

## CHRICED Thematic Brief on Promoting Cultural Rights of Abuja Original Inhabitants

### Introduction

Worldwide indigenous peoples have often developed strong attachment to their ancestral lands. However, the Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs) in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have been facing tendentious constraint in the full expressions of their cultural rights. This is apparent in the disheartenment on the rights to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultural traditions and customs.



Hence, the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) through its project of Promotion of Political, Economic, and Cultural Rights of Original Inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, revisits the historic marginalization of the FCT-Abuja Original Inhabitants which emanated due to the relocation of Nigeria's political capital from Lagos metropolitan coastal city to the hinterland in the middle of the country. Devoid of expected human rights prerequisites of such mega projects, the movement of Nigeria's capital to Abuja has undoubtedly continued to undermine the rights of those Nigerians who called the affected area their ancestral home.

Therefore, this brief recommends among other things, the establishment of an interventionist development agency: Abuja Original Inhabitant Development Commission (AOIDC) to address the peculiarities, a review of the 1976 Abuja Master Plan to incorporate all indigenous communities of the FCT, and the full enforcement and domestication of relevant international conventions on cultural rights issues.<sup>1</sup>

### Understanding Indigenous People Cultural Rights

Since the emergence of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, international human rights law has evolved from its initial focus on individual rights as exemplified by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to the contemporary era where collective rights of groups such as minorities and indigenous peoples are protected as *sui generis* rights.<sup>2</sup> This expansion is rooted

on the need for the protection of victims of historical injustices as well as violations of rights of social collectives especially that of indigenous people.

As rightly stipulated in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>3</sup> indigenous peoples and individuals are:

*Free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity (Art. 2); Have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Art 8); Shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories (Art 10); Have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs, including the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature (Art. 11); Have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning (Art. 14).*

1 Several international and regional frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (AFCHPR), and the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) are normative instruments that guaranteed and speak to the significant of cultural rights.

2 See, Sylvanus, G. B. (2018). Abuja Peoples of Nigeria as Indigenous Peoples in International Law. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, Vol. 25, 431-457.

3 See, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, (UN 2007).

## Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory and Abuja Original Inhabitants Cultural Rights Strangulation

In 1975, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria set up Justice Akinola Aguda Committee to examine the capacity of Lagos as the Federal Capital Territory, and to recommend alternative sites for the capital. The committee recommended that the Federal Capital be moved from Lagos to Abuja as an alternative site for a new Capital City. The Decree six stipulated that the area contained as the FCT would, as from the date of the promulgation, cease to be portion of the states concerned and would be governed and administered by or under the control of the Federal Government.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the ownership of the lands comprised in the new Federal Capital Territory was vested in the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 1976).<sup>5</sup>

Prior to 1976, available evidence suggests that there were nine (9) indigenous ethnic groups in the affected area that had been living in the localities for hundreds of years and had developed very rich cultural expressions and civilization. These were the Gbagyi (Gwari), Gade, Ganagana, Bassa, Gwandara, Koro, Ibira Koto and a few Hausa and Fulani. Regrettably, both the FCT and the Land Use Acts effectively alienated Abuja indigenous inhabitants from their lands. These legal frameworks entitle indigenes in the FCT to resettlement and compensation for loss of economic and agricultural assets.<sup>7</sup> Under the Master Plan, all indigenous villages within five kilometres of the area intended for the Federal Capital City as well as several areas of support, including “the game reserve area; the reservoir watersheds; the plains areas adjacent to the Capital City containing the airport; and the key access points to the

Federal Capital Territory” were to be resettled in other areas of the FCT or in the neighbouring states of Nigeria. Cultural rights are recognised under chapter II of the Nigeria's 1999 Constitution.<sup>8</sup> Despite this constitutional foundation, the AOIs have repeatedly voiced out concern on the seeming rights violations as relate to large scale expropriation of their ancestral lands. The forceful removal of original inhabitants from their ancestral lands, with the resultant destruction of cultural institutions are discriminatory, which rightfully qualifies as violation of their cultural rights in light of plethora of international and regional instruments, including constitutional recognitions.

Indigenous people are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced. The AOIs have suffered cultural repression with expropriation of their ancestral lands. Like other indigenous peoples, the AOIs are distinguished by their ancestral lands, language, culture, and values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. The land is particularly important as the greatest material assets; the main base of their livelihoods, dignity and pride.

Therefore, the problems of the Abuja's OIs over the decades (1976 till date) partially relate to the loss of cultural economy, livelihoods, and heritage, including the lack of participatory processes. By implication, these have also distorted the local indigenous languages, unique knowledge systems and beliefs of the people.

### SUCCESS STORIES AND LEARNING FROM CHRICED'S COHORTS INITIATIVES:



Against the apparent realities that the loss of basic political, cultural and economic rights has taken a serious toll on the lives, livelihoods, economic opportunities and cultural repositories of Abuja's Original Inhabitants, CHRICED's project: *Promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the Federal Capital Territory* addresses the decades-long political, economic and cultural marginalization of the Abuja Original Inhabitants.

Premised on the promotion of AOIs' political, economic and cultural rights, the project empowered FCT Original Inhabitants in protecting and preserving their cultural heritage using drama, and other art forms to engage with the indigenous communities, promote their cultural values, and raise awareness about their environmental rights.<sup>10</sup>

4 No other person or authority was permitted to continue to exercise control over the entire area of the new FCT besides the Federal Government of Nigeria.

5 See, the Federal Capital Territory Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990.

6 See: Julius O. U. (2020). The Vision, Reality and Emerging Issues in the Status of Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria, as A “No Man's Land”, 1976-2020. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Reviews* Vol.10 No.3, September 2020; p. 122 – 132.

7 See, Nwatu, S. I (2012). Legal Framework for the Protection of Socio-Economic Rights in Nigeria. *Nigerian Juridical Review*, Vol. 10

8 The “Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy”; See, *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)*, Lagos: Federal Government Printers.

9 With the support of MacArthur Foundation

10 The buckets of strategic engagements are being facilitated by Center for Transparency and Advocacy (CTA), Abuja Original Inhabitants Youth Empowerment Organisation [AOIYE], and Helpline Foundation amongst other cohort of partners promoting the rights of FCT-OIs communities.



The project amplified Abuja's OIs voices for the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous people, addressing the historical injustices and discrimination that many indigenous communities face in the FCT; including revamping dying cultural values, treasures, and repositories through economic empowerment and preservation of cultural heritage. CHRICED working in partnership with a cohort of Abuja indigenous (and civil society) organizations have thus focused on promoting indigenous rights to preservation of cultural sites and economic justice by interfacing with government agencies, and offering training and empowerment programs for the original inhabitants. The traditional leadership thus acknowledges that these contributions have impacted positively on the capacity of their communities, including deepening social inclusion of the OIs in addressing the over four decades of political, social and economic marginalization resulting from their *statelessness*.<sup>11</sup>

- i. Establishment and operationalization of Abuja OI Pedia,<sup>12</sup> an open-source online platform which allows everyone to access and contribute contents. The portal serves as a platform of cultural repository on the Abuja Original Inhabitants.
- ii. Resuscitation and modernization of traditional skills programs via training and re-training in indigenous crafts with practical poverty reduction values.<sup>13</sup> In the past two years, the helpline foundation (HLF) has empowered 189 participants on traditional skills in weaving traditional attires, and marketing same as part of the OIs' cultural economy.
- iii. Encouraged improved cultural practices: due to rapid urbanization of the FCT arising from the influx of other Nigerians from different parts of the country, the indigenous culture is endangered as the number of those who could transfer traditional skills are fizzling out. The project has however contributed to the revamping and preservation of AOIs cultural practices.
- iv. Preservation of cultural repositories: the urbanization of FCT aided encroachments on heritage sites especially that of the Gbagyi culture. Before the project, the cultural sites of the Gbagyi people were badly encroached upon by people oblivious of the cultural importance and sacredness of the *Asumbo*, the dyeing pits where the ancestors dyed their cloths dated 400 years ago.<sup>14</sup>
- v. Improved Duty-Bearers Responsiveness: the project provided strong platform to amplify voices of AOIs, the engagements have also created awareness about

their issues and built rights-bearers capacities to identify duty-bearers and other relevant government actors on issues of concern to AOIs cultural rights.

- vi. Capacity for community action and positive social change: strengthened AOIs communities' skills for collective action.<sup>15</sup> Although only a few change initiatives have been carried out at the community, nevertheless, most communities have planned step-down training to percolate and transfer skills on negotiation and understanding of the Community Development Agreements [CDA]<sup>16</sup> to reach other communities through the Theatre for Development Drama.

Despite the CHRICED's cohorts' success stories, there are still **gaps and challenges** in ongoing efforts to redress the expropriations of the cultural rights of Abuja original inhabitants as highlighted below.

- i. Loss of cultural heritage and sites compounded by inaccessible roads to many remote communities. The involvement of some OIs in the expropriations of cultural sites because of poverty, low consciousness, and exposure on cultural rights issue.
- ii. Failure of governments to enforce relevant laws, policies, and ensure adequate regulation and monitoring of activities of mining businesses and land grabbers; leading to indiscriminate destruction of the environment and the land by mining and other businesses.
- iii. Opaque and non-inclusive CDA processes, often leading to a situation where majority of community members are unaware of the existence of such an agreement or its content. In some instances, some community leaders are tricked into signing bad agreements by the companies.
- iv. Lack of transparency, accountability, and justice in Land administration system: the FCT Land administration has always been shrouded in secrecy with OIs not properly taken into consideration before their lands are wishfully taken away by FCTA officials.
- v. Abuja original inhabitants often have fewer choices when Government officials, estate builders and some well-connected private citizens knock at their doors with land papers or show up with armed policemen and bulldozers to sack entire villages or forcefully grab their farmlands with little or no compensation.
- vi. Inadequate public awareness to the plights of Abuja's OIs amongst FCT residents at large; including mechanisms for solidarization to promote the rights of Abuja Original Inhabitants.

11 See, Welcome Address by the Secretary, Garki Traditional Council, Elder Lazarus Nuhu Nyaholo, on the Occasion of Coronation of Prof. John Palfrey, President Macarthur Foundation as Byefechi' Nugba (Hero of Justice) by His Royal Highness Sa'Peyi of Garki, Abuja, October 29, 2023

12 www.abujaoipedia.org The portal is AOIYEO's flagship contribution which allow people to search and find diverse information about Abuja's nine indigenous tribes. The original inhabitants of Abuja have a very rich and intriguing culture, with a captivating history of migration, and economic and leadership strides, and they have also experienced memorable breakthroughs and setbacks in their fight against marginalization and the injustices they have suffered since the relocation of Nigerian capital city to Abuja in 1976.

13 Led by HLF, the initiative has improved the AOI's livelihood in great measures against what they used to be before the project.

14 The cultural heritage was almost lost, but HLF strategic step helped reclaimed the land, rehabilitated the heritage sites, and ameliorated the remaining Dye pits; renovated the Asumbo with up to 25 die pits available for continuous use.

15 Facilitated by CTA, Communities could clearly state that series of training carried out has significantly met the need of the community.

16 The CDAs are agreements mandated by law that mining businesses are to negotiate, reach agreements, and sign with communities where they are operational.

## Recommendations

1. Ensure AOIs' rights are prioritized, including remediation of their human rights violation, with effective and accessible grievances redress mechanism to anticipate and resolve conflicts arising from environmental and human rights gaps, and achieving social co-benefits for both the indigenous inhabitants and other residents.
2. Establish Abuja Original Inhabitants Development Commission (AOIDC) as a special purpose development vehicle.<sup>17</sup> The AOIDC, as a deliberate interventionist mechanism, will address not only the immediate, and medium-term consequences of the historical marginalization of the AOIs, but also begin to address the longer-term development of the AOI communities, including investment in human capital development, as well as the infrastructure to support delivery of accessible basic services, and sustainable socioeconomic growth.
3. Develop policy framework, with institutional mechanism and sustainable investment model for auditing of all AOIs cultural sites, their restoration, preservation and protection with the full participation of AOIs.
4. Collate and Digitalize historical pasts to enhance the AOIs cultural economy.
5. Implement the FCT OIs Charter of Demands. And Undertake a comprehensive, participatory and holistic consequential evaluation of FCT rapid urbanization on the conditions and status of OIs with a view to outlining a clear program of actions on redressing and addressing the situation on the basis of justice, equity, social inclusion and fairness, in favour of original inhabitants.
6. Domesticating all relevant international instruments, including the review of the 1976 Abuja Master Plan to incorporate all OIs communities in the City Plan.
7. Review the FCT Land administration system to ensure transparency, equity, social justice, fairness, and social inclusion, for the protection of AOIs human [civil and political, economic, and sociocultural] rights.
8. Establish a mechanism for environmental devastation auditing and ensuring environmental remediation.<sup>18</sup>
9. Ensure the integration of the culture, tradition and beliefs of the indigenous peoples into the education system.

## Conclusion

Cultural rights are one of most tendentious issues in human rights discourse. The emergence of the Abuja as Nigeria's capital saw discriminations in the exercise of rights, destruction of culture, forceful removal of original inhabitants from their lands, and desecration of historical cultural heritages and sites. Essentially, the Abuja's OIs cultural and environmental rights have been largely overlooked, ignored, or threatened by various forms of development and urbanization. The main rights issues revolve around the loss of ancestral land, access to cultural sites, environmental devastation, and degradation due to mining and other extractive activities; non recognition and relegation of the culture (cultural practices); disruption and destruction of livelihoods, local livelihoods systems, and the capacity to sustain existing local livelihoods processes and systems.<sup>19</sup>

The inconclusiveness of resettlement and reintegration programs meant that severe systemic constraints have been placed on the ability of the original inhabitants to participate fully in the political, socioeconomic and cultural processes of the FCT historically, causing their

current status of exclusion and marginalisation. Hence, the very nature of the events and processes around the creation of Abuja as Nigeria's federal capital has led to systemic marginalization and exclusion of the original inhabitants from political, economic, and sociocultural processes of the FCT.

Nigeria joins the rest of the world to pledge her commitments towards protecting human rights. However, Mega-projects, such as movement of Nigeria's FCT to Abuja, have been criticized of "leaving vulnerable segments of the society underserved, or unserved, perpetuating exclusion, and exacerbating inequality between population groups." Perhaps, the more reason why "The human rights framework helps us to understand inequality as a function of conflicting power relations, with a focus on disparities caused by discrimination." Thus, "Human right law directs our attention to the root causes of exclusion and requires legislative, budgetary, administrative and other measures to remove access barriers, with the ultimate aim of achieving substantive (de facto) equality."<sup>20</sup>

17 As initially muted by the Original Inhabitants Development Association of Abuja (OIDA is an umbrella association of OI development associations) during the 2014 FCT Heritage Day, "The proposed AOIDC should be statutory and derive its funding from 30% of all sales accruing from lands within the FCT, when established AOIDC should deal with the lingering issues of relocation, resettlement and compensation for all project affected communities and persons." See, Premium Times, January 6, 2014

18 This will involve creating transparent, inclusive and participatory mechanisms and processes of negotiating and signing CDAs with clearly spelt out accountability framework for its implementation. This will enhance strict monitoring and enforcement of compliance.

19 These constraints are further reinforced by issues around political representation, especially around nature and character of representation, and access to opportunities for representation; as well as issues around responsive local self-government.

20 "Inequality is one of the most persistent human rights challenges of our times. One of the central purposes of human rights law, and the accountability mechanisms built around it, is to fight discrimination and promote equality." See, UN (2018). The Other Infrastructure Gaps: Sustainability (Human Rights and Environmental Perspectives).



Issued by:

RESOURCE CENTRE  
for HUMAN RIGHTS  
& CIVIC EDUCATION

With support from:

The John D. and  
Catherine T. MacArthur  
Foundation





## Strengthening Abuja Original Inhabitants Traditional Justice System in Combating Sexual and Gender-based Violence

(with special focus on the rights of FCT Indigenous' Women)

### Introduction

This thematic brief documents learning from the **Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED)** support to strengthen the Abuja Original Inhabitants traditional justice system to combat sexual and gender-based violence at the community levels in the Federal Capital Territory.<sup>1</sup> All over the world, violence against women is still perpetuated despite advances in human rights laws.<sup>2</sup> *One in every three women experience physical, sexual or intimate-partner violence; are victims of trafficking or are subject to harmful social norms.*<sup>3</sup> Thus, Sexual and Gender Based- Violence (SGBV) is seen as a public health challenge, a human rights violation, and a barrier to civic, social, political, and economic participation. In the context of Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs), SGBV accentuates the prevalent burdens of human rights violations arising from the surreptitious structural exclusions. The indigenous women bear the brunt of societal pains and gender bias given the preexisting discriminations. From the brunt of demolition to socio-economic marginalization, the vulnerability of AOIs' women to SGBV remains very high.



**STOP  
GENDER  
VIOLENCE**

## Scope of the Problem (Understanding the Nature, Character and Impacts of SGBV)

As one of the most persistent and widespread human rights violations globally, sexual and gender-based violence affects almost every society across the world and represents a significant impediment to development. It presents a challenge that significantly constrains women's autonomy and opportunities. According to a World Bank assessment,<sup>4</sup> gender-based violence is one of the most oppressive forms of gender inequality, posing a fundamental barrier to the equal participation of women and men in social, economic, and political spheres. The economic costs of SGBV include expenditures on service provision, foregone income for women and their families, decreased productivity, and negative impacts on human capital formation, which are burdensome to developing economies.

Due to the high prevalence of female survivors, some organizations use the terms *violence against women [and girls]* to describe the focus of their SGBV-related work.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the SGBV indicators include intimate partner

violence, non-partner sexual assault, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child marriage etc. Such violence impedes gender equality and the achievement of a range of development outcomes.

*Apparently, SGBV affects both men and women, but women are much more vulnerable because violence reflects and reinforces existing gender inequalities.* Put differently, anybody can be a victim of SGBV based on their gender identity, but women and girls are mostly affected. While much of the focus of SGBV is rightly on women, sexual violence can also be directed against men. Data shows that 14% of the SGBV survivors who reported to the Sexual Assault Referral Centers (SARCs) were males and most often boys under 14 years old. Many believe that official statistics vastly under-represent the number of male survivors; as male survivors seem less likely than female to report abuses.<sup>6</sup>

1 Implemented by Abiodun Essiet Initiative for Girls (AEIG)

2 See, Preface to *Gender Violence: Women Victims in Man's World*, Prabhakar, Vani [ed.] (2012). *Gender Violence: Women Victims in Man's World*. New Delhi: Wisdom Press

3. See NDHS 2018

4 See, Qasim, Farwah; Asubaro, Wumi (2019). *Gender-Based Violence: An Analysis of the Implications for the Nigeria for Women Project (English)*.

Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/731521555064925144/Gender-Based-Violence-An-Analysis-of-the-Implications-for-the-Nigeria-for-Women-Project>

5 *Gender-Based Violence: An Analysis of the Implications for the Nigeria For Women Project*

**SGBV's National Data and the FCT's Situation**

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS 2018) found that 31% of women aged 15 – 49 years had suffered sexual violence and nine (9%) percent had also experienced physical violence. The 2018 NDHS also discovered that four (4%) percent suffered sexual violence before 18 years. In the context of FCT, 35.3% of women aged 15 – 49 have experienced physical violence by 15 years of age. About eight (8%) percent experienced physical violence in the last 12 months; three (3%) per cent of women aged 15 – 49 have also experienced sexual violence. Nationally, more than half of women (55%) who have experienced physical or sexual violence never sought help to stop the violence; for those who did, women's own families were the most common source of help (73%). Only one (1%) per cent sought help from doctors or medical personnel, the police, or lawyers.<sup>7</sup>

**Theory of Change and Actions on Combating SGBV at the FCT'S OIs Communities' level**

Given the underreporting of SGBV cases and trust in traditional structures at the grassroots levels, the theory of change revolves around strengthening traditional institutions across the six area councils for social justice delivery on SGBV with a focus on young women and girls, and people with disabilities. Traditional rulers are the first and sometimes the only point for reporting gender violence cases in most indigenous communities. This is because the people trust the community chiefs and rulers, and getting justice is faster and less costly. But unfortunately, most traditional rulers are not acquainted with how to handle cases of gender-based violence. The

strategy invigorated traditional justice systems<sup>8</sup> to address SGBV incidents through preventive and restorative justice, raising awareness especially for persons with disabilities and indigenous women to achieve socially inclusive dispute resolutions. To this end, the CHRICED-powered intervention empowered traditional rulers with skills to handle SGBV cases.<sup>9</sup> For example, given the sensitivity of the sexual abuse cases, the traditional leadership have been sensitized to be mindful of addressing rape or other sexual abuse cases in a town-hall meeting which would further likely traumatize the victim.

**Debunking misconceptions/ myths of what constitutes SGBV**

The conventional thinking within the communities presupposes husbands have unfettered right to demand sex from their wives. Feedback indicated that both male and female did not view the concept of marital rape as an abnormality. To them, since the husbands had fulfilled the cultural requirements and paid the necessary bridal prices, their wives got to be available for sex whenever needed. However, the intervention empowered the community traditional structures to unlearn harmful practices and attitudes such as marrying off female raped victims to their victimizers as claimed by a community chief, wives' batteries, etc. to respect sexual and reproductive health rights of women.<sup>10</sup>

**COMBATING SGBV THROUGH TRADITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (LEARNING AND SUCCESS STORIES)**



The CHRICED's cohort Abiodun Essiet Initiative for Girls (AEIG) intervention has been impactful. "Gender-based violence has been reduced because community members can now observe how well the traditional rulers handle cases. In addition, watching the abuse perpetrators go to prison has made people even more vigilant." AEIG addressed over 25 cases of wife battery and child rape in partnership with other organizations, such as the FCT Traditional Rulers' Wives Association, NAPTIP and other relevant government agencies. Other

success stories are highlighted below:

- i. The school outreach sensitized over 800 students, and contributed in creating more awareness within the school environment and their communities to break the culture of silence by speaking out; including instituting school based, students-led anti-SGBV watchdogs' ambassadors to make the schools environment safer for girls.
- ii. The capacity development programme empowered over 150 communities' structures (traditional rulers

6 Ibid., CF. WHO (2002). World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva: WHO Publication.

7 See NDHS 2018

8 More often, traditional justice system is understood conventionally as consisting of historically generated rules and norms. In African societies, it is referred to all those mechanisms that African peoples or communities have used in managing conflicts/disputes, including crimes and criminalities since time immemorial and which have been passed from one generation to the other.

9 Abiodun Essiet Initiative for Girls trained over 150 traditional rulers from the six area councils within the FCT on case management, reporting, and how well to address the survivors of SGBV. As a result, some community rulers and members for the first time realized that spousal rape, battery, intimate partner violence and FGM are forms of abuse that should not be dismissed or downplayed as family issues.

10 The women were astounded to learn they could report their husbands for beating them or forcing them into having sex without consent as they never considered such domestic violence or marital pain as abnormal having endured them for a while. After all, they had seen it happen to their mothers and



and their wives, Community Development Committee members and officers in charge of Primary Health Centers) on ways to respond to SGBV cases and survivors in the six area councils. building skills on the restorative justice system as gatekeepers in their communities.

- iii. The public awareness sensitization (through radio programs and jingles) as well as the town hall meetings conducted raised level of communities' awareness and sensitized the general public on SGBV issues emphasizing the need to report the perpetrators and promoting dedicated SARCs' hotline numbers for reporting incidents.
- iv. Accountability mechanisms were developed and deployed with action plan as well as scorecard to monitor the commitment of traditional rulers to end

SGBV in their communities in the FCT. The scorecard also helps to build, strengthen and reinvigorate the network of SGBV responders around the various traditional and community institutions for an effective and impactful referral system.

- v. Sexual Assault Referral Centers' readiness assessment conducted with recommendations on improving awareness of SARCs services and activities widely disseminated to communities and other relevant partners.
- vi. Sustained strategic engagement with government agencies and relevant stakeholders on prioritizing SGBV's funding needs in their budget, including provision of safe shelter for survivors.

## Identified Gaps and Challenges:

- a. Nigerian government's response to SGBV and its prevention is multi-sectoral involving multiple agencies (MDAs) at both national and subnational levels.<sup>11</sup> However, the peculiarities of FCT with obscure second tier level of democratic governance presents institutional challenges and gaps for effective state-led response.
- b. Harmful cultural practices (attitude, behaviours, and norms) that support violence against women and restrict women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Inadequate awareness on the part of survivors and communities about their rights, and on redress mechanisms.
- c. Poor coordination and institutional weaknesses among response agencies, including around capacity, expertise, knowledge, personnel, equipment and facilities, among others.



## Lessons learnt to improving SGBV's response:

1. Participatory approach aided by active listening skills produced impactful results in debunking huge misperception of what constitutes SGBV at the community levels.
2. Learning, unlearning and relearning harmful cultural practices and or attitude are crucial to address preconceived views about SGBV held by the community members.
3. Strategic stakeholders' engagements, including capacity building of traditional rulers, and their wives, religious leaders, student outreach, etc. invigorated the whole of the society approach, particularly traditional justice systems in combating SGBV cases as most community members report cases to them. This approach helped in getting everyone involved in understanding the issues and committed to combat the SGBV cases and prevention at the community levels.
4. Media mainstreaming facilitated improved awareness on the need to break the culture of silence on SGBV and speak out.

grandmothers.

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Health oversees the management of SGBV health issues, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is responsible for ensuring that policies on gender equity are developed and implemented; the MWASD, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, is also responsible for education and gender awareness training in both formal and informal educational processes; the Ministry of Justice is responsible for providing legal support services for survivors and their families.

## Recommendations

1. Sustain community structures' capacity strengthening in handling SGBV cases with adequate knowledge of various MDAs to be carried along in such cases.
2. Increase capacity of response points, especially traditional rulers and health facilities on VAPP Act grassroots implementation, as well as SGBV care for persons with disability and original inhabitants of the FCT.
3. Ensure effective coordination across agencies and institutions responding to SGBV at both FCT and six area councils' levels. This will encourage synergy amongst institutions responding to SGBV at all levels to ensure effective response to cases of SGBV in the FCT.
4. Promote zero-tolerance for SGBV, including orientation of law enforcement officers, and health workers on case management. The police and other law enforcement agencies should be proactive in dealing with perpetrators, and survivors should be given proper care during interrogation; including provision of safe space (shelters) for SGBV survivors; with free medical services for SGBV survivors.
5. Prioritize SGBV cases for speedy prosecution, prolong trials often wear out and frustrate the survivors, and furthering their traumatization during court processes. Survivors should not be asked to pay for case files and other things at the investigation level in police station to report cases.
6. Increase the Sexual Assault Referral Centers, at least one in each of the six Area Councils; and link or integrate selected PHCs across the communities with the SARCs for an effective referral system.
7. Make SARC hotline phone number functional leveraging on community referral; and explore a more sustainable way of running the SARCs to guarantee continuity of services and availability of commodities and drugs, including posting of permanent staffs to deepen uptake of services.



Women in Kano State led by CHRICED march in unity, commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls in 2022 —a powerful display of strength and solidarity.

## Conclusion

Despite the growing policy and legislative measures adopted in favour of gender justice in contemporary societies, countless women continue to be victims of violence. Beyond the formal criminal justice response, including bottom-up naming and shaming approaches, the needs of SGBV's survivors are better addressed historically and the interventions of stakeholders at the community levels are critical for promoting local participation. As well conscientized in this brief, SGBV cuts across geographical, cultural, socio-economic, ethnic or other lines. However, its prevalence and effects cut deeper for the poor and marginalized communities. The poor indigenous communities within the FCT continue to struggle with basic amenities, lacking adequate knowledge and resources to report or follow up on cases of abuse once in court. Without legal support, the cases drag, and most complainants give up or "settle out of court" – the latter being code for the assailant going scot-free or paying a token fine. Therefore, the CHRICED's supported interventions documented in this thematic brief presented evidence to underscore the fact that traditional justice systems could play critical roles in combating SGBV for both the victims and society at large if well capacitated.

### About

**CHRICED**

Established in 2006, with offices in Abuja and Kano, the Resource Center for Human Rights and Civic Education is a registered Nigerian non-profit promoting human rights and advancing a democratic, representative, and inclusive political culture in Nigeria. CHRICED work is anchored on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the Nigerian Constitution. CHRICED is a reputable organization with a track record of partnering with foundations, religious organizations, and development partners across Europe and North America, including Bishopliches Hilfswerk MISEREOR, e.V (the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Cooperation) and the Katholische Zentrastelle für Entwicklungshilfe e.V (Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and Open Society Foundation, to mention a few.

For core programming, CHRICED uses civics, research and publication, advocacy, information sharing, grassroots organizing, networking and outreach to mobilize vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population to implement innovative grassroots-focused programs aimed at energizing community action to resist injustice, curb corruption and foster accountability; and bring about fundamental changes in societal norms and behaviors, which fuel injustices and corruption.

Over the years, CHRICED has amassed the requisite experience and track record in project management in the areas of human rights promotion, deepening accountability and mobilizing marginalised groups to amplify their concerns in governance processes. In terms of strategic alliances, CHRICED has a strong relationship with community actors across Nigeria, including youth networks, indigenous people's groups, farmers' collective, women activists, traditional leaders and social influencers. CHRICED also has a name recognition, which would boost its ability to convene stakeholders on the demand and supply side of human rights, including inhabitant self-determination groups. Also, as a result of the consistency of its messaging on human rights, and accountable governance, CHRICED has become a credible voice in the debate on the democratic process in Nigeria.

*CHRICED's key philosophy is that civic education dissemination is cardinal to the empowerment of the citizens.*



Issued by:

RESOURCE CENTRE  
for HUMAN RIGHTS  
& CIVIC EDUCATION

With support from:

The John D. and  
Catherine T. MacArthur  
Foundation



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