

SECRET

JUNE, 2018

NCH/60/0030

MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH ON THE NATIONAL POLICY ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY, WITH EMPHASIS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS.

1.0. Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to present the draft National Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Persons with Disability with emphasis on Women and Girls with Disabilities and to seek the Council's approval for its adoption, dissemination and implementation.

2.0. Introduction/Background

The World Report on Disability [2017] states that approximately 25 million Nigerians live with one form of disability or the other with an estimated 13 million of this population being women and girls. Persons with disabilities have the same Sexual and Reproductive Health [SRH] needs as other people. They need the minimum package of reproductive health services available to everyone but their special circumstances create barriers to access those services. This includes communication barriers, ignorance of service providers, societal attitude, and inadequate capacity of service providers to manage clients with disabilities.

Women and girls with disability are particularly affected, because they are generally poor, live in remote areas without any economic power and they experience multiple forms of discrimination, first as women then as Women with Disabilities [WWDs]. They have often been denied the right to establish relationships and to decide whether, when and with whom to have a family. Many have been subjected to forced abortion and forced marriages; they are more likely to experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse and other forms of Gender Based Violence; they are more likely to become infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections [STIs].

3.0. Rationale

Apart from being a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, the basic rights of all Nigerians is enshrined in Chapter 4 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution. The most important of these Rights is the "Right to life", and unfortunately many persons with disabilities have been denied this right as health services is mainly available to those without disabilities. Persons with disability are yet to be counted, catered for, or allowed opportunities for meaningful inclusion. A Situation Analysis [SA] on access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services by Women and Girls with Disability in Nigeria recently carried out by Disability Rights Advocacy Centre [DRAC] has highlighted the plight of WWDs in accessing health services in Nigeria with a focus on their sexual and reproductive health. The Situation Analysis revealed that women with disabilities experience barriers in accessing health care at multiple points of the health care process such as lack of accessible facilities and equipment, lack of accessible communication facilities, lack of skilled medical providers, economic barriers and negative attitude of healthcare workers. Respondents also admitted that there is no specific policy or framework solely aimed at enabling access to health for women and girls, with disabilities.

Consequently the Situation Analysis recommends the following amongst others:

- a. Appropriate measures to be taken to ensure access to health for **WWDs** through affordable health care, hospitals and diagnostic equipments that are physically accessible.
- b. Building capacity of healthcare professionals who are trained to serve people with disabilities and who have appropriate knowledge to provide them with appropriate knowledge to serve people with disabilities.
- c. Government to recognize WWDs in the implementation of the National Health Act [**NH Act**] which is a testament to the need for a framework for the regulation, development and management of health systems in Nigeria. It is therefore pertinent to optimize the platform presented by the implementation of the **NH Act** to advocate for a Specific Policy on access to sexual and reproductive health for persons living with disability.

4.0. Justification:

This Document is intended to provide a policy direction to Government, Civil Society Organizations, Development Partners and the organized Private Sector on how to deal with reproductive health concerns of women and girls with disabilities. It ensures that their issues are fully integrated into the National health and Social Welfare programmes.

5.0. Prayer:

Council is hereby invited to consider and approve the Draft National Policy on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of Persons with Disability with Emphasis on Women and Girls for adoption, dissemination and implementation in all States of the federation and the FCT.

Honourable Minister of Health

June, 2018