NIGERIA MARKS WORLD HEALTH DAY 2002

Nigeria joined the rest of the world to commemorate this year’s World Health Day, with events carried out at the national level from 30th March to 7th April 2002. The theme this year was “Physical Activity” with the slogan Move For Health.

The climax of this year’s activities, in keeping with the slogan for the year was a 45-minute walk carried out on 6th April 2002 at Abuja. Led by the country’s Minister of Health, Professor Alphonsus Nwosu and the World Health Organization Representative in Nigeria, Dr. Abdou Moudi, the walk covered a five-kilometre distance from the New Federal Secretariat Complex, Garki to the Old Parade Ground in Area 10.

The walk was immediately followed by a novelty football match between boys (10 – 12 years) and girls (15 – 17 years). The match which drew a sizeable crowd and applause all through, ended in a 2 – 2 draw.

In his speech before the commencement of the match, Professor Nwosu commended WHO for selecting physical activity as this year’s theme. Enumerating the benefits of physical exercise, Professor Nwosu advised all those present never to give it up, as according to him, there is nothing like exercise. “It makes your body work up to an activity level that helps you to fight off diseases. It helps your body to stop the build up and the accumulation of those fats that clog up your arteries”, the Health Minister said.

He enjoined the Federal Ministry of Sports and Social Development to make participation in physical exercises by civil servants a regular feature, suggesting that it should happen at least once a week. He promised that he would participate whenever he is available.

Earlier in the week, on 4th April, the Minister of State for Health, Dr. (Mrs.) Amina Ndololo addressed a press conference to usher in events marking the World Health Day. In her speech, the Minister noted that the theme for this year was most appropriate in these times of increasing indolence among our people and the consequent increase in incidences of silent killers.

Dr. Ndololo told the audience that “Nigerians in their early 20s are hypertensive and sudden, unexpected deaths from heart attack and stroke are becoming recurrent phenomena”. Some of these she attributed to sedentary lifestyle coupled with other risk factors like stressful living, consumption of fatty foods and tobacco use.

The Minister added that the Ministry’s Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) Control Programme is currently implementing a medium term plan of action for the prevention and control of NCDs in the country. One of the major components of the plan, according to her, is the promotion of healthy lifestyles, including raising public awareness about the importance of physical activity for health.

She then charged journalists to use their privileged position to ensure that the message on adoption of healthy lifestyles reaches the entire Nigerian population so that the tide of non-communicable silent killers threatening the health and survival of our people is stemmed.

On the 4th of April 2002, a symposium on the theme for World Health Day was held. Three papers were presented. These were “Daily Exercise and Prevention of Degenerative Diseases: A Key to Increasing the Longevity of Nigerians” by Dr. Ken Anugweje, Director, School of Medical Sciences, University of Port Harcourt; “The Role of Women in the Promotion of Physical Activity for Health” by Hajia Aisha Ismail,
Minister of Women Affairs and Youth Development; and “The Silent Killers and Lack of Physical Activity” by Professor G. C. Onyemelukwe, Department of Medicine, ABU Teaching Hospital, Zaria and Chairman, National Expert Committee on Non-Communicable Diseases.

The Chairman at the occasion, Senator (Dr.) Tafida, one time Minister of Health thanked WHO for selecting the theme for this year. He noted that this year’s celebration should be lifelong because of the theme, as according to him, physical exercise is beneficial to the individual, the community and the nation. He remarked that the programme on exercises should be sustained and enduring and advised the media to carry out publicity on physical exercises free of charge.

The WHO’s Director-General’s statement on World Health Day was presented during the symposium on her behalf and that of the WHO Representative in Nigeria. Copies of the statement and that of the WHO Regional Director for Africa had earlier been circulated to the media.

As part of activities to create/increase awareness among the populace, members of the planning committee participated in a number of television discussion programmes. These were “Morning Ride” programme on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) 2, Channel 5 Lagos on 30th March; a special programme on NTA Network Service on 4th April and “Heartbeat” programme on NTA Abuja on 6th April. An audio jingle was produced and broadcast on Aso Radio from 31st March – 7th April.

A number of health promotion and education materials – posters, leaflets, stickers and T-shirts - were also produced and distributed.

Religious services were also held. Special Jumat prayers were said at the Central Mosque, Abuja on 5th April while an interdenominational church service was held at the Holy Trinity Church, Maitama, Abuja on 7th April.

This year’s events were organized by a planning committee constituted by the Federal Ministry of Health. Inter-sectoral collaboration was brought to play as the Federal Ministry of Sports and social Development played a vital role in the organization. In fact, the planning committee was headed by Chief Patrick Ekeji, Director of Sports Development in the Federal Ministry of Sports while the Coordinator was Dr. (Mrs.) Annette Akinsete of the NCDs Control Programme, Federal Ministry of Health. WHO was a member of the committee.