

16 days of activism - Orange the world: End violence against women now.

Introduction

The global 16 days of activism is an annual campaign for ending violence against women and girls all over the world. Globally and in Nigeria, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a drastic increase in gender-based violence and rolled back the gains towards achieving gender equality. The pandemic increased the urgency of taking the right actions to end violence against women and girls. Indeed, it showed the different forms of violence experienced by women and girls including physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. Traditionally, violence against women has been defined to accommodate heterosexual women only, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. However, the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, queer, trans women and intersex persons are valid. The experiences of female sex workers, women with disabilities, women affected by displacement, and women living with HIV and their voices deserve just as much attention.

Violence against female sex workers

In Nigeria, violence against sex workers is often not categorized as a criminal act, and this is a result of the indirect criminalization of sex work and the lack of recognition of sex workers' rights as human rights in Nigeria. Female sex workers face multiple forms of violence from law enforcement agents; the police, through misinterpretation of laws, stigmatization and discrimination from the public, media, and healthcare providers. These factors have continued to prevent female sex workers from reporting cases of violence perpetrated against them and also negatively impacted the enjoyment of their human rights. The Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance Survey 2014ⁱ highlighted that about 49.9 % of sex workers had experienced police arrest and 13.5% had experienced forced sex without a condom and data from the KAP care1 project from October -2019 - September 2020 recorded over 3,000 cases of violations against sex workers in Akwa-Ibom, Cross River and Lagos state respectively. All these continue to increase sex workers' vulnerability to life-threatening disease, including HIV/AIDS. Recently, on 29 October 2021ⁱⁱ, the office of the Social Welfare Services, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Social Development Secretariat (SDS), Malam Sani Amar, led a team of security agencies and evacuation squad of SDS to raid HOT SPOTS which includes hotels, brothels, and clubs. The raiding led to the arrest of 27 sex workers in Abuja. According to him, the FCT Minister of State, Dr. Ramatu Aliyu,

directed the social development secretariat to arrest sex workers in all the districts in Abuja giving a reason of sex workers constituting public nuisance.

Violence against women in displaced communities

In 2019, there were 50.8 million internally displaced persons worldwide, more than half of whom are women and girls. Nigeria reports that over 2 million people were displaced by over a decade of the humanitarian crisis in the North-Eastern states due to terrorism and north-central states due to farmer-herder and communal clashes and banditry in the northwestern states. These crises have led to an upsurge of community displacements, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the creation of IDP camps in various parts of the country. In addition to the many general human rights violations faced by all IDPs, displaced women are often at greater risk than other affected populations. They face loss of livelihoods and basic social services needed for daily life. They tend to have less access to assistance and struggle to access education, healthcare, training and sources of livelihood. They are more susceptible to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and are likely to face difficulties in exercising rights to housing, land and property, and are often excluded from decision-making processes. These human rights violations are compounded by insecurity and humanitarian crisis, which exacerbates pre-crisis patterns of discrimination. Age, group affiliation e.g. membership in minority groups, disability, civil status, low socioeconomic status also puts internally displaced women at heightened risk of violence.

Violence against Lesbians, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex and Trans women

Lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, queer women and intersex persons continue to experience different forms of violence because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This violence is mostly initiated by close relatives, law enforcement agencies and the public. Additionally, the criminalization of same-sex relationships in Nigeria and the socio-cultural biases against LBTQI women puts them at higher risk of experiencing violence without a real chance of legal redress. In 2019, The Initiative for Equal Rights and other organizations' reportsⁱⁱⁱ show 330 human rights violations based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity in Nigeria. These violations were perpetrated by state and non-state actors in Nigeria.

Violence against women with Disabilities

Women and girls with disabilities in Nigeria are twice more likely to experience gender-based violence than other women. They tend to experience higher levels of sexual and physical assault from intimate male partners and even family

members. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability (UN DESA)^{iv} pointed out that girls and women of all ages with any form of disability experience sexual harassment at higher rates than women without disabilities. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)^v also estimates that girls and young women with disabilities may face up to 10 times more violence than women and girls without disabilities.

Violence against women with HIV

Despite the increased risk of domestic violence among women living with HIV/AIDS, its burden has not been adequately explored in many developing countries including Nigeria. Types of violence experienced were physical violence, emotional violence, and sexual violence. Young women aged 20-24 in Nigeria are three times more likely to contract HIV than men of the same age. In this group, HIV prevalence was 1.3% compared to 0.4% in men according to a newly published Nigeria HIV/AIDS Indicator and Impact Survey (NAIIS)^{vi}, one of the largest population-based HIV/AIDS household surveys ever conducted.

Our Position

Violence against women cuts across women in all their diversity. And so, our position as a consortium during these 16 days of activism are:

- We demand an end to misinterpretation of the criminal and penal codes to oppress female sex workers by Law Enforcement agencies.
- The law enforcement agencies must recognize the full humanity of female sex workers and hold perpetrators of violence against this group accountable.
- The Federal Ministry of Health and Education must recognize bodily autonomy and integrate reproductive services for female sex workers into existing National and Sub-national policies to increase access to evidence-informed SRH programming.
- The Federal Ministries of Health and Women Affairs must improve the quality, safety and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls at Internally Displaced Persons Camp in Nigeria.
- We demand the immediate repeal of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act 2014 from the Nigerian Government to effect swift legal actions for cases of violence against LGBTQI persons whose rights are often violated as a result of the discriminatory law.
- The legislative arm of the Nigerian government must integrate a non-discriminative law that is inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics diversity, and protects the rights of LGBTQI women.

- The Federal Ministry of Health and related Departments and Agencies must improve comprehensive SRHR services which will signal a commitment to equality and fairness in the treatment of all individuals regardless of their Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Gender Expression Sex Characteristics.
- Parents, healthcare workers and other non-state actors must put an end to non-consensual Intersex genital mutilation and surgeries on intersex children and adolescents, which most times leaves them in traumatic and painful experiences.

About We Lead Nigeria

We Lead is a new, inspiring, innovative and far-reaching program aiming to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH-R) of young women. It focuses on four specific groups of young women: those who live with HIV, who have a disability, who identify as lesbian, bisexual, trans, or intersex, and who are affected by displacement. The program puts young women rightsholders in the driving seat while supporting them to impactful and sustainably advocate for their SRH-R. The We Lead consortium consists of six civil society organizations (Positive Vibes, Restless Development, Marsa, FEMNET, the Central American Women’s Fund, Hivos).

The We Lead is currently being implemented in Nigeria by a community of action of 11 organizations. The COA will support in developing and implementing strategies to shift social and gender norms – starting with their direct environment and gradually reaching the general public. We Lead Nigeria will help rightsholders influence SRH-R service providers to improve their access to SRH-R information and services and support them in lobbying duty bearers to change laws and policies in favor of rightsholders’ SRH-R.

ⁱ <https://www.naca.gov.ng/final-nigeria-ibbss-2014-report/>

ⁱⁱ <https://thewhistler.ng/abuja-security-agencies-raid-brothels-arrest-27-sex-workers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/resources/>

^{iv} https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/NEW_UNPRPD_UNFPA_WEI_-_The_Impact_of_COVID-19_on_Women_and_Girls_with_Disabilities.pdf

^v <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/women-with-disabilities-fact-sheet.html>

^{vi} <https://www.avert.org/news/nigerian-hiv-survey-young-women-are-most-affected>