**Noma surgical intervention May 2023.
Testimonies of patients.**

**Aisha A.**Aisha is six years old and wants to be a teacher. When she was four years old, she got noma. Her cheek started swelling and some of her teeth fell out. She was taken to a hospital near her home in Jigawa state, northern Nigeria, but the treatment did not work. Quickly the flesh and bones in her face were destroyed and a hole appeared. Her twin brother was protective and supportive, but the children laughed at her, so she stopped going out. Luckily, one day a local person visited the family and took Aisha and her mother, Hauwa, on the 12-hour drive to Sokoto Noma Hospital. Finally, Aisha had reconstructive surgery to repair the hole in her face. She also found the hospital to be a place where she felt safe and could find companionship. “She has made friends here – wherever she goes, everybody loves her and greets her,” says Hauwa. “She really wanted to get the surgery. Before we came, she couldn't eat out of excitement.” Now Aisha is counting the days until she can go to school.

**Aisha L.**Aisha, age 45, is a farmer in Yobe state, northeast Nigeria. She can't remember her exact age when she got noma, but she was a child when a wound appeared on her lips. Within a short time, part of her lips fell off. She didn’t feel stigmatised by her community, but she did feel relieved when the health promotion team from Sokoto Noma Hospital advised her to go for treatment. “When I first came here, I was happy, as I met with others with whom I relate as though we've known one another before,” says Aisha. “I was not scared when they said I would undergo surgery. I was happy after my two surgeries when my lips were reconstructed.” As a result of the surgery, Aisha feels confident about meeting people and socialising. She is proud of being a role model for other people with noma. “Anyone with noma who sees me would be willing to come to the hospital and get treated,” she says.

**Amadu**Amadu, age 45, was selling secondhand clothes in Lagos, Nigeria, when a woman approached him and asked about his face. He told her that he was very small when his face was affected by this disease, so he didn’t remember when and how it happened. The woman took a photograph of Amadu’s face and put it online, asking medics for support. A staff member at Sokoto Noma Hospital replied to her message and asked Amadu to come to Sokoto, as they could help him. Amadu made several visits to the hospital before having reconstructive surgery in May 2023. Amadu’s parents, wife, and son all live in Bauchi state, in northeast Nigeria, while he earns money in Lagos to support them. After recovering from his surgery, he plans to make some big changes. “It was noma that stopped me from schooling,” he says. “After this surgery, I wish to get some capital and start a business at home in Bauchi, where my son is now at school. I want to open a provisions store.”

**Rabiu**
“This is the first time I have come to this hospital,” says Rabiu, aged 20. “At the beginning I refused, but my elder sister convinced me and brought me here.” Rabiu lives in Sokoto state, not far from Sokoto Noma Hospital. Rabiu got noma when he was just one year old. “He started getting herbal medication at home,” says his brother Bello. “His face had a boil and hot metal was used to break the boil and the sore was removed and it healed. Two other boils appeared, and the same thing was done.” Rabiu didn’t feel stigmatised and his life was peaceful, but he had difficulties eating, due to trismus, a possible consequence of noma that blocks the jaws “When I eat, I have to push the food inside my mouth with my hand because my mouth can't open wide,” he says. Waiting for surgery, Rabiu says: “I don't regret coming here. I wish to have everything corrected so I can eat food freely. And I also want to marry my girlfriend and start a new life.” Unfortunately, Rabiu fainted due to the heat days before the planned surgery, so it has been delayed for another seven months, until the next surgical team arrives in Sokoto.

**Abdulwahab**Sixteen-year-old Abdulwahab says he wants to stay at Sokoto Noma Hospital forever. He knows he can’t, but he really enjoys the peaceful atmosphere. He says this is the first time in his life that nobody is mocking him, attacking him or chasing him away because of the disfigurements left by noma on his face. “People usually ask me to leave their place because saliva comes out of my mouth,” says Abdulwahab. Maryam, his half-sister, who has cared for Addulwahab since his parents died, adds: “People don't want to eat from the same plate. They ask him to go away and stay alone. Some even beat him. They chase him away.” This started happening when Addulwahab got noma at the age of eight. People in their village thought he had been possessed by spirits and treated the wound with herbs. When that failed, he was taken to a hospital in Kano state and finally referred to Sokoto Noma Hospital. He had his first surgery three years ago, but the scar did not heal well and now he needs a second round of surgery. “If my face is corrected, I will go back to school,” says Abdulwahab. “I want to be educated. I wish to have the knowledge to help people.”

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