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A-list Nollywood actress, Stephanie Okereke partners with USAID/ACQUIRES Fistula Care Project to fight Fistula in Nigeria.

LAGOS, NIGERIA- A-list actress Stephanie Okereke has partnered with USAID/ACQUIRES Fistula Care Project with the goal to help the eradication of Fistula in Nigeria. The project is being implemented by Engender Health/Nigeria, represented by Mr. Iyeme Efem. This partnership was initiated with a visit to Ebonyi State on August 5th where Stephanie Okereke and the team from the United States Agency for International Development were received by Her Excellency Ms. Josephine Elechi. Mrs. Elechi is the founder and Facilitator of the Mother and Child Care Initiative, under which auspices the Ebonyi State Fistula Intervention program was started.

Vesico vaginal fistula is a condition where women continuously leak urine through the vagina, wetting their clothes and excoriating their vulva. VVF is now a major gynecological problem in many parts of the developing world. Studies show that over 800,000 women are affected in Nigeria.

Stephanie Okereke has been involved in Fistula Intervention activities. In 2006, she was invited to Sierra Leone, during the opening of Aberdeen Fistula Hospital. She was also invited by the United Nations mission in Liberia to campaign against Rape, where she paid a visited the Fistula hospital in Liberia. She is more publicly extending her outreach to include her humanitarian mission: "*Extended Hands*" an NGO whose mission is to raise awareness on the many healthcare and personal challenges women in Nigeria face and understanding that education is the foundation that saves us from any kind of cultural prejudices; it gives birth to human liberation and empowerment, self-reliance and most importantly knowing that everyone deserves a chance.

With the new partnership, Stephanie Okereke and the USAID/ACQUIRE Fistula Care team will embark on a tour of supported fistula centers, which has started with the South East Regional Fistula Center in Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State. The high incidence of Fistula in Nigeria is not only as result of negligence, ignorance and lack of education, but most importantly, a breakdown of the health systems in the country. Her Excellency Josephine Elechi held a reception in honor of this project, attended by many government functionaries;

"We as a project, funded by USAID can only do so much. But with stars like Stephanie, we will have a multiplier effect on our reach and results. We are happy that she has come fully ready and sleeves rolled up to assist and we hope to leverage as much support as we can from her for the good of the communities." -Chief Iyeme Efem

During the visit to the center, Stephanie Okereke had one on one interaction with some of the patients who'd recently undergone Free Repair Surgery, courtesy of the amiable First Lady, Mrs. Josephine Elechi.

"This trip has strengthened my resolve to do all I can to advocate for the poor rural women who bear the brunt of this condition. The first lady is truly supportive and doing an excellent job with her center. With all hands on deck we will kick this condition out of Nigeria. I see us winning this challenge in no distant time. I'll continue to lend my voice, energy and time towards fighting this dreaded enemy of womanhood"
- Stephanie Okereke

There is a need to create awareness in communities to recognize the need to attend antenatal care as well as deliver under the care of a trained healthcare provider; the need to educate the girl child who will have a better understanding of how to take care of her body and indeed take control of her reproductive health. This partnership will also address advocacy issues at federal and state levels to further support the need for governments to be more responsive to the health needs of their communities.

The creation of this partnership is making possible visits to other states in the coming weeks and also working together to conduct a National Seminar on Female Genital Mutilation, another traditional practice that facilitates the development of or directly causes fistula.

For more information on Stephanie Okereke's Humanitarian projects please contact us at info@icypr.com