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PRESS RELEASE

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USAID Launches New Activity to Prevent and Treat Complications from Obstetric Fistula in Nigeria

Abuja – On June 28, 2021, U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Mary Beth Leonard virtually joined Minister Women Affairs and Social Development Dame Pauline Tallen to launch a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-supported health activity that will prevent and repair complications from obstetric fistula, a debilitating condition arising during pregnancy and childbirth endured by countless Nigerian women.

The USAID/Nigeria Safe Surgery in Family Planning and Obstetrics activity, a part of the global USAID MOMENTUM project, will reduce maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity by supporting institutions and local organizations to introduce, scale-up, and sustain evidence-based prevention and surgical management of obstetric fistula and female genital mutilation, mitigating the adverse effects and complications of these conditions.

“This new U.S. assistance will help Nigeria’s health care providers identify, manage, and prevent obstetric fistula, female genital mutilation, and other forms of gender-based violence in a complementary manner,” Ambassador Leonard said at the launch of the activity. “Fistula is both preventable and treatable, and by working in partnership with government agencies, we can do both.”

Obstetric fistula occurs when complications during delivery result in a hole between the mother’s birth canal and either the bladder or rectum -- usually exacerbated by a lack of quality medical treatment. Nigeria accounts for 40 percent of fistula cases worldwide. The country reports 13,000 new cases of fistula

per year, and as many as 400,000 women languish on waiting lists for corrective surgery.

The \$10 million activity builds on the gains of the previous USAID funded fistula interventions in Nigeria, which conducted over 18,400 fistula surgical repairs and about 800 non-surgical repairs in 14 fistula centers in 13 states. Under the activity, partners trained more than 50 surgeons in fistula repair and 2,700 other healthcare workers in fistula prevention and treatment.

Over the next five years, USAID Implementing Partner: EngenderHealth will lead a coalition of local and university-based international partners and professional organizations to implement the activity in Bauchi, Ebonyi, Kebbi, and Sokoto States, as well as the Federal Capital Territory.

“This is a call to action. All hands must be on deck,” Minister Tallen said. “So many women are in so much pain. The need is tremendous. This robust program will reach more women who are suffering and empower survivors with hope and the joy of living again.”

Other dignitaries included the First Lady of Kebbi State, commissioners of Health from Bauchi, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Ebonyi states, as well as Nigerian actor and model Stephanie Linus – who is also a fistula prevention advocate.

For more information: Abujadoc@usaid.gov

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PHOTO CAPTION: Nigerian Minister of Women and Social Affairs Dame Pauline Tallen (third right) announces the launch of the USAID Safe Surgery in Family Planning and Obstetrics activity to help more women in Nigeria overcome the burden of obstetric fistula. Joining Minister Tallen were Dr. Zainab Shinkafi Bagudu, First Lady of Kebbi State (second left), USAID Health Office Director

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Paul McDermott (right) and EngenderHealth West Africa Regional Representative Nene Cisse (left).

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