. Aligning the resolutions with the health system framework revealed that 20% of the resolutions were on service delivery, 10% on Human resource, 2% on medical products vaccines and Technology, 4% on Health Information System, 10% on Health System Financing, 25% on Leadership and Governance and 29% on Health Promotion and Partnerships (Figure 2).

The first strategic Plan of the Society; Vision for the future I was published in July 2005, with the mission to eliminate avoidable blindness and low vision that results from preventable and treatable eye diseases for people throughout Nigeria. It covers eight priority areas; (i) Ophthalmic education and training for residents, (ii) Ophthalmic research, (iii) Eye care advocacy (iv) Eye care teams roles (v) Eye care guideline (vi) ethics (vii) continuing education (continuing professional development) (viii) linkages and partnerships³. It clearly outlines the goal for each of the priority areas and the expected outcomes. The plan does not have a timeline or target and could be regarded as a policy document of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria. The plan proposes the inauguration and launch of an implementation task force for the restoration and preservation of vision with advisory committees set up at the national, state and local government levels to ensure the implementation of the plans. No record of the establishment of the task force or the advisory committees was retrieved from the archives.

The mission of the Vision for the future II is to empower Nigerian ophthalmologists to work with stakeholders to ensure access to high quality eye health in an affordable and equitable manner for the people of Nigeria. It consists of 3 priority areas; (1) Effective Eye health leadership and Governance (2) Enhance education and training (3) Enhance quality eye health⁴. These priority areas are further distilled into three goals, 17 objectives and several activities, expected outcomes and indicators. This plan provides a more workable platform for implementation. Both Vision for the Future I and II do not include a monitoring and evaluation framework.

DISCUSSION

The OSN as a body has addressed all the health system blocks required for sustainability of the eye health system through the development of its strategic plans; Vision for the Future I in 2005 and Vision for the Future II in 2018. The OSN has annually reviewed the challenges and issues in improving eye health in Nigeria and brought forth several resolutions. It is worthy to note that, in the past ten years, the resolutions have largely been centred on three of the health building blocks: Leadership and governance, Service delivery and Partnerships and health promotion; making up about 75% of all resolutions. The provision of quality eye care involves strengthening members of the eye health team, not just ophthalmologists, through training, providing the required infrastructure and technology, empower regulatory bodies to ensure standard practice and strengthen referral links and the provision of eye care services within the communities. As part of improving service delivery, the Society has resolved to ensure the inclusion of primary eye care into primary health care. In the recent years, this has gained some grounds with the development of the primary eye care training manuals for the trainer and trainee and the training of master trainers for the each of the geopolitical zones in the country in readiness for a nationwide training of primary healthcare workers. In order to build a sustainable eye health programme in Nigeria, the OSN has recognized as stated in the communique, the importance of integrating primary eye care into primary health care system, and establishing Partnerships with media, NGOS including faith based and non-faith-based organizations, communities and individuals. The need for health promotion and advocacy for the dissemination of information, education and communication materials on eye diseases and intersectoral collaborations on areas of health have also been emphasized over the years.

About 10% of the resolutions by the OSN in the past ten years have been targeted at improving financial access to eye health services in other to ensure universal health coverage. The Society has advocated for increased funding of eye health care, expansion of the coverage of eye services in the benefit package of the National Health Insurance and the establishment of tax rebate for importation

of eye equipment and consumables. The OSN as a body has not addressed these issues but the discussions at its meetings has steered up interests amongst ophthalmologists in the country as noted by reports of the inclusion and contributions of ophthalmologists as members of the Federal and State health insurance committees. In Nigeria, Eye Health has been listed in the benefit package in the National Health Insurance scheme and the Delta State Contributory Health Scheme.

Medical products, vaccines and technologies came to focus at the 2016 AGM/SC in Port Harcourt. The Society resolved to explore all avenues to support local manufacture and patronage of local eye medicines and consumables, local production of spectacle frames and intraocular lenses. At present, most of the eye medications used in the country are imported. The only notable eye drops manufacturing company is the ECWA Central Pharmacy. All spectacle frames used in Nigeria are currently imported largely from China. There are no spectacle production companies in Nigeria resulting in relatively high cost of spectacles.

Nigeria has over the last seven years adopted the District Health information system (DHIS 2.0) for its health data repository. Only 2% of the resolutions of the OSN in the past ten years focused on health information systems. Till date in Nigeria, eye health indicators are still not fully covered in the system. There are no available national data on eye diseases or services. Report of the National Eye Health programme states that these indicators have been developed and included and a roll out is planned within the next few months.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For a Sustainable eye health system all the six (6) health system building blocks including the 7th Block; People, Partnerships and Health Promotion must be addressed. The OSN has demonstrated a genuine interest in building sustainable eye health system in Nigeria through the development of two (2) well-articulated strategic plans and its resolutions as contained in the AGM/SC Communiques. Unfortunately, it appears these communiques are released in most part in fulfillment of the criteria for a complete conference and not necessarily treated as tools for implementation.

As a body therefore the OSN has played its part and has said quite a lot about what is needed. The challenge therefore is in the inadequate or lack of translation of these well thought out objectives, activities and resolutions into action. This report on the status of implementation of the communiques in the past ten years is presented with the hope that it will engender the national body and state chapters to use the communiques as a tool for implementation and set up implementation monitoring committees on both the communique and the OSN Vision for the Future strategic plan. It is therefore recommended that the OSN should take the following steps:

- (i) Design an implementation template to be distributed to each state 2 weeks after the publication of the Communique {Rapporteurs & Communique development Team}
- (ii) Define implementation groups or sub groups – National, State, Zonal levels, Subspecialty groups etc {Reactivation of the OSN Zones & Branches}
- (iii) Ensure the implementation status of the strategic Plan and Communique is presented at its the annual conferences.
- (iv) Empower all Statutory and Ad hoc Committees to carry out their mandate in line with the Strategic Plan Communique
- (v) Empower the OSN Foundation to be more Functional
- (vi) Commence the development of the Vision for the future which should take into cognisance the National Eye Health Policy and the National Eye Health Plan and
- (vii) Set up a committee to monitor and track the implementation of the strategic plans and previous communiques. The author believes that the OSN can change the Eye Health Landscape if only it can collectively action its strategic Plan and Communiques.

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