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The Rule of Law and Anti-corruption (RoLAC) Programme

Themes and Messaging for a Campaign to Improve Justice and Social Support for Survivors of Sexual and Gender -Based Violence

State Governments need to Fund and Establish Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

#StatesMustFundSARCs
#HerStoryOurStoryNG
#MakeWePaiViolence!

This campaign to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence 2024, is supported by the Rule of Law and Anti-corruption (RoLAC) Programme which is funded by the European Union and is being implemented by International IDEA.

There is a crisis of sexual violence in Nigeria and the victims are mostly children. According to a Violence Against Children Survey, 1 in 4 girls in Nigeria have experienced violence before the age of 18. Sexual and gender-based violence has now become so widespread in Nigeria that its actual daily occurrence as well as the ever-present fear of being assaulted that women and girls face, have become normalized. In spite of the size of the problem, there are still limited facilities to help victims and the number of cases of sexual violence and rape that are prosecuted, are very few compared to the number of victims. Many victims are reluctant to report crimes for fear of the social stigma associated with rape. Even when cases are reported, police response / investigation is weak, with the police also complicit in our society's tendency to blame the victim and excuse the perpetrator. This crisis of sexual violence in Nigeria demands an urgent and comprehensive action from federal and state governments as well as justice service providers, with much more funding commitment and action to improve medical, psychosocial, justice, social welfare response for survivors.

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Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) was passed in 2015 as an improvement on the penal and criminal code in relation to all forms of violence against persons. The Act not only ensures that violators are brought to justice but also that victims have adequate recourse to justice or rehabilitative, psychological or social support and protection. 35 out of 36 states (Kano is the exception) have domesticated the VAPPA or a variant of it; and all states have passed a variation of the Child Rights Act 2003. In spite of how much progress has been made in the adoption of these laws at the state level, government commitment to fund their and enforce their implementation is still very weak.

In establishing a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), states automatically fulfil a key provision of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 (VAPPA). Section 38, Sub-section 1 of the VAPPA provides for victims of violence to be 'entitled to receive comprehensive medical, psychological, social and legal assistance through government and non-governmental agencies providing such assistance.

Only 22 out of 36 states have established a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) that provides free medical, counselling and support services to survivors of sexual violence.

Even among the 22 states that have a SARC, there is still weak commitment by the state governments to foster the kind of inter-agency collaboration that will sustain the delivery of SARC services to the public free of charge; ensure efficient investigation and prosecution of sexual violence cases and appropriate punishment for offenders.

A Network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Nigeria is being managed by the Rule of Law and Anti-corruption (RoLAC) Programme with a growing membership of 26 stakeholder states, who either have a SARC or are interested in establishing one. The Network has held annual meetings since its inception in 2016 with the aim of securing state institutional commitment to keep SARCs running long term; and strengthen the cross-sector linkages that enable the provision of comprehensive support services to survivors of sexual assault.

Critical Considerations for Addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV)

What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now?

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What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now -

Legislation, Prosecution and Adjudication



Fund the implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 and the Child Rights Act, 2003 and empower state institutions and state service providers to implement.



Pressure state ministries of Health, Justice, Women Affairs / Gender / Social Protection to budget for and fund the implementation of critical provisions of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015, which include but are not limited to:



Section 38 (1). Maintain a pool of professional medical and social workers who are adequately trained to provide medical, counseling social welfare response (including shelter) to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.



Section 40(2a). Maintain a register of active and accredited, capitated and accredited service providers (including disability inclusive service providers) and protection officers, circulate same to citizens and all stakeholders.



Pass legislation similar to Victims of Gunshot Wounds Act 2017 which mandates hospitals to provide emergency medical care and treatment to victims of sexual violence.



Provide and deploy a clear budget for the establishment or designation, and operation of sexual offences courts



Mandate the state ministry of justice, judiciary and state police command to develop a pool of investigators, prosecutors, judges and magistrates who have been adequately trained in handling survivors of trauma, in critical elements of effective investigation and prosecution of SGBV cases and the facilitation of social welfare support services for survivors, in the context of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015.



Mandate the courts to maintain a register of active, capacitated and accredited service providers (including for services tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities) and protection officers and make this register available state-wide.



What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now -

Improve Medical Response



Provide and deploy clear state budgets to strengthen, emergency medical response to SGBV, toward facilitating the best justice outcomes for survivors, in the context of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015.



Train medical and counselling personnel of all state funded hospitals in head-to-toe medical examination, injury documentation and medical reporting that will support the presentation of admissible evidence for the effective prosecution of sexual violence cases in court.



Fund existing and new Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). Fund a budget line to ensure sustainability of existing Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and the establishment of new SARCs - at least one in each state – to provide services to the public free of charge.



Establish and fund free Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in primary healthcare centres in every local government area, to serve citizens at grassroots level.



Require that state ministries of health develop and adopt uniform protocols for administering rape kits, forensic medical examination, injury documentation, diagnostic testing and medical reporting in cases of sexual assault.



Mandate emergency medical care and treatment for victims of sexual violence by all state-funded hospitals.



Eliminate the practice of hospitals requiring a police report before providing care and treatment to victims of sexual violence.



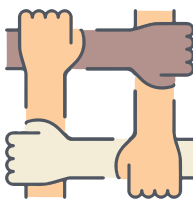
Mandate that medical reports from any state funded hospital be admissible as evidence to support the prosecute of sexual assault cases in court.



Mandate every state funded hospital to maintain a register of active, capacitated and accredited service providers (including disability inclusive service providers) and protection officers and make this available to citizens and other stakeholders.



Commit to new budget lines to provide for free emergency medical response to sexual and gender-based violence across all state-funded hospitals.



What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now -

Strengthen civil society as first responders



Identify local NGOs who are active as GBV first responders in the state and designate them as essential service providers who can freely travel intra-state to rescue and secure victims. This means providing them with official passes / ID cards for use during curfew hours and offering police protection to guarantee their safety.



State governments should partner with local NGOs to enhance reach of SGBV response services and expand the number of channels available for citizens to report SGBV and get help.



State governments should partner with local NGOs to quality assure and monitor responsiveness of justice services and well as monitor SGBV case proceedings in court.



What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now -

Social Welfare Response



Establish and fund shelters for survivors of sexual assault



Deploy professional social workers, social welfare and protection officers who have been adequately trained in trauma counseling and the facilitation of social welfare support services to be seconded to police gender desks/ units, state funded hospitals and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs). Support their capacity to track the progress of sexual violence cases as they pass through the justice processes and ensure speedy prosecution and justice for the survivor.



What can state governments in Nigeria do differently right now -

Accountability



Deliberately track the progress of sexual violence cases as they pass through the state's justice process and ensure speedy prosecution.



Hold town halls and support platforms of public dialogue between survivors, SGBV front line responders and justice service providers to obtain and act on feedback about their experience with justice service channels in relation to SGBV.



Mandate Commissioners of Police to provide a detailed report on the actions taken to strengthen their response to sexual and gender-based violence through the Family Support Units and Force Gender Units at State and Local Government levels.



Mandate state Commissioners for Women Affairs / Gender/ Social Development to provide detailed reports of progress and impact of social welfare and social support services (e.g. shelters) provided for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.



Mandate State Commissioners for Justice to provide regular detailed reports and actions taken toward speedy prosecution of sexual assault cases in court, and toward victim and witness protection, in the context of the VAPPA Act 2015.



Secure commitment of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) for postgraduate medical training colleges to establish clear curricula and pathways for specializations in SGBV emergency treatment, trauma management and GBV documentation and data reporting.

Rape is not a Joke

Rapeisnotajoke
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Rape culture is the social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalized and justified. In Nigeria, rape culture is fueled by persistent attitudes that support the idea of masculinity, violence and dominance as “strong” and “male”, and place responsibility for sexual assault on the victim rather than the perpetrator. One of the more subtle ways in which rape culture gets normalized is through humor and entertainment that deliberately or inadvertently minimizes, justifies or excuses sexual violence, making it harder for victims to speak up when their consent is violated. In Nigeria’s vibrant entertainment industry, entertainment content will often use rape and Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in general, as a funny punchline and the tragedy is that for many people, this has become acceptable. Such content is harmful to the fight against SGBV and compromises the slow and grueling work that is being done at community, state and national level to change the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours that perpetuate SGBV.

Important Catchphrases



There is a critical need for us to evaluate how entertainment industry creators and players may be contributing to perpetuating narrative, attitudes and stereotypes that promote rape culture.



This is call to the entertainment industry in Nigeria to act against SGBV. Skit makers, comedians and musicians, actors and actresses need to evaluate the content they create and be honest with themselves about whether it stigmatizes or devalues women and girls OR whether it minimizes/justifies sexual violence in any way.

There is a critical need for us to evaluate how entertainment industry creators and players may be contributing to perpetuating narrative, attitudes and stereotypes that promote rape culture.



Together, we can change the culture, behaviors and narratives that have allowed SGBV to become so commonplace in our society.



It is possible for us to make people laugh without minimizing or justifying rape. Rape is not a joke.



Every day we have the opportunity to examine our behaviours and beliefs for biases that permit rape culture to continue in our society



Change begins with each of us. Sexual violence and abuse are not entertainment.

What can you do differently?

Admit that you have been part of this culture, that you have been part of the problem so that you can recognize that you are also part of the solution.

Humour that normalizes and justifies sexual violence is not acceptable. Call it out wherever you find it

As a skit maker or comedian, ask yourself, does this joke devalue men or women in any way? Does it desensitize my audience to the gravity of rape as a horrible crime? If it does, then don't tell it.

As an entertainer, ask yourself, does my content encourage violently dominant behavior? If it does, then don't share it.

As a skit maker or comedian, ask yourself, will this joke shame survivors of rape and compromise their capacity to speak out? If it will, then don't tell it.

Does your joke perpetuate the narrative that men are entitled to women bodies? If it does, then your joke is not worth telling.

Join the conversation. Talk to family and friends about how we can work together to end rape culture in our communities

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