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MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH ON INTEGRATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE INTO THE TRAINING CURRICULUM OF ALL MEDICAL AND HEALTH INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to notify on the progress made by the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to include health related issues in climate change negotiations and in order to build on the progress, seek Council's approval for the integration of climate change issues into training curricula of all Medical and Health institutions in Nigeria.

Background

2. There is no doubt today that climate change caused by the emission and accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere is already affecting virtually all sectors in Nigeria, posing grave and dangerous unprecedented threats to our health. Its impact will continue unless we urgently engage in meaningful interventions.

3. In 1992, Countries agreed on an international treaty - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to cooperatively consider what they could do to limit global temperature rise and cope with the inevitable impact of climate change. The UNFCCC is the highest decision making body for climate agreements working in close association with the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The UNFCCC works to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

4. The IPCC is the only leading international body established to provide the world with clear scientific views on the current state of knowledge in climate change. The IPCC has reported that climate change impact is far more rapid and dangerous than earlier thought. A chapter on health was included in its 5th IPCC assessment report (chapter 8, November 2014) indicating that health aspects of climate change should be taken more seriously.

5. In the past, climate change and health were often considered independently but now, in a bid to tackle climate change more holistically, the need for public health actions to anticipate, manage and ameliorate the health burdens it imposes are receiving more attention during negotiations.

6. There are two links between climate change and health. The first is that in the process of addressing climate change and emission reduction, we prevent worsening health conditions such as those caused by air pollution. The second is that by improving on adaptation and ensuring food security and water safety, we are actually improving health conditions. Therefore addressing climate change has co-benefits for health.

7. At the Conference of Parties (COP 21) meeting in Paris, participants took some decisions called 'the Paris Agreement 2015'. It was the first time, that Parties under the UNFCCC made unified, bold commitment to catalyze transition to a decarbonized economy while protecting human well-being. The Paris Agreement marked the beginning of a new era in the global response to climate change and significantly facilitated progress with individual Country's public health response to climate change because it states that 'the right to health will be central to the actions taken'.

8. Furthermore with the Paris Agreement, Parties were asked to develop their climate priorities. These priorities were called 'Intended Nationally Determined Contributions' (INDCs now known as 'Nationally Determined Contributions'- NDCs) and came into force in Nov 4, 2016. With this, Countries committed to keep global warming below 2°C while pursuing a target of 1.5°C and strengthen adaptation which includes implementing plans that should protect human health from the worst impacts of climate change such as heat waves.

9. During the annual Global Climate and Health Summit at COP 23 in Bonn, Germany, 2017 the health community agreed that it was about time climate change issues were integrated into all medical and health training curricula to prepare the health workforce to respond to climate change.

Justification

10. The aim of the health sector in any Country is to continually provide and improve wellbeing, deliver high quality care now and for future generations and reduce to the barest minimum the wasting of human lives.

11. There is no climate change impact that does not affect health. Therefore, these impacts have to be linked to health in a health-in-all policy approach.

12. Partly due to the population, heavy burden of diseases, gas flaring and socio-economic factors, Nigeria as a developing country is one of the most vulnerable to impacts of Climate Change.

13. In Nigeria, Climate change will worsen the main health problems of vulnerable populations by increasing malnutrition, reducing access to safe water and adequate hygiene and sanitation, deteriorate air quality and increase exposure to vector-borne diseases, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, loss of livelihoods and displacement of communities which impose costs, increase poverty and vulnerability.

14. Some climate related health indicators correlate with sustainable development goals. Thus Climate Change has cross-cutting issues of significance relevant to attainment of the highest possible level of health.

15. Nigeria is a signatory to the UNFCCC, has ratified the Paris Agreement and is therefore expected to be supportive of and aligned to global and regional Treaties, Conventions, Protocols, Agreements and efforts related to climate change.

16. The relevance of the health sector in contributing to response to climate change is becoming a recurring decimal in climate change negotiations.

17. Medical and health professionals in training have to influence how vulnerable communities will survive in the coming decades. They therefore need to be well informed because they will eventually work with policymakers on issues such as sustainable energy, urban planning, transport and migration and need to infuse public health perspectives to solutions offered to shape a sustainable future. Therefore, training the next and future generations of medical and health professionals to mainstream climate change into all health decisions, planning, budgeting etc is pertinent.

18. Some of the advantages of the proposed integration are that it will enable the health sector to contribute immensely to the national response to climate change and sustainable development since the training will include how to tackle emerging public health issues caused by climate change.

19. The Paris Agreement (2015) and deliberations by the health sector at COP 23 (2017), necessitate moving forward. The first step in this movement is through education and training.

20. The process of addressing the risks caused by climate change avail opportunities which should be used to establish healthy communities resilient to climate change.

21. Integration of climate change into medical and health training curricula will help sustain Universal Health Coverage.

Prayers:

Council is hereby invited to note:

- i. The progress made by UNFCCC and IPCC to include 'health' in climate change negotiations; and
- ii. How that it is time to build on the progress made in Paris (2015) and COP 23 (2017).

Council is further invited to approve:

- The integration of climate change issues into all training curricula of medical and health institutions in Nigeria and teach same to all upcoming medical and health professionals.

Honourable Minister of Health

JUNE , 2018.