

FOREWORD

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has been the most serious natural disaster to hit the world in recent centuries. In the worst affected regions, notably sub-Saharan Africa, this steadily progressing catastrophe threatens to become a calamity of cataclysmic proportions.

The massive growth of literature on this subject reflects the extensive work that practitioners and scientists around the world are doing to confront the daunting challenge of HIV/AIDS. Writing mainly for specialist audiences, biomedical scientists have reported on the biology of the virus, the range of host responses to the infection, the clinical features of the disease, and innovations in treatment. For their part, social scientists have analyzed the cultural and behavioral aspects of the epidemic, as well as its impact on families, communities, and nations. This widening base of knowledge about the virus and its effects, accumulated over the past few decades, provides health practitioners and other stakeholders with critical information. This literature also tracks scientific discoveries and observations that we hope will generate improved technologies, including vaccines and new drugs.

Yet most of these publications offer research findings without providing a clear picture of their application to individual countries. Public health practitioners, policy makers, nongovernmental organization leaders, and other stakeholders face the difficult task of accessing this massive literature, identifying the best information to guide policies and strategies, and adapting the findings to the local situation. *AIDS in Nigeria: A Nation on the Threshold* provides a scholarly synthesis of the biological, social, behavioral, and economic features of HIV/AIDS as they apply to Nigeria. This country-based analysis provides a useful tool for all stakeholders involved in the control of Nigeria's epidemic.

In some respects, Nigeria has been granted several advantages over many other African nations. The epidemic reached the country at a relatively late stage, permitting health authorities to apply the valuable lessons other countries had already learned. Furthermore, the prevalence rates and patterns of progress of the epidemic

show significant geographic variations within the country. The most recent sentinel survey, in 2003, showed that the HIV prevalence rate ranged from 1.2 percent in Osun State to 12.0 percent in Cross River State. This variation not only reflects the social and cultural diversity of a nation populated by hundreds of language groups, but it also may provide clues about the local determinants of the epidemic—information that can be translated into highly focused, effective interventions.

The dynamics of the epidemic in Nigeria—as in all countries—reflect the complex interaction of biological and social factors, as well as the effects of public health and medical interventions. The chapters in this book capture that complexity as they cover a range of relevant topics, from the evolution of the epidemic in Nigeria, to the biomedical and social dimensions of HIV/AIDS, to the national response to the crisis.

This volume had its genesis in the work of the AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria, when people working on the frontlines—whether in laboratories or clinics or outreach sessions for sex workers—felt the need for a single, authoritative source on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. For all its value, *AIDS in Nigeria* should be regarded as an interim report to be supplemented by later accounts as the epidemic continues to evolve. In the meantime, the information contained in this book will guide all stakeholders in making a more robust and effective response to the epidemic in Nigeria.

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