



National Consultative Meeting on Violence against Women and Girls

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ACTIVITY REPORT



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Report on the National Consultative Meeting on Violence against Women and Girls

1. Introduction

Violence against Women and Girl (VAWG) is a global issue of concern. Despite efforts over the years, it continues to be prevalent in Nigeria, manifesting in various forms, including intimate partner violence and abuse, female Genital Mutilation (FGM) child marriage, rape, sexual harassment and cyberbullying.

The national consultative meeting was held under the auspices of the International Network to End Violence Against Women and Girls (INEVAWG) to bring together stakeholders to chart a course for more effective approaches to the elimination of VAWG. INEVAWG is a newly established network conceptualized and formulated in South Africa by a group of women from the South representing five continents and who have decades of experience of working in solidarity with sister activists and organisations across the world. As part of INEVAWG's growth policy, a regional consultation was hosted in Mauritius to which at least women from 10 countries were invited. INEVAWG in partnership with Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) and Centre for Family Health Initiative (CFHI) plans a one-day national consultation of stakeholders fighting violence against women and girls all over the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

The Consultative meeting was hosted by Centre for Family Health Initiative (CFHI) in collaboration with Girls' Power Initiative (GPI). This meeting brought together policymakers, civil society organizations, and stakeholders working and carrying out advocacy programs on the elimination of violence against women and girls in Nigeria. This Report provides a summary of the outcomes of the meeting which took place on the 22nd day of April in Abuja.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the consultation were to:

- a. To gather relevant and current inputs, insights and information related to VAWG in the Nigerian context
- b. To discuss new and innovative ways of dealing with VAWG in the context of global pandemic
- c. To develop an action plan to implement these new ideals and the possible resources that may be needed for implementation
- d. To mobilise and campaign against violence against women and girls, gender equality, equity and gender relationship

3. The Report

The Report provides a summation of the events and discussions by stakeholders. The discussions were arranged around the objectives of the meeting to elicit information and provoke creative discussions among participants. An Action Plan that collates the suggestions from the participants' wealth of experience was collectively developed. It is anticipated that the Action Plan distilled would influence the work of the participants, encourage more intensive advocacy, address gaps, and support systems thinking, and inclusionary approaches to the issues relating to VAWG. It is also anticipated that it will have a more direct influence on the implementation of existing laws, accountability in policy development and service provisioning for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

4. Approach

The Consultative Meeting was designed to foster participants' active involvement and obtain insights. The meeting was designed to be interactive, drawing on the knowledge and experience of participants through the breakout sessions in small group work, presentations and general discussions. It drew information from participants through the virtual platform, whose participation was designed to mirror the in-person meetings.

To ensure maximum input from the participants, the Consultant facilitator, Dr Cheluchi Onyemelukwe, developed the themes drawn from the objectives in brief presentations. These formed the background for key questions discussed in three breakout sessions during the meeting. The agenda benefited from participants' experience, projects, challenges, learning goals, recommendations and what they hoped to execute using the knowledge garnered from the meeting.

The small group sessions were grouped based on the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Representatives from each small group session made presentations in the spirit of learning from one another while the contributions of online participants (also divided into six geopolitical zones) were read out by the facilitator. The aim was to ensure a contextual approach reflecting the realities of the different geopolitical zones in Nigeria while learning from the realities and interventions implemented in other regions.

The approach adopted aimed to:

- Obtain relevant information from the field on prevalence, rates and forms of VAWG;
- Emphasise inclusiveness of all women and girls, including women living with disabilities, and other minority groups
- Identify areas of strengths, challenges, and gaps and on this basis develop an Action Plan.

5. Consultative Meeting

The meeting commenced with introductions by the Executive Director, CFHI, Krystal Anyanwu. Other key presentations included the Welcome Address by Princess Osita-Oleribe (one of the

founding members of INEVAWG and co-founder of CFHI), which emphasized key challenges such as rape culture, key interventions emphasizing intersectionality amongst others (see Annex 2). An introduction to INEVAWG was provided by Nnodeye Basse-Osongha (another founding member of INEVAWG and the Head of Programs in GPI). This was followed by a goodwill message by Mrs Zainab Gimba, Member, House of Representatives (Vice Chairman, House Committee on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), who emphasized political involvement in the elimination of VAWG. These helped to set the stage for the interactions of participants.

The rest of the Report is arranged around the themes discussed during the Meeting.

6. Discussion of Themes

State of Violence against women and girls in Nigeria

The Facilitator in a brief presentation, provided key statistics on different forms of VAWG and some of the successes and continuing gaps in interventions from a national perspective. Afterwards, participants were tasked to identify key challenges as well as the current state of VAWG in their respective environments.

Guiding questions were:

- What are the forms of violence prevalent in your zone, state or environment?
- What are the root causes of the violence against women and girls in your field/ community/space?
- When we say VAWG, are there any groups that are currently being left out in the efforts?
- How do we bring these groups into the mainstream?
- What is the state of prevention and response in your zone/area
- What are the remaining gaps?

The small groups were 5 groups that comprised of South East, South West, South South, North Central, and North East and North West combined. Each of these groups had an interactive time within their groups and thereafter made presentation of their answers and feedbacks to the above questions. Responses are provided in Annex 3.

Key highlights, however, included the similarities and differences in the forms of violence prevalent in the different zones, highlighting the need for different approaches and interventions. Summary of responses are as provided below:

	South West	South East	South South	North Central	North West & North East
Predominant Forms of Violence in our Zone	Domestic Violence Rape Sexual Harassment	Domestic Violence Rape Sexual Harassment	Domestic Violence Abandonment Sexual Harassment Trafficking	Sexual violence Abduction Rape	Child Marriage Early Marriage Forced Marriages Rape Child Labour
Root causes in the geographical location	Delay in the justice system, patriarchy, economic and social inequality, attitude of responders, harmful	Poor public awareness of the VAPP Act, Insecurity/herdsmen attacks including rape	Patriarchy poverty, religion, harmful socio-cultural norms, poor education, the culture of silence	Traditions and norms, poverty, ignorance of human rights, deprivation of rights, culture of	Patriarchy, Poverty, lack of awareness of the VAPP Act, harmful cultures and traditions

	traditions, impunity, lack of follow up	(this is dominant in Ebonyi, Enugu and Anambra)		silence, religious misinterpretations	
What groups are being left out in the efforts so far	Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS.	School age girls, women living with disabilities	Women living with disabilities, elderly women, LGBT communities, economically challenged women	Sexual minorities, women and girl in IDP, female sex workers	Women with disabilities, elderly women and mentally retarded women.
How do we bring these groups into the mainstream?	Organisations must act exclusively and programs must be targeted to a wider range of people.	Improved media participation	Community engagements, political and media participation,	Inclusionary approach to stakeholder engagement, public information	Sensitization/ awareness programs should hold in schools and rural areas,
What are the remaining gaps?	The gap existing in the south west is largely related to inadequate/ incorrect information on VAWG, gaps in access to existing services, gaps in service provision, including in hard to reach areas	No synergy between key players.	Resistance to change in communities, absence of social change communication in many localities	Gaps in information dissemination. Lack of referral services and channels, Exclusion of vulnerable groups	Severe challenges with litigation and access to care

Common thread identified in responses shows a strong impact of culture on continued perpetuation of VAWG and the potential for a more inclusionary approach to vulnerable groups to sustain advocacy to improve policy and social change.

Policy and Law relating to VAWG in Nigeria: What are the Constraints?

This session featured an analysis of laws and policies relevant to VAWG such as: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women (the Maputo Protocol), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons Living with Disability, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

On the domestic level, Nigeria has enacted several laws which provide for the protection of women and children from VAWG. The most relevant are the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPPA). The facilitator provided the context and applicability of the relevant laws after which participants were distributed into groups aimed at assessing the relevance of the law in stemming the tide of VAWG in their contexts. Participants were called upon to examine the constraints of policy and law in Nigeria, along the lines of adequacy, use, implementation, constraints and gaps, addressing the following questions:

1. How effective is the Law and Policy and what are the challenges you have encountered in your work?
2. What challenges have you encountered with prosecution and investigations?
3. How do you think we can improve the effectiveness of the Law?

4. What innovative mechanisms would help implementation of the Law and policies on VAWG?
5. How do we navigate amidst Covid and all the anomalies Covid brought to fore?
6. What are the gaps and challenges in the Law that you have encountered in your zone?

The 5 small groups had 40 minutes of interactions and discussions and when the entire house conveyed for the plenary discussion, the groups had representatives that presented their responses to the outlined questions.

Below is a summary of responses which details key contributions from participants during the training session.

South-south

1. Participants from the South-South identified that although the law had proven useful in several instances, the absence of domestication of the VAPP Act and key VAWG oriented policies prevented widespread coherent action to be taken in controlling VAWG in the zone. (e.g. the VAPP Act has been domesticated only in Edo, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom)
2. Furthermore, they recommended that concerted effort be made to educate women and girls on legal frameworks which protect them. For instance, provisions within the VAPP act can be included in the educational curriculum and taught to women to ensure that they can seek redress if they should desire upon experiencing VAWG.

South West

1. Participants identified relevant laws to be the Child Rights Act, Laws prohibiting domestic violence and policies such as child protection and safeguarding policies, as well as the presence of sex offender's registers in many states.
2. Identified challenges include challenges with domesticating the VAPP Act, absence of a legal framework which prohibits marital rape, no compensation plan for survivors of VAWG as well as inadequate structure for the implementation of existing laws.
3. Possible solutions that participants recommended in the South West are:
 - Adoption of the VAPP Act in South West states,
 - Increased accountability from key players in the VAWG Space,
 - Improve access to justice and reduction of cost of justice for the victims,
 - Elimination of the need for corroboration of evidence in cases of rape,
 - Provision of free DNA and forensic laboratory services to aid evidence collection/collation for victims, accelerate litigation processes, amongst others.

South-East

1. Participants considered the law to be largely ineffective in combatting VAWG based on the fact that implementation of identified law is poor.
2. Difficulties identified with regard to investigations and prosecutions include:
 - Unfair/biased judgement of law enforcement officials
 - Challenge with burden of proof being laid on the prosecution/complainant
 - Political interference from politicians in some instances
 - Inadequate pro bono lawyers
 - Victim stigmatization
3. To improve the effectiveness of the Law, participants within the group recommended:
 - Better implementation of the VAPP Act
 - Use of media to create awareness
 - Stronger synergy amongst key players
 - Stronger network and synergy amongst CSOs
 - Training for lawyers and judicial authorities

The gaps in the law were recognized to be inadequate sanctions and penalty and the silence of the VAPP Act on gang rape or economic harm meted out on women which is a commonly observed phenomenon in the zone.

North Central

1. Participants from the North Central zone identified the following to be potent challenges affecting the implementation of relevant VAWG laws and policies:
 - Poor knowledge and lack of grassroots awareness
 - Lack of trust in constituted authorities
 - Poor implementation of identified laws e.g. VAPP Act
 - Laws and policies are signed and silenced
 - Poor knowledge of the Law by key implementer/enforcers and the public.

North East and North West.

1. Participants from these Zones identified the following as being the main drivers for poor implementation of VAWG laws as being:
 - Religious and cultural Practices which discourage justice seeking and thus law implementation
 - Poor knowledge of the VAPP Act
 - Lack of political commitment to the issues affecting women and girls
 - Interferences from law enforcement agencies and the judiciary during prosecution of rape cases
 - Adjustment of the Law to suit personal desires.
2. Participants opined that to make the Law more effective in these zones, it is important to:
 - Conduct massive awareness campaigns
 - Engage with stakeholders such as FIDA to enhance the domestication of necessary Laws and allow for enhanced synergy of women-led organisations to champion the efficiency and implementation of the Law
 - Train emergency response workers on handling VAWG cases

- Simplification of the Law into local languages
- Establishment of referral centres and rehabilitation centres to effectively handle VAWG cases.

Generally, participants identified the need for institutional strengthening of law enforcement agencies - especially the police and the judiciary - as well as the need to ramp up public information on provisions of the VAPP Act and other related laws. The need for sustained advocacy and the domestication of key legal framework in states of the federation was also a frequently recurring recommendation to strengthen ongoing efforts at controlling VAWG.

New and Innovative Ways of Dealing with VAWG in the context of global pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic served to indicate the high level of VAWG in Nigeria, but also the gaps in interventions across all types of VAWG. This resulted in the declaration of a ‘State of Emergency’ on VAWG by the Nigerian Governors Forum June 2020.¹ Not many significant steps have been taken in line with this declaration. The Consultative Meeting provided an opportunity to bring together perspectives from a variety of stakeholders to develop an effective action plan towards the elimination of VAWG.

Key question discussed by the participants was:

What are the innovative mechanisms that we can apply to address VAWG effectively during the pandemic and after?

A review of all suggestions/recommendations advanced by participants showed the following to be the most commonly recurring:

- Provision of responsive hotlines to handle cases of VAWG (In many states, such hotlines are barely functional and where present, coordination with law enforcement is usually poor);
- Use of technology for social media awareness, online control rooms and referral centres (this may allow for consistency despite COVID-19 restrictions);
- Provision of shelters in strategic areas of the States which are to remain open especially during emergencies such as COVID-19 mandated lockdowns;
- Provision of quick evacuation measures of victims of abuse from their abusers
- Provision of mental health and psychosocial support
- Community mobilisations to ensure sustainability of interventions
- Training of emergency response workers
- Inclusion and acknowledgement of women in policy making processes.

¹ Voice of America, All 36 Nigerian Governors Declare State of Emergency Over Rapes and Violence
<<https://www.voanews.com/africa/all-36-nigerian-governors-declare-state-emergency-over-rapes-and-violence>>

7. Action Plan

Throughout the course of the meeting and the group work, many gaps and challenges were identified and potential solutions proposed. This session aimed to develop, as much as practicable within the framework of the meeting. Several areas of interventions were suggested by the facilitator, emphasizing that these were not closed off categories and there was room for other identified areas. The areas suggested were:

- Capacity Building on existing prevalence, advocacy techniques, and intervention opportunities,
- Law/Policy Reform
- Law Enforcement - Police, Judiciary, Etc
- Government Involvement - DVSRT, Funding
- Key Necessities - Shelters, Sexual Assault Referral Centres, Helplines, Public Information
- Sustainability and Continuity (funding
- Media Engagement
- Gender Mainstreaming
- Institutionalising Best Practices
- Stakeholder Engagement - DVSRT, Law Enforcement, Legislature, Community Leaders, Religious leaders, Regulatory Councils, Health Professionals, Private Sector

Participants were requested to provide other areas as necessary, key activities and indicate potential sources of resources.

Below are the results of the interaction as articulated by the stakeholders in group work:

Action Plan

South East

Issues	Actions	Resources
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media engagement • Government support • Synergy between principal actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media literacy programs and trainings • Funding • Public enlightenment programs • Government support
Capacity building	Train: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Agencies, • Security Agencies, • CSOs, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Development experts • Academia • Expert programmers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawyers, • Women led organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I.C.T Experts • Media support
Policy reform and Law Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations and Dialogue with policy makers and players in the specific areas of needs. • Orientation programs to increase the awareness and knowledge of the existing laws and policies. • Review/update meetings to get the Laws up to date with our current realities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • The Academia • Data • Volunteers • Legal Practitioners • Legislators • CSOs • Media support
Shelters, S.A.R.C, D.V.R.S.T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelters to be built in each local government of a State • Toll free lines for people to call and request for help • Collaborate and synergise with Law Enforcement Agencies. • Partner with Transport companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Partnerships • Public private Partnerships • International support • Partnerships with Tele-Communication companies • Psycho-clinical Experts for therapy and counselling • Partnership with Transport service companies. • Digital Advocacy • Media Support
Sustainability and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community ownership • School project for secondary school students and tertiary institutions • Keep talking!!!! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community/traditional leaders support • Religious leaders support • Social media platforms • Print media

South-South

Issues	Actions	Resources
Media Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate stories on the issue for publicity across all media. • Popularise such platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced discussants • Collaborations with media (both public and private)
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage on existing coalitions to drive the domestication of existing policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding
Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a directory for stakeholders • Popularize existing service centres • Create hotlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Partnerships/collaboration

Institutionalizing best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate GBV trainings into official trainings for police, lawyers etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy Synergy Funding Experts on curriculum development
Government involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give enough allocations to organisations in charge of VAWG related issues. Example; Ministry of Gender, NAPTIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy
Research and data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct trainings for appropriate organization across the state on Data entry and collation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding
Gender Mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy with the government for equal participation-Affirmative Action. Establish a system for inter-generational mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborations Coalitions/network
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy and sensitization campaigns to stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding Collaborations/synergy

North East and North West Zones

Issues	Actions	Resources
VAPP Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestication Translate the law into local languages Simplify the law for the benefit of everyone Advocacy Stakeholder's involvement Litigation Engage with FIDA to enhance the process of the Law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resource Media engagement Funding from donors and government
Gender Based Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy Awareness creation Campaign against GBV Referral centres Sensitisations against the culture of silence Empowerment of survivors Litigation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resource Partnership Findings Media
Child Marriage / Forceful Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy to religious leaders and traditional leaders Awareness campaigns Translating government law and simplifying it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources Partnerships Funding Media

North Central

Issues	Actions	Resources
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct campaigns to community gatekeepers, religious leaders and traditional rulers • Conduct campaigns to key implementers and all relevant stakeholders • Create campaign notable dates • Conduct campaigns for funding by the government and private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships • Funding • Human resources • Media literacy • Expertise • I.E.C Materials • Social behavioural change communication • Local translators and interpreters
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on advocacy skills (including minority groups) • Conduct training on human rights, policies and especially on the VAPP Act • Conduct trainings for law enforcement agencies, gender units of the police force, gender desk of MOWA. • Conduct T.O.T for various areas for sustainability purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Partnerships • Media literacy • Training materials • Expertise
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of more sexual assault referral centres • Creation of strategic safe shelter space • Creation of evacuation strategies for victims • Provision of accessible legal representations • Provision of accessible psychosocial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Partnerships • Training materials and expertise • Media literacy

South West

Issues	Actions	Resources
Sustainability and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community involvement and ownership of interventions. • Media engagement • Awareness Campaigns to change the narrative and social perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media
Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the VAPP • in a robust sense • adopt laws prohibiting GBV through education and sensitization • Access to justice 	

Capacity area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Train the police• Train gender desks• Train magistrates	
Institutionalising best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build an online resource centre for sharing best practices and networking	



8. Attendance and Evaluation Feedback

Over 400 persons attended the hybrid event and feedbacks were received from some virtual participants after the event. The analysed feedback below is based on the overall assessment of the event's content.

Grades (%)	Categories
44	Excellent
44	Very Good
10	Good
2	Fair

9. Conclusion

Some of the key highlights of the meeting were the need for more collaboration and synergies within the VAWG space, which is a key focus for INEVAWG. It was also emphasized that collaboration with other sectors such as the private sector to support with resources such as helplines was necessary. In addition, participants expressed enthusiasm at learning about interventions such as the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Response Teams, a government-led multisectoral team providing support for VAWG in some States. Several participants also acknowledged new information relating to the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and committed to advocating for enactment of this legislation in their States. The use of technology and digital tools was emphasized, in part, to address the gaps in interventions that became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stakeholders also emphasized the inclusion of representatives of all groups of women and girls in all intervention processes from design implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Several expressed the hope that the report would be made widely available to help inform their activities and programming. A Call was made for persons to join INEVAWG and forms were distributed.

The Consultative Meeting was a vibrant, interactive session which provided insights that are not often discussed in the literature. Participants brought insights from the field, service provision, personal experiences and intervention implementation in work on VAWG.



Annex 1 – Agenda

**National Consultation on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
Agenda**

Activity	Persons Responsible	Time
Arrival and Registration	CFHI and GPI	8:30am - 9:00am
Prayers - 2 nd Stanza of The National Anthem	CFHI and GPI	9.00am - 9.05am
Introduction of Participants	Krystal Anyanwu, ED, CFHI	9:05am - 9:30am
Welcome address and Setting Out Objectives of the Consultation	Princess Osita-Oleribe, Co-Founder of CFHI	9:30am - 9:40am
Introducing INEVAWG and its members	Ndodeye Basse-Obongha Head of Programs, GPI	9:50am - 10:10am
Opening Remarks	Her Excellency, Ummi Garba El-Rufai, Wife of Kaduna State Governor, Ambassador of UNICEF and UNFPA	9:40am - 9:50am
SESSION I		
Context - The State of Violence Against Women and Girls in Nigeria Facilitated Interactive Session Video	Dr Cheluchi Onyemelukwe (facilitator)	10:10am - 11:40am
Group Photograph and Tea Break 11:40am -12:10pm		
Policy and Law Relating to VAWG in Nigeria: How Useful? (Interactive Session)	Dr Cheluchi Onyemelukwe (facilitator)	12:10pm - 12:45pm
3Group Activity - What are the Challenges with the Law in relation to VAWG? How can we make law more effective in protecting women and girls		12:45pm - 1:15pm
Plenary		1:15pm - 1:30pm
New and Innovative Ways of Dealing with VAWG in the context of global pandemic Facilitated Interactive Session	Dr Cheluchi Onyemelukwe (facilitator)	1:30pm - 1:50pm
Lunch Break 2:00pm - 3:00pm		
Icebreaker Action Plan - Interactive	Dr Cheluchi Onyemelukwe (facilitator)	3:00pm - 4:30pm
Plenary		
Call to Join INEVAWG	CFHI	4:30pm - 4:50pm
Vote of Thanks	GPI	4:50pm - 5:00pm
Snacks and Closing	All	5:00pm

Annex 2 - Welcome Address by Princess Osita-Oleribe

CO-FOUNDER'S OPENING SPEECH AT VAWG NATIONAL CONSULTATION, APRIL 22, 2021.

Good morning Her Excellency, the Honourable Member of the House of Representatives, and eminent champions of women's and girls' issues present here. Thank you for being part of this wonderful program that is put together to address one of the least reported yet the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

VAWG simply refers to all acts perpetrated against women and girls which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological verbal, emotional or economic harm. This harm could emanate from domestic abuse, sexual assault and harassment, financial abuse, child or forced marriage, sex trafficking, 'honour' crimes, female genital mutilation, breast ironing, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty among others. Facts revealed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) shows that one in every three women suffers from abuse or violence globally. VAWG not only devastates women's and girls' lives and divides communities, but it also undermines development efforts and the building of strong democracies, as well as the sustenance of just and peaceful societies. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr.; "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. This issue concerns all of us and we must be combat it vigorously.

Problems:

VAWG is rooted in the gender inequality that women face throughout their lives from childhood through to old age. If persons believe, enable and foster the superiority of males over females, then they create the environment for impudence and violence against women and girls. If people see VAWG as an accepted norm or as unchangeable; it will, unfortunately, remain so. But why would anyone be fine with this ill except they see themselves helped/unaffected by it or have resigned to its oppressions? We cannot allow any range on this spectrum. We cannot allow any mindset or practices that is detrimental not only to the victims of violence and the society at large.

In the work of Centre for Family Health Initiative (CFHI) does, we have seen gender stereotypes, myths and misconceptions perpetuate violence against women. We have heard some of the participants in our events/projects say they viewed the campaign against gender-based violence as a way of promoting women over men, hence, they were advised not to participate in them. Some have said to us that wives are properties of the husbands and so subject to their wishes. They have laughed at the suggestion of marital rape. CFHI has handled several rape cases across Nigeria with very little success owing to victims withdrawing from the case or forced to abscond from the community without a trace to avoid recrimination. This has happened time and again not just because of the culture of silence but also for the fear of the revictimization of the survivors instead of any repercussion for the offences. These experiences are by no

means peculiar to CFHI. Many organizations, groups and individuals here will tell their stories, when given the opportunity.

Emerging data reveals that domestic violence and gender-based violence cases are on the rise amid the global COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The United Nations has called it the "shadow pandemic". Violence, sexual assault and femicide have all increased in the past months across Africa and the globe for reasons closely related to the coronavirus pandemic because women and girls were/are left at the mercy of and socially isolated with their oppressors.

According to Charles Kettering, "A problem well defined is a problem half solved." One of the effective ways to end violence against women is to first realise there is a problem that needs urgent attention. Violence against women and girls can be curbed only if the causes are clearly stated and deliberate actions are taken to tackle them. The Amnesty International Report on Violence Against Women by Peace Women sees discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, social status, class, and age as forces driving VAWG. We will examine these today. We hope to keep ending VAWG front and centre of the political discuss and action. We can have a society that is aware and nontolerant to all forms of VAWG. Yes, we can.

Successes:

But it has not all a tale of woe and doom. Some progress has been made to empower women and break the cycle of oppression they face. Laws have been enacted and policies put in place to address and tackle VAWG. Take for example, Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a global human rights treaty that adopted by the United Nations as the highest standard for women's rights. At the continental level, we have the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of Women in Africa (popularly called the Maputo Protocol). The Violence Against Person Prohibition Act (VAPP) thus far provides the most protection to victims and the most punishments to perpetrators of violence in Nigeria.

Although social media has its many pros and cons, we have seen it as a tool for the voice of women to be amplified and their oppressors shamed. We have seen celebrities lend their voice to the fight. We have also seen the rise of women groups and women led organization in bridging the gap in women empowerment. We have seen funds dedicated to tackling women issues. Organizations like CFHI and GPI have championed wide ranging interventions for women and girls. In 2018, CFHI started a media campaign against VAWG on all the organization's media platforms tagged "Speak Wednesday". This initiative which was birthed to give voice to the voiceless, addresses issues of Violence Against Women and Girls and gender bias, also shares real stories of GBV victims and provide legal or psychological help to those in need of them. Speak Wednesday posts are published every Wednesday on all CFHI social media platforms. You are welcome to join us.

Looking from where we are:

Living in a society free of violence against women and girls is achievable; a society where the voice of women and girls can be heard, where women and girls matter, where women and girls can walk freely without the fear of being abused and assaulted. Ending violence against women and girls is everyone's business. The United Nations Entity for Gender and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) came up with ways to end violence against women. These are relevant, even during this pandemic. Please, do not tell me the pandemic is over, it is not. It is the only reason my trip to Nigeria for this event was truncated at its last lap but that is a story for another day. Back to UN Women's recommendations for tackling violence against women and girls:

1. Listen to and believe survivors. When a woman shares her story of violence, she takes the first step to breaking the cycle of abuse. It is on all of us to give her the safe space she needs to speak up and be heard. The perpetrator is the sole reason for assault and must bear the responsibility alone. Call out victim-blaming and counter the idea that it is on women to avoid situations that might be seen as dangerous by traditional standards. Survivors of violence are speaking out more than ever before, and everyone has a role to play to ensure justice is served. Words like "Why did you not leave?", "What were you wearing?", "What took you to his house?" should be avoided, rather, use words like "We believe you", "We stand with you".

We need to stop pulling out the blame cards on women and girls who are the victims. It is high time we stopped asking them to avoid violence. We need to hold perpetrator liable for their offenses.

2. Teach the next generation and learn from them. The examples we set for the younger generation can shape the way they think about gender, respect, and human rights. By empowering young advocates with information, and educating them about women's rights, we can build a better future for all. Advertisement campaigns, television shows, leaders in positions of power and social media all have the ability to change perceptions surrounding women. The stigma surrounding violence against women can be lifted when we correct its presentation.

Another way to inform younger generations about VAWG is to set up compulsory educational programs in schools to teach respectful and healthy relationships. These programs could discuss topics such as consensual sex, sexism and gender equality, forms of abuse, respect, healthy relationships and where you can get help if needed such as help lines and service centres. These programs would need to be introduced as early as kindergarten and continue through primary and secondary levels of education. This continuity would ensure that the values discussed stick.

3. Call for responses and services fit for purpose. Services for survivors are essential services. This means that shelters, hotlines, counselling and all support for

survivors of gender-based violence need to be available for those in need. Especially during the pandemic.

When women are actively engaged in the affairs of their countries, there is a considerable amount of change in the well-being of their women. Although women represent half the global population, research shows that less than 20% of the world's legislators are women. We need to actively advocate for increased women's participation in the social, political, and economic development of this country. This calls for an urgent inclusion of women in all sectors/arenas including politics, judiciary, economy, cultural and religious settings etc. Only by so doing will women be in the right positions to make balanced decisions that promote gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. Although there is a significant change when compared to decades past, a lot still needs to be done.

4. Understand consent. Freely given, enthusiastic consent is mandatory, every time. Rather than listening for a “no”, make sure there is an active “yes”, from all involved. Phrases like “she was asking for it” or “boys will be boys” attempt to blur the lines around sexual consent, placing blame on victims, and excusing perpetrators from the crimes they have committed. This calls for review of beliefs, attitudes and practices that have been upheld in many cultures and many generations.
5. Learn the signs of abuse and how you can help. There are many forms of abuse and all of them can have serious physical and emotional effects. If one is concerned about a friend who may be experiencing violence or feels unsafe around someone, seek for help. Some bodies (like many of us represented here today) give help to the victim of gender-based violence, find one or more. Do not be ashamed to seek help.
6. Stand against rape culture. Rape culture is the social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalized and justified, fuelled by the persistent gender inequalities and attitudes about gender and sexuality. Naming it is the first step to dismantling rape culture.

Why we are here:

Today's event is about us standing together against all forms of violence against women and girls. This consultation is organized for current and new champions to join forces in a united fight to end VAWG in Nigeria. We are fully confident we can, especially when we fight together. So, the core of this consultation is organised to gather from the experience and knowledge of the in-person and virtual participants on the following headings:

- The State of Violence Against Women and Girls in Nigeria.
- The value of the Policies and Laws Relating to VAWG in Nigeria.

- New and Innovative Ways of Dealing with VAWG in the context of global pandemic.
- Development of a Plan of Action to end VAWG with timelines and resources needed.

Each these sessions will be preceded with an introduction by the participants then group work and presentation of the group work. We have our online participants covered in that we have created break out rooms for you to join the in-person participants in the group work. There will be 6 groups according to the geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Persons are welcome to join the group they are most affiliated with by virtue of their origin, residence, work or interests. In each of the groups we would love to hear the voices of the old and new advocates, old and young persons, binary and non-binary gender representatives, people with disability, rural people minority groups and people of all works of life.

We are excited and hopeful of all that we will accomplish today, not as a checkbox on another gender consultation completed but as the primer to the great work that we will each do to bring an end to violence against the women and girls in our lives and around us as well as in those yet unborn. Additionally, before we leave, we will give each of you an opportunity to join the International Network to End Violence Against Women and Girls (INEVAWG). My friend and sister, Ndodeye will talk to us more about INEVAWG.

I would like to thank all our distinguished guests, facilitators and participants who took out time from their busy schedule to be part of this remarkable event. We look forward to a fruitful deliberation and collaboration as we propose solutions and develop action plans to eliminate violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

Thank you all.