

“Each time the mobilizer goes out to share information, they are always willing to come:” A follow-up conversation with representatives from the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN) on distribution models, generating demand, and incentives.

Rollo Romig

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Rollo Romig: Can you start by introducing yourself and the work you do?

Grace Kange: I'm the Benue state program coordinator with CHAN. I supervise what they do, and I also guide them when they are not doing it correctly. I make sure everything on the field goes well, and I ensure transparency. I ensure that whoever is collecting data doesn't falsify figures, and writes the exact figure. We believe in true data.



I also tell them, you mustn't sell the glasses. These glasses are free, and if you're found selling, you'll stop the job. I even go to the field when they're not aware to make sure they're doing their job right. If they're aware I'm coming, they might just pretend to be doing the right thing.

Rollo Romig: Has that ever been a problem before in any place? Has anyone tried to sell glasses?

Grace Kange: No, they've not. I've checked, and they are giving them out for free.

Rollo Romig: What were your observations these past two days? How did you feel about the distributions?



Grace Kange: I noticed that people are excited about it, and each time the mobilizer goes out to share information, they are always willing to come. Their closing time is 3:00, and when they want to close, people will be begging them to extend the time because they really want the glasses. They are excited, and they believe that because these glasses are coming from CHAN, they're genuine.

Rollo Romig: If it reaches three o'clock and they haven't gotten to everybody, do they sometimes extend the time?

Grace Kange: Yes, they do, because people will sit there begging them.

Anointed David: For the past two days, I noticed dedication in our volunteers, despite the fact that they are not fully happy with the transport reimbursements. We have seen that the distances they travel are quite far. However, they are doing it as a service to their community, so they are dedicated. The quality of work has been great. You hear them say that the training they received and the follow-up visit have been good.

There's quality in the work we do. Grace mentioned we take the falsification of data seriously. There are a few teams, and they may want to be funny sometimes, but we don't allow that. Quality is paramount.



Community acceptance is another thing that we have seen here. When we were starting, we had some stakeholder engagement, but now the community has accepted us as CHAN, an organization that has been in existence for a while. There is great community acceptance. Those are the three major things I've noticed: dedication, quality of work, and community acceptance.

Rollo Romig: Have you had a problem in the past with workers not always keeping accurate records?



Anointed David: Yes. It's common in the first few days because it's common that they don't know the exact way to fill the form, even with the trainings. That's why we keep doing on-the-job training. As I went today, they were filling it well, and this particular team we checked on today is also using the electronic register. It has seriously reduced those errors in entry. We do data validations, too.

Rollo Romig: What's the data validation process?

Anointed David: We collect data from them every day because we always say that data collected in small chunks is easier to validate. They submit summary report at the end of the day, then at the end of the week, we harmonize and have a weekly report. We triangulate what we have to make sure it is the same as what is in the summary report for the day, along with what is in the register.

In a short while, we'll be having a national data validation exercise, where we also come and check on what we have in our report and what is in the register. Eventually, the states will start to do it more often, and we'll come to do it once in a while.

Rollo Romig: Nathan, is there anything you would add?

Nathan Meshik: There's great acceptance from the community, and there's so much overwhelming trust and love. We can hear that in the testimonies of the people. I'm always being surprised.

There is such a high level of mobilization and information going around figuring out if you have this challenge, as these glasses are for people who have challenges with presbyopia, but then you end up seeing people who have challenges beyond near vision showing up. What I'm wondering is, how do we manage all these people? You often find out that after referring them to further care, some of them are not picking up the referrals or going for the referrals. They would rather come back to you and depend on you for another solution. How do we manage not to lose these people?

That's been challenging, but generally, there has been a great level of acceptance from the team, from the village chiefs, and from the community. I also observed that certain powers have very great optics in the field.

Rollo Romig: One of the big challenges that has come up in my conversations with healthcare workers is the cost of transportation. What do you all think about that? Who sets the amount of pay? If you could set it at any amount, what do you think would be the right amount?



Nathan Meshik: We don't just come up with a number and propose it. There are values for what we do, and we put some level of calculations into these things before we make a final decision. We have a stipend for transportation, and we also have a stipend for food. We are not paying them. We are just appreciating them with the little that we are able to provide.

Rollo Romig: It's a stipend?



Nathan Meshik: Yes. Initially, we did not mention we were going to pay them, but the need came up because of the distances being traveled. You would hear that someone is paying ₦20,000 (\$12.46 USD), or someone is paying ₦5,000 (\$3.12 USD), just to travel from your location to where the glasses are.

There's a particular rate that we pay for each kilometer that they cover, and we expect them to do that daily. In the end, we pay them for about 28 days. When you lump that whole sum, it's around ₦25,000 (\$15.58 USD). There is room and there is need for improvement because while this sum is quite good in some locations, in other locations, it is quite terrible.



For example, if you are paying ₦5,000 to move the glasses to your location, and then you have to go to outreaches, how much will that cover? Barely three or four. That would defeat the whole aim of having to get the glasses along the line. You don't want to use your own money to provide these services.

I'm hoping to make some adjustments once we meet up with the team and to seek more funding to be able to carry out and improve these services. *[NOTE: In response to this feedback, CHAN raised the stipend amount from ₦25,000 to ₦72,000.]*

Rollo Romig: The stipend is supposed to be just for transport and food?

Nathan Meshik: Yes.

Rollo Romig: They're not really getting paid?

Nathan Meshik: No, they are not getting paid. When we first came, we had a number of meetings with the community leaders and the religious leaders, and we told them, yes, this is what we want to do, and then we asked them for their buy-in.

We let them know that we are not coming to pay anybody. We said, "There is a need for this, and if you accept it, it's for the benefit of your community. If you don't want to support the initiatives in your own little way, there are other locations that would gracefully accept this."

We tried to motivate them to accept it, which most of them did. A lot of people are happy we ask if they want to get glasses. That's what we were able to do somehow.

Rollo Romig: Anointed and Grace, do either of you have thoughts on the stipend and how it's working?

Anointed David: We need to do better. The stipend needs to be commensurate with the distances people travel. The funding for this project is quite small, so you can't do much. This phase ends in June. As we plan to get to the next phase, we will look into this more because we need to get our teams motivated. It would not be advisable at all for them to use their money to do outreach. We should at least take care of their transportation completely.

Rollo Romig: Do you have enough funding to increase the rate, or is that a challenge?

Anointed David: This cycle is ending in two months, in June. The funds we have available right now are limited.

Rollo Romig: Grace, do you have thoughts about the money?

Grace Kange: Yes. The healthcare workers call me a lot. They are like my friends. They always call me to ask, Can this money be increased? I tell them I'll talk to the office and

get back to them. I tell them it's not a decision I can make on my own. The office needs to hear about it and then see what they can do about it.

Rollo Romig: And the funding needs to be there, right?

Grace Kange: Exactly.

Rollo Romig: Thank you for your time and insights.

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Rollo Romig (he/him) is the author of I Am on the Hit List: A Journalist's Murder and the Rise of Autocracy in India.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*