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STORY COLLECTION on
SLCVAWG
COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS
PROJECT

2ND EDITION

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ABOUT THE SLOC VAWG PROJECT

Strengthening the Capacities of Local Women's Rights Organisations to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls (**SLOC VAWG**) Project, is a 3-year project funded by Ford Foundation to support Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) in their work of advancing gender equality in Nigeria. Specifically, the project seeks to provide technical and financial supports to WROs as they seek to challenge oppressive socio-cultural norms and practices that exacerbate gender-based violence (GBV) and the fear of it across 3 states -Gombe, Imo states and the FCT. Through capacity building and sub-granting, the project works towards improving organisational and institutional capabilities of WROs to strategically design, implement and manage actions on GBV for vulnerable women and girls thus contributing to women and girls living with reduced violence and fear of it in project states.

The SLOC Project is at the end of its second year, and targets 12 women's rights organisations comprising six NGOs and 6 CBOs respectively. These organisations are empowering and partnering with the communities they serve to address harmful traditional practices that exacerbate violence against women and girls.

Using a multi-pronged approach to community engagement, they are working with community level committee, girls and boys school clubs, women peer education circles, men groups, faith-based groups, age-grades and traditional councils among others to shift harmful archaic and patriarchal perceptions that put women and girls at risk. Through strategic community wide awareness creation, interrogation of the origins of these practices, elimination of some of them and setting up sanctions to curb future actions, the SLOC-VAWG project partners across Gombe, Imo States and the FCT are beginning to record significant success and change.



**END IT
NOW!**

AN END TO FGM; COMMUNITY ACTION PAYS OFF

PARTNER:

Communal Care Center & National Council for Women's Societies (NCWS), Imo State



History was made on the 7th day of May 2022 as Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), an age-long tradition, was publicly abolished in Ozuh Community, Oru-East LGA, Imo State.

Before this declaration, the act of cutting the genitals of female children is widely acknowledged by both men and women in the community as a vital tool for curbing promiscuity at adulthood. Despite the domestication of the Child Rights law which abolished Female Genital mutilation/cutting in Imo State, the business continued to flourish as maternity homes and traditional birth attendants kept at it, while some

people revert to numbing or massaging the female genitals with petroleum gel to achieve the same aim.

The Process

In February 2021, Communal Care Center (CCC) extended the 'End FGM Initiative' to Ozuh Community. The organisation identified critical stakeholders and duty-bearers within the community and engaged them on the ills of (FGM/C) through intensive sensitization, training workshops, and townhall meetings. Leveraging on existing community structure, a VAWG Response Committee referred to as 'Ogene Committee' was set up comprising members of the Igwe's Council, the women group, men group, church group, community vigilante and youth group. The committee was saddled with the responsibility of formulating strategies to be used in addressing harmful cultural norms and practices fuelling violence against women and girls, especially Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, with a view to ending them.

The committee swung into action, engaging the Igwe and his cabinet, community village heads and women groups in the community. They conducted outreaches round the community targeting churches, markets, maternity homes, and traditional birth attendants, intimating them of the risk involved in FGM/C both to the victim, family, and the community. They also made it known to the populace that FGM/C is a criminal offence and has been abolished in the state; anyone caught in the act will be prosecuted in accordance with the law.



The Big Break

The efforts of CCC and Ogene Committee yielded positive results. After many sensitizations and deliberations with community members, the Traditional Ruling Council of Ozuh-Omuma community, under the leadership of His Royal Highness, Eze Philip Uzodimma, the Ononehi 1 of Ozuh community and Chairman of the Traditional Council in Oru-East LGA publicly abolished Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the community. A letter to that effect was made public and circulated to all the churches, villages, maternities, schools, health centres and hospitals in the community, while the town-crier went round the whole of Ozuh community to herald the new law passed by the Igwe and his cabinet.

The Response Team have constituted themselves into community surveillance team to monitor and track adherence to the new law, as well as report perpetrators of the dastardly act to relevant authorities for appropriate action.

Experience has proven that the impact of community response committees in communities where FGM/C thrives cannot be overemphasised. This is clearly depicted in the success documented in Amawuihe community, another Local Government Area in Imo State.



A Mother's Love

Nnenna, a civil servant and mother of 3 welcomed her first daughter in October 2021. As is the custom in Ohum Village of Amawuihe Community, baby girls are to be circumcised on the 7th day of birth. As an upholder of tradition and a dutiful grandmother, Nnenna's mother was already on ground to ensure that the baby girl gets circumcised. However, something had changed. Nnenna had been exposed to the right information on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).

FGM/C has always been a tradition that was practiced with pride in the community. Men initiate it for their daughters with the excuse that it will stop promiscuity, while

mothers believe that it aids smooth childbirth. This practice is mostly handled by some auxiliary nurses and traditional birth attendants who are invited and paid by parents of the girls. Despite the community recording 2 cases of loss of lives due to excessive bleeding from FGM/C, the practice persisted.

Nnenna, realizing what was about to happen to her precious little one, recalled the information shared at one of the programs she attended on ending VAWG in communities facilitated by National Council for Women's Societies (NCWS), Imo State, through the SLOC-VAWG project. She hurriedly went to the Chairperson of the VAWG response team mentioned during the program called the Local Interactive Group (LIG) to lay a complaint. The chairperson swung into action by visiting the house, enlightening Nnenna's mother, and warning against the practice.

Although it seemed at the moment that the storm had been calmed, Nnenna's mother still proceeded with her plans by inviting an auxiliary nurse renowned for performing FGM in the community. On noticing her arrival, Nnenna called the LIG chairperson who rushed to the scene and stopped the process. The community was surprised that this practice can be stopped at all, as they reiterated the losses that the community has recorded because of FGM/C. Nnenna is now an advocate of ending FGM/C in the community. Also, FGM/C is now prohibited in the community.

CCC and NCWS will continue to increase the capacity of these committees to strengthen responses towards having FGM/C free communities in Imo state.



The POWER of a PACK

PARTNER:

Virgin Heart Foundation (VHF), Imo State

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t Patricks Mission School located at Ogbeh Ahaizu, Mbaize LGA in Imo State has had a history of male students constituting the highest percentage of school leadership with few girls on board to assist them. This was due to the general assumption that males are more eligible for leadership positions than females.

This situation seemed normal until 2020/2021 school session, when Virgin Heart Foundation (VHF) chose the school as one of its project schools on the SLOC-VAWG project . VHF focused on addressing socio-cultural norms that enables VAWG in school environment, and this led to the establishment and inauguration of

girls' rights club on September 19th, 2021, comprising of 79 Peer Educators in the school.

Using an Adolescent Peer Education approach, members of the club were equipped with knowledge and skills to facilitate monthly meetings, trainings, and organize peer sessions with fellow students through in-and-out of school activities which include dramas, quiz competition, and presentations on issues of VAWG. These were complemented with the establishment of Boys' Peer Educator's club consisting of 40 male students who educate other boys against negative masculinity and the effect of patriarchy.

A resultant effect of these activities is the enlightenment of girls on their rights which translated into increased outspokenness and boldness to challenge practices that violate such rights within the school environment. One of such is the use of corporal punishment targeting girls' buttocks. Students, especially girls, started challenging this norm as an infringement on their bodily integrity and a form of sexual harassment. Led by 12-year-old Vivian A. Onwukwe in JSS 3, the issue caught the attention of the school management, and a rule was made against such act with accompanying penalty. VHF is working with the school to ensure proper documentation and institutionalization of this.

The viability of the girls and their solution-oriented mind-set became productive as it earned them a place in the school's leadership space. For the first time ever, the school appointed 15 female students, who are mainly peer educators, as school prefects. This is historic because for the first time, the school has more female prefects (15) than males (10).

The school reiterated that the decision to appoint more girls was necessitated by VHF's intervention and is also part of the school's efforts towards promoting gender equality.

ENTERING THE RESTRICTED SPACE

**-FIRST WOMAN
IN THE KALTUNGO
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

PARTNER:

Kningingale Women Health Initiative
(KWHI), Gombe State



Kaltungo Chieftdom is the largest of the Chieftdoms in Gombe state. Located in the southern part of the state, it comprises two LGAs (Kaltungo and Shongom). The Chieftdom has different tribes such as Awak, Kamo, Tangale, Pero and chonge tribes. Although the people speak different languages, they have similarities in their culture and beliefs. Out of Kaltungo chieftdom's sixteen (16) political wards, KWHI is implementing the SLOC-VAWG project in six (6) wards; three (3) from each of the two LGAs of the chieftdom.

Kaltungo Chieftdom is not new to experiencing violence against women and girls (VAWG) such as rape, battery, denial of inheritance, male child preference, denial of educational opportunities, women exclusion in decision making at family and community levels, and harmful widowhood practices among others. These various forms of violence are exacerbated by socio-cultural norms that have lingered for decades and left unaddressed especially because there are no laws that promote and protect the rights of women and girls, and with fewer women in the decision-making spaces at the community level. Hence, these norms are normalised, and community leaders cannot be held accountable for their inaction.

In response to these, Kningtingale Women Health Initiative (KWHI) implemented strategic activities through the SLOC-VAWG project in the communities. Activities included advocacies, community sensitization and awareness through flash mob/drama, street announcements, rallies, radio jingles, and talk shows. These were complemented with capacity building for traditional leaders, religious leaders, women and women peer educators, schoolteachers, head girls of schools, men and boys, and security personnel. At the heart of these interventions is the message that supporting and protecting the rights of women and girls involves putting measures in place to break those cultural barriers that uphold violence against women and girls. KWHI also emphasised that nipping these issues in the bud should start with women inclusion in decision-making at the community level.

Through the organizations intensive and rigorous engagements with critical stakeholders, the council of elders became convinced, and this informed their decision to appoint a woman, Mrs. Lois S. Yerima, into the council on the 14th of May 2022. She will function as a member of a nine-man committee achievement because the council of elders is the highest decision-making body in the chieftdom, and this is the first time in history that a woman is appointed into the decision-making body chieftdom,

and this is the first time in history that a woman is appointed into the decision-making body of the chieftdom.

This development has given room for women to be heard and their voices reflected in the upward review of traditional marriages towards establishing and enforcing punitive measures for perpetrators of violence against women and girls through community bylaws that protect women's and girls' rights in the Chieftdom.



THE SILVER LINING

PARTNER:

Initiative for Women and Girls Rights Advancement (IWOGRA), FCT.

Hanatu¹ is a 32-year-old mother of three children married to Illiyasu in Jikwoyi community, Abuja, until her husband deserted her and the children without any means of subsistence. Being an indigent woman living in a community that does not support interference in marital disputes, Hanatu depended on petty trading to care for her children. Life was hard, but she forged ahead until one of her children fell seriously ill.

This coincided with the period that IWOGRA commenced implementation of the SLOC-VAWG project in Jikwoyi community. The project engaged traditional leaders,

religious leaders, women, girls, men, and boys on the need to support women and girls and work collectively to achieve a violence free community where women feel accepted, safe, and cared for. The community's receptiveness to the message gave rise to the formation of the Violence Against Women and Girls Community Response Team (VAWG-CRT) comprising community women, girls, men, boys, cabinet members, and the woman leader of Jikwoyi community. The VAWG-CRT were trained as activists deployed to work as community-based action teams to challenge community attitudes, spread understanding of law, counsel couples affected by intimate partner violence, and support with referrals to relevant social services providers. The team also works with the traditional leader of the community to fashion out ways of addressing VAWG in the community.

Life stood still for Hanatu as all her efforts to help her son recuperate proved abortive. Realizing that life was gradually slipping out of the poor child primarily because she could not afford hospital bills, Hanatu, left with no other option, ran to the VAWG-CRT. Unlike the typical Jikwoyi community where everyone was responsible for themselves, the team rallied round her and took the child to the hospital. Despite multiple rejections by some health service providers based on the severity of the illness, the team did not relent until they found a good government hospital that admitted the child.

The child's situation required an urgent surgery with an exorbitant bill (NGN 300,000). However, the selflessness and solidarity demonstrated by the community in line with their commitment towards protecting women and girls from the effects of GBV, the hospital gave a 33.3% discount (NGN 100,000) for the surgery. To complete the funds, the VAWG-CRT mobilized community members and raised the balance for the surgery within a short period. The surgery was successfully done, and the child recovered swiftly.



**I CHOOSE TO
CHALLENGE GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE**

In all these, Hanatu's husband was contacted by the VAWG-CRT but he refused to take responsibility. The team has since transferred his case to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in persons (NAPTIP) who has commenced investigations with active plans to get him arrested and hold him accountable for neglect.

Hanatu is forever grateful for the communal efforts which saved her son's life! IWOGRA is committed to ensuring that NAPTIP gets Hanatu's husband to take on his responsibilities. This communal effort demonstrated by Jikwoyi residents was made possible through the community interventions on the SLOC-VAWG project. IWOGRA is committed to providing support towards ensuring that these gains are sustained.



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