

CONCLUSION

When describing Nigeria, we often resort to numbers. The most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria is home to more than 130 million people. These individuals belong to more than 350 ethnic and linguistic groups, and their country is ranked among the 25 poorest in the world. And when we try to portray the country's HIV epidemic, the numbers quickly become daunting: As many as six million people already infected with the virus. HIV prevalence rates in some states as high as 12 percent. At least two million children orphaned by AIDS.

These numbers, of course, are expected to worsen as the virus continues to spread. Some experts predict that, within the decade, as many as nine million more Nigerians will become infected. But this last, tragically monolithic number is not inevitable. Despite the challenges the sheer size of its diverse population poses, Nigeria carries several distinct advantages. Its epidemic was relatively slow to develop, allowing the country time to benefit from the accumulated wisdom of other nations. Civil society organizations have shown great energy and creativity in launching interventions. Since its return to democracy in 1999, the federal government has been responsive, with the president taking a strong, personal stance. And more recently international agencies have stepped in to help.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nigeria remains a formidable challenge to all sectors of society, yet it is a challenge the Nigerian people can meet. We are confident that their concerted and sustained efforts will result in a new set of figures: the number of new infections prevented, the number of HIV-infected people receiving lifesaving treatment, the number of children able to grow up with their parents.

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