

# PROJECT REPORT: HEALTH FIRST (AHUIKEBUISI)

## Background and Context

**Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — particularly hypertension (high blood pressure) and type 2 diabetes (high blood sugar) — are rapidly emerging as major public health burdens in Nigeria. While much attention still focuses on infectious diseases, the rate of NCDs is rising, especially in rural and underserved communities.**

**The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Atlas places the number of Nigerian adults aged 20–79 living with diabetes at around 3.0 million. Hypertension is even more pervasive. A national survey conducted in 2017 found a prevalence of 38.1% among Nigerian adults (age 18+), with little difference between rural (37.5%) and urban settings. However, the critical gaps lie in awareness, treatment, and control: of all hypertensives, only about 60% knew their status; of those, only roughly one-third were on treatment; and only about 12% had their blood pressure adequately controlled.**

**Other studies in rural Nigeria echo this troubling pattern. A 2023 study in Southeastern Nigeria found hypertension prevalence of approximately 27.6% but an extremely low awareness rate (about 7–8%). Risk factors such as increasing age, obesity, high salt intake, poor diet (low fruit and vegetable consumption), and physical inactivity continue to rise.**

**At the national level, non-communicable diseases already account for nearly 30% of all deaths in Nigeria, with significant economic and social consequences. Due largely to out-of-pocket spending, NCDs place a heavy financial burden on households and contribute to productivity losses and disability.**

**In rural communities such as Umuogwu and Umuona in Isu LGA, these national trends manifest even more sharply. Baseline data from the Health First intervention revealed that:**

- **Only 20 participants had prior awareness of hypertension and diabetes**
- **Only 30 participants had ever checked their blood pressure**
- **Only 20 participants had ever checked their blood sugar**
- **Over 70% of participants had no knowledge of their hypertensive status**
- **Widespread misconceptions existed, including beliefs that hypertension and diabetes are caused by “overthinking,” spiritual attacks, or enemies**

**The prevalence of self-medication was also found to be high, driven by poverty, weak health systems, and limited access to qualified healthcare providers.**

**These findings reinforce the broader reality that rural communities face multiple, overlapping constraints:**

- **Poverty and inability to afford care**
- **Weak and under-resourced primary healthcare systems**
- **Low health literacy**

- **Poor continuity of care and referral systems**
- **Limited trust in formal healthcare structures**

In Isu LGA generally, healthcare delivery is further constrained by poor infrastructure, dispersed settlements, and limited availability of essential medicines. Primary healthcare services tend to focus more on maternal and child health, with minimal attention to chronic disease detection and management.

Against this backdrop, the Health First intervention served as a critical pilot initiative, offering both immediate healthcare services and valuable insights into scalable rural health strategies.

## Project Objectives

The Health First Project aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Improve health awareness among rural populations.**
2. **Promote early detection of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.**
3. **Provide free medical screening and treatment to underserved community members.**
4. **Encourage healthy lifestyle practices, including proper diet, hydration, exercise, and hygiene.**
5. **Reduce preventable deaths caused by undiagnosed health conditions.**
6. **Strengthen community access to healthcare services.**



Project Activities

Day 1: Umuogwu

January 12, 2026

Opening Remarks



The programme commenced with a sensitization talk by Dr. Patricia Uzohuo, Programme Coordinator, Ofoegbu Justus Foundation. She explained that the “Health First” project team was in Umuogwu village to attend to the health needs of the people, noting that many of them lack access to proper healthcare services and medication. As a result, when they feel unwell, they often resort

to purchasing drugs from chemist shops without undergoing proper medical diagnosis, which can lead to incorrect treatment and further deterioration of their health.

Her observation was strongly supported by field data collected during the intervention, which showed a high prevalence of self-medication and extremely low baseline health awareness among participants.

Dr. Patricia highlighted common health conditions affecting many individuals in Umuogwu, including high blood pressure and diabetes. She noted that many people do not fully understand the seriousness of these illnesses, emphasizing the importance of awareness and education. Quoting the adage, "My people perish for lack of knowledge," she stressed that proper diagnosis enables effective management and treatment.

She further explained that high blood pressure and diabetes are not death sentences if detected early. Early diagnosis allows individuals to make necessary adjustments to their diet and lifestyle, thereby improving their chances of living longer and healthier lives.

Addressing prevalent lifestyle habits among the people, Dr. Patricia observed that many of them prioritize wealth accumulation over their health. She likened the human body to a vehicle that requires regular maintenance, stressing that neglecting one's health can have serious consequences. She also cautioned against excessive consumption of alcohol and sugary drinks, advising moderation.

On hydration, she noted that many individuals do not drink enough water, recommending a daily intake of at least five bottles to support proper body function. She also identified lack of physical exercise as a major concern, clarifying that daily stress does not equate to healthy physical activity.

Dr. Patricia warned against indiscriminate drug use, advising that while over-the-counter medication may be taken initially, individuals should seek professional medical attention if symptoms persist beyond three days. She also discouraged late-night consumption of heavy meals, recommending that such meals be taken no later than 7:30 pm to allow proper digestion.

She further emphasized the importance of fruit consumption, noting that while many prefer to sell their produce, it is essential to consume some for nutritional benefits. She reiterated that the purpose of the outreach was to equip the community with knowledge that promotes longevity and healthy living.

In her concluding remarks, Dr Patricia informed participants that they would undergo screening for blood pressure and blood sugar levels. After screening, they would consult with a doctor for medical advice and prescriptions, with medications provided free of charge. She encouraged participants to remain orderly to ensure a smooth process.



Meanwhile, nurses coordinated the screening process by calling participants in sequence. After screening, participants were directed to the doctor for consultation and then to the dispensary for medication.

## Service Delivery and Screening Outcomes (Umuogwu)

A total of 265 individuals were screened for both blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

Screening results showed:

- 88 individuals with high blood pressure
- 10 individuals with low blood pressure
- 25 individuals with high blood sugar
- 5 individuals with low blood sugar

Several participants required further medical attention, with 7 individuals referred for advanced care. These findings confirm a significant burden of undiagnosed NCDs within the community.



**Supporting her remarks, Dr. Ofoegbu Justus, Founder and CEO of the Ofoegbu Justus Foundation, reiterated the importance of early dinner, ideally before 7:00 pm, to aid digestion. He also advised that water should be sipped gradually rather than consumed hastily, and he emphasized regular fruit intake.**

**For individuals with high blood pressure, he suggested that in emergency situations where prescribed medication is unavailable, paracetamol may be taken temporarily until proper medication can be accessed. He stressed the importance of regular monitoring, particularly for individuals aged 35 and above, noting that climate change can also influence the rise of blood pressure.**

**Dr. Ofoegbu further disclosed plans to establish a permanent presence in the community by setting up an office equipped with screening facilities and staffed by healthcare personnel to provide ongoing medical support.**

### **Participant Experiences**

**Ms. Agatha Uzohuo, a participant living with a physical disability, shared that she attended the outreach upon hearing about it the previous day. She expressed gratitude to the Foundation for previous support and appealed for further medical assistance in treating her swollen arm, adding that it does not allow her to help herself.**

**On his part, Mr. Silvester Onyeaghala, a participant with visual impairment, said he was at the outreach following its announcement by the village town crier.** Asked how regularly he monitored his BP level, Mr Onyeaghala explained, “Whenever I visit the hospital for my eye treatment, I usually check my blood pressure. Sometimes the reading is normal, and other times it is slightly higher. The increase often happens when I worry about my condition, especially because my siblings have abandoned me due to my eye problem.”

He disclosed that he currently survives mostly by begging for food, adding that sometimes he attends burial ceremonies just so he can find something to eat.

On the things he would like the Foundation to do for him, Mr Onyeaghala said, “I have many needs, but the most urgent one is my eye treatment. When I was still going to the hospital, my vision was gradually improving. I could see passing cars and recognize people by the colours of their clothes, especially bright colours like blue and white. However, since I stopped receiving treatment due to lack of money, my vision has deteriorated badly. There was a particular medicine the doctors were giving me that was helping a lot, but I had to stop taking it when I ran out of money. If I could resume that treatment again, I believe my vision would gradually improve.”

**Sharing her thought, Mrs. Loreta Irennadi, an elderly participant, said she was at the programme to receive treatment for her ailment, adding that she had been told the previous day that healthcare professionals were coming to the area to screen and treat people for high blood pressure and diabetes.**

On whether she knew about the diseases before the outreach, Mrs Irennadi said, “I first learned about these diseases when some of my neighbours were diagnosed with them. Since then, I have made it a habit to visit the hospital every month to check my BP level, even when I do not feel sick.”

Asked what she would love the Foundation to help her with, Mrs Nnadi said she would like the organisation to assist her in caring for the children of her late brother-in-law, saying that she has been responsible for their care since their mother abandoned them with her.

**The outreach also recorded participation from different clusters of persons with disabilities, including:**

- **4 visually impaired individuals**
- **3 persons with physical disabilities**

- 2 with hearing impairments
- 3 with mental disabilities

Despite limited formal accessibility structures (e.g., no sign language interpreters), informal support systems enabled participation.



**Speaking on the sidelines, Hon. Eunice Emecheta, Health First Ambassador and OJF Volunteer, said that the outreach focused on the health of the people.** She further disclosed that the intervention was made possible by Dr. Ofoegbu Justus, Founder and CEO of the Ofoegbu Justus Foundation, who carries out the project every year.

“This is a rural community, and many government health interventions do not reach here”, she pointed out. “Today, we are screening people for blood pressure and sugar levels. Many individuals have high blood pressure or high sugar levels without even knowing it. Through this programme, they are now aware of their health status and have received free medication where necessary”, she explained.

Hon Emecheta expressed her deep satisfaction with the programme activities, noting that the initiative is worthy of emulation by both the government and the well-to-do members of Amandugba community.

Concluding her remarks, Hon Emecheta said, “Through this project, Dr. Ofoegbu has helped prevent avoidable deaths among many elderly people in our area who are vulnerable to high blood pressure and diabetes. Participants have also been educated on important health practices such as proper diet, regular health screening, and correct use of medication.”

Day 2: Umuona

January 13, 2026

Sensitization Address



Addressing the people of Umuona on the mission of the Ofoegbu Justus Foundation medical outreach in their village, Hon. Eunice Emecheta said that the intervention was in the area to give free medical tests and treatment to the people, noting that the Foundation was established to assist the poor in society, particularly those living in rural communities. “It is no longer news that many government health interventions do not reach people in rural areas like ours”, she said, adding that the Foundation cares deeply for the vulnerable in society, including the elderly, youths, women, and persons with disabilities.

Explaining the process to the participants, Hon. Emecheta said, “Today, you will be tested for high blood pressure and diabetes. Those of you whose results indicate these conditions will receive free medication. Doctors, including Dr. Harrison Achugasim, will be here to attend to you people. Please remain seated and wait for your turn. You will be given a numbered card, and when your number is called, kindly proceed to one of the nurses for your screening. After your test, your results will be taken to a doctor who will provide medical advice and prescribe medication. You will then proceed to the dispensary to receive the prescribed drugs.”

With this, she thanked the participants and outreach activities commenced immediately.

Health Talk and Community Engagement



Leading the health sensitization talk, Hon. Eunice Emecheta, who is widely respected in the locality as one possessing vast knowledge of primary healthcare, educated the participants in the following words:

Cleanliness is so precious that it cannot be bought in the market. When I sweat in this dress I am wearing, I wash it to keep it clean and prevent it from smelling. It is beneficial when both your body and your clothes are clean.

Poor hygiene causes diseases, and diseases can lead to death. When you wake up in the morning, brush your teeth and take your bath. After doing this, you will feel refreshed, as though a heavy burden has been lifted off you. Just as your body needs cleanliness, your environment must also be kept clean.

Water is very important. Regular intake of water is essential for healthy living. Another important factor is rest. Many of our people do not rest; we are always busy with household activities, yet the work never truly ends. As human beings, we need to rest. Even taking at least one hour of rest daily helps the body recover from stress and promotes longer life. The truth is that the list of things to do in life never ends.

Another issue is that many of you people do not go to the hospital when they feel unwell. It is only in the hospital that you can properly determine what is wrong with you. If you are a patient with high blood pressure, your routine medication should always be close to you. Carry it in your handbag whenever you go out. If you notice symptoms of a BP attack, simply ask for water and take your medication. Doing this could save your life.

Those of you living with high blood pressure should avoid noisy environments because excessive noise can trigger attacks. They should also avoid situations involving anger, scolding, or excessive worry. Unfortunately, BP attacks can occur at any time - when a person does not have their medication, when they are asleep, or even when no one is around to assist them. Therefore, you must be careful and attentive to your health.

Health education sessions recorded very high engagement levels, with participants actively asking questions and seeking clarification—largely due to the use of local language.

## Service Delivery and Screening Outcomes (Umuona)

A total of 240 individuals were screened.

Results included:

- 107 individuals with high blood pressure
- 8 individuals with low blood pressure
- 32 individuals with high blood sugar

- 18 individuals with low blood sugar

An additional 4 individuals were referred for further care.

## Participant's Experience

Speaking about the programme, Mr. Martin Nkennaya from Achara in Umuaka, said that he was at the outreach because he was feeling unwell, adding that the first time he heard about high blood pressure and diabetes was when he went to the hospital for treatment. He described the intervention as timely and very beneficial to him. On his health status, Mr. Nkennaya disclosed that the nurses had tested him for the two diseases and confirmed that he was free from both. He concluded by saying that the doctor had also advised him on what he should do to maintain his present health status.



Meanwhile, nurses were seen calling out participants' names and numbers. Participants took turns to be screened by the nurses. After screening, participants and their results were directed to the doctor's stand for medical advice and prescriptions. Afterwards, they proceeded to the dispensary to receive their medications.

## Community Leader's Perspective on the Intervention

In a chat with Dr Patricia, Mr. Nnamdi Obialo, Former Chairman of Umuona, expressed his profound gratitude to Dr Ofoegbu for extending the health intervention to members of his village, particularly

the elderly ones among them. He observed that someone may be sick without even knowing what is wrong with them, and before long the person may die.

Commending Dr Ofoegbu for the kind gesture, Mr Obialo said, "Our son devoted his time and resources to invite medical professionals to come and take care of our health free of charge. He also provided free medicines for high blood pressure and diabetes. This is truly a thing of joy, and all of us in this village are grateful to Almighty God for him. We pray that God will reward him for this."

He described the health intervention as the first of its kind in Umuona village, noting that the programme was particularly unique because it was completely free, well organized, and stress-free. The former community leader recalled that even before the outreach, Dr. Ofoegbu had been supporting villagers with food items and clothing, adding that he truly cares about the happiness and well-being of his people. Mr Obialo prayed that God will continue to bless Dr Ofoegbu and his entire team.

## Perspectives of the Organizers



Speaking to press men at the event, Dr Patricia Uzohuo, Programme Coordinator, Ofoegbu Justus Foundation, stated that their objective in rolling out the project was to improve the health of the people. Below is her full speech:

When we began discussing what we could do for the community, many ideas came up, but health stood out as the most urgent need requiring intervention. We agreed that when people enjoy good health, other aspects of their lives will improve as well.

We are very impressed by the turnout for this programme. In fact, the number of participants far exceeded our expectations, even though some people could not attend due to other engagements.

We are deeply satisfied because people are now becoming more aware that health must come first in everything they do. Even as we speak, more people are still arriving, and we are very happy about this.

Due to the large number of participants, we experienced shortages of some medicines. However, we are doing everything possible to restock because it is our sincere desire to see our people healthy and strong. It pains us to see members of our community suffering from preventable diseases.

It is often said that “my people perish for lack of knowledge.” We are here to inform our people that high blood pressure and diabetes have claimed many lives. With God’s help, we are committed to doing even more for our communities in the future.



**On his part, Dr Ofoegbu Justus, Founder and CEO, Ofoegbu Justus Foundation, had this to say in response to questions from pressmen at the event:**

**There are many diseases affecting our communities, yet many life-saving interventions never reach us. I founded the Ofoegbu Justus Foundation to support our people and assist the vulnerable. The**

**Foundation exists to give our people a sense of belonging and to help connect our communities with government support.**

**Many of our brothers and sisters are living with high blood pressure and diabetes without even knowing it. That is why we are here—to sensitize them about these diseases. Many people do not visit government hospitals because of poverty, so they resort to self-medication, which often leads to death.**

**Sadly, I lost one of my stepbrothers to high blood pressure in September last year. That experience strengthened my determination to embark on this journey to save lives across our communities and beyond.**

**No one has financially supported this programme; I am the sole financier of everything you see happening here today. I am doing this out of my love for humanity. I am not a politician and do not receive funds from the government.**

**I have called on wealthy members of our communities to support this initiative, but there has not been any significant response so far. I officially launched this Foundation on January 8, 2025. Afterwards, I realized how widespread illnesses are among our people, which led to the creation of this project.**

**This free medical outreach is our first major project since the Foundation was established. It provides free screening for high blood pressure and diabetes. Those diagnosed with these conditions receive free medication, all purchased with my personal funds. If there are medications we do not have, our doctors advise patients to purchase them.**

**The turnout has been remarkable. Yesterday, the crowd was so large that we ran out of medicines. That is why we started late today - we had to travel to Owerri early this morning to restock.**

**We are grateful to God that everything went well. My pledge to the pilot villages of Umuogwu and Umuona is that, as long as I have the resources, I will continue to support this intervention until the health of our people improves significantly.**

**I also call on well-meaning and financially capable members of our communities to join us in this effort. I cannot do it alone. But with collective support, we can make meaningful progress in improving the health of our people.**

## Human Resources and Operations



- 20 Health First Ambassadors (volunteers) deployed



- 1 medical doctor



- 6 trained nurses

## Operational Challenges

Due to high turnout (505 participants total), there were stock-outs of medications. Immediate restocking efforts were undertaken, though some participants were advised to purchase drugs externally.

## Safety and Incident Management

- 2 medical emergencies recorded
- Prompt response included immediate treatment and hospital referrals

## Participant Demographics for both villages

**Total participants: 505**

- Male: 215
- Female: 290

## Community breakdown:

- Umuogwu: 265 participants
- Umuona: 240 participants

## Key Lessons Learned

- Ignorance remains a major driver of preventable disease in the areas
- Rural populations have very low baseline awareness of NCDs
- Demand for healthcare services is extremely high
- Community-based interventions are highly effective
- Health education is most impactful when delivered in local language

## Next Steps

- Conduct follow-up visits for high-risk individuals
- Track referred cases and monitor outcomes
- Strengthen drug supply systems through partnership with government hospitals, including FMC
- Improve disability inclusion measures
- Expand intervention to additional rural communities

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17XN2ORdDmf05hpB4HI9wXWSzk-\\_9jPYx](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17XN2ORdDmf05hpB4HI9wXWSzk-_9jPYx)