

“There’s no way you can train a doctor today to replace the experience and knowledge of consultants (who are leaving)”

– Prof. Innocent Ujah

The Nigeria Solidarity Support Fund (NSSF) on Tuesday, June 28th organized a discussion on brain drain in the health sector titled **“Nigerian health-care system and brain drain- step up or sink”**. The discussion which aired live on Silverbird Television News Hub, was organized as an advocacy strategy with the aim of highlighting current challenges in human capital flight in the Nigerian health sector; and proffering solutions to same. The discussion was also a rallying call for individuals and organizations to partner with NSSF on strengthening the healthcare system in Nigeria.

The discussion had in attendance, **Dr Ngozi Azodoh**, Director; Department of Health Planning, Research and Statistics (DHPRS), **Professor Innocent Ujah**, the immediate past President of Nigerian Medical Association and Vice Chancellor; Federal University of Health Science, Otuokpo, Benue state, and **Dr Fejiro Chinye-Nwoko**, General Manager/ CEO, NSSF.

Professor Ujah highlighted push and pull factors influencing brain drain in the health sector to include poor working conditions stemming from epileptic power supply, dilapidated hospitals, inter-professional rivalry; security challenges exposing doctors to kidnapping and harassment from patients’ relatives; non-existent training opportunities, delays in payments of salaries lasting as long as 23 months in states such as Abia and Imo; and poor follow through of government policies. These enumerated factors are all in stack contrast to conditions in the west, where salaries and emoluments are paid in a timely fashion; equipment are available and modern; and general conditions are conducive.

Speaking on behalf of the government, Dr Ngozi Azodoh, discussed the government’s efforts at solving the problem on brain drain. This included: examining the statistics and the push factors, embarking on a reform program chaired by Vice president, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, negotiating for better pay and infrastructure, establishing the National Health Act to empower workers, establishing the Basic health care provision fund, which was created as a source of sustainable and predictable financing for health, and exploring mutually beneficial partnerships with countries that have high numbers of Nigerian healthcare workers in a bid to strengthen the healthcare sector in Nigeria

The General Manager / CEO, Nigeria Solidarity Support Fund, further stressed that Nigeria’s healthcare system is in crisis, and it is currently only receiving 50% returns on its investment in training healthcare workers, particularly doctors, since data shows only 50% of registered doctors are practicing in Nigeria. NSSF seeks to address this by identifying and funding high impact solutions that are in line with government strategies. Support for human resources for health is in line with NSSFs priority of Strengthening the healthcare system which is a complex system that is incomplete without available healthcare workers. NSSF pools resources from individuals and corporate organisations to support national response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted various sectors and worsened migration of healthcare workers.

Recommendations:

1. **Strengthened Government commitment:** Government should commit to implementing agreed policies such as hazard allowance which took eight (8) months to negotiate and is yet to be implemented.
2. **Revitalizing the health committee:** the health committee which was inaugurated in January 2022 has not met since then. The committee should be reactivated to perform the duties it was set up for.
3. **Stakeholder engagement:** Government should convene roundtable discussions with relevant stakeholders to discuss workable solutions.
4. **Research:** Government should identify data gaps and research agendas and use the knowledge gathered to understand and address brain drain as well as the risks of the health care system completely breaking down.
5. **Increased patriotism:** Government should work towards increasing patriotism by meeting the basic needs of the average citizen and creating an enabling, conducive environment.
6. **Regular disbursement of Basic Healthcare Provision Fund.**