

# **RESOURCE MATERIAL**

**For**  
**The Training of Christian Stakeholders**  
**On Eliminating**  
**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**  
**in Nigeria**

**Produced and Published**  
**by**  
**Lux Terra Leadership Foundation**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The major part of this *Resource Material* was adopted from three earlier publications of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, namely, a Training Manual and a Facilitator's Guide on *Christianity and the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls*, as well as *Protecting Women and Girls: Christian Perspectives*. They were produced between 2021 and 2022, in collaboration with the Development Institute of West Africa (DIWA), and with support from the *Spotlight Project*. This material has been adapted to suit the planned Training Workshops meant to equip a cross-section of Christian stakeholders that will work towards the Elimination of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria.

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We are grateful to Ford Foundation, for supporting the printing and free distribution of this *Resource Material* to the facilitators and stakeholders that will be involved in the workshops to be hosted by Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, as well as in the step-down enlightenment campaign and advocacy activities that will be organised by the initial trainees.

Finally, we render all thanks and praise to the Almighty God whose Son Jesus Christ came into the world to redeem humanity from sin, and all its consequences, including the various forms of violence against the most vulnerable of his children. Indeed, Jesus Christ declared at the beginning of his ministry that he has come “to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to captives...to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour” (Luke 4:18-19). May His name be glorified forever. Amen.

Rev. Fr. George EHUSANI  
Executive Director, Lux Terra Leadership Foundation

**“The measure of any society  
is how it treats  
its women and girls.”**

***Michelle Obama***

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## INTRODUCTION

**S**exual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is one of the world's most prevalent human rights violations. It knows no social, economic or national boundaries. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime (UNFPA, 2021). SGBV undermines survivors' and victims' health, dignity, security and autonomy because it often involves acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, or the threat of such acts, resulting in coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Yet, such acts have remained often shrouded in a culture of silence across the world.

In response to the increasing report of SGBV in Nigeria, Lux Terra Leadership Foundation resolved to hold a series of experiential training workshops and interventions with Christian religious and community leaders, including priests and pastors, as well as women and youth leaders.

It is expected that at the end of the planned training workshops, the consciousness of participants would have been awakened to the devastating consequences of SGBV; that they would readily make public commitments to never be involved in any action that is perceived to promote SGBV, and do all in their power to end the menace in their spheres of influence. In other words, while an individual attitudinal change on the part of the participants is a necessary step in fighting against the acts of sexual and gender violence that many people suffer in the Nigerian society, programme participants would be expected to do much more. They would be expected to spread the message through their engagement in the delivery of sermons, talks and conference presentations, as well as their engagements in such policy and culture change advocacy initiatives that are geared towards eliminating SGBV in society.

The workshops will focus on exploring Christian resources, including scripture texts and teachings that affirm the equal dignity and integrity of all human beings, and those that condemn all forms of violence and abuse of power that denigrate those persons that are created in the image of God, and are destined for eternal union with God. Such Christian texts and teachings will be used to interrogate cultural (and sometimes religious) beliefs and practices that tend to promote or tolerate SGBV.

The workshops will explore what legal and policy frameworks for the elimination of SGBV already exist, and what more could be done to strengthen those frameworks. Effective and strategic communication and advocacy mechanisms for raising of public awareness and garnering the support of all stakeholders towards the elimination of SGBV will be a critical part of the workshop engagements. Finally, participants will be introduced to the basics of psychological first aid as well as necessary referral services for helping

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survivors of SGBV. Thus, the core modules will include:

- I. Understanding SGBV
- II. Religious and Cultural Beliefs and Practices related to SGBV
- III. Legal and Policy Frameworks for the Elimination of SGBV
- IV. Preventing SGBV through Strategic Communication and Advocacy Mechanisms
- V. Introduction to Psychological First Aid and Referral Services for the support of survivors of SGBV

### **How this Resource Material is Organised**

This document has been put together as a campaign tool for trainees and would-be campaigners against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria. It provides some foundational information on the various dimensions of SGBV, the abundant Christian scriptural texts and teachings that condemn this form of violence, the existing legal and policy frameworks for eliminating the menace in our society, and strategic communication mechanisms for the required attitudinal as well as policy and culture change campaign and advocacy work. The document is arranged as follows:

#### **Section 1: Understanding SGBV and the Challenge of Eliminating it**

This section contains a concise body of knowledge on SGBV and the training modules. Facilitators and Trainees are encouraged to read other related materials to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the issues.

#### **Section 2: A Guide to Facilitation and Activities**

This section is designed to guide both facilitators and trainees, as they plan their initial training events as well as post-training step-down activities.

#### **Appendix A: Biblical Texts Supporting the Elimination of SGBV**

#### **Appendix B: Christian Narratives Supporting the Elimination of SGBV**



**SECTION ONE:**

**UNDERSTANDING SGBV  
AND THE CHALLENGE OF ELIMINATING IT**

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## **Module One:**

### **Understanding Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

#### **A Brief Overview**

**S**exual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is defined by the European Commission as "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately." Thus, SGBV is understood as a form of discrimination against persons or a violation of human rights based on gender, especially when such violence results in physical harm, sexual harm, psychological harm, economic deprivation, suffering, or denial of resources or access to services.

In Nigeria, many women and girls have often been victims of SGBV. Many have been sexually violated by the use of force in varying degrees, as well as by psychological intimidation, blackmail, threats of physical harm, or barter sex (i.e., the demand for sex in exchange for jobs, grades, or some other favours). In some cases, women and girls that are incapable of giving consent are sexually violated, especially while intoxicated, drugged, asleep, or mentally incapacitated. Also, persons living with disabilities are often targets of sexual violence, as some are often unable to defend themselves or are too vulnerable to resist unwelcome sexual advances. Thousands of underage and/or poor vulnerable girls are regularly trafficked – lured into the local and international sex trade by unscrupulous merchants, thus putting the poor girls through unimaginable psychological trauma, and often leaving them damaged for life.

#### **I. Operational Definition of Concepts**

##### **Gender:**

As used in this publication, gender refers to the characteristics of a person as either a male or a female. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a male or a female. Gender is often used interchangeably with sex, which refers to the physical and biological or genital features that differentiate a male from a female. Although in contemporary times, "gender" is largely used as a prefix for describing issues associated with the protection of the rights of women (e.g., gender discrimination, gender equality), our understanding and use of the term in this document are faithful to Biblical presentation of the human person created by God as falling into either of the two sets of gender identities and attributes:

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"God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

**Power:**

Power is the ability or capacity to get things done. It also involves the capacity to determine, direct or influence the action or behaviour of another or a group of persons. Power can be real or perceived. Therefore, the one who has power is perceived to be able to influence or regulate the behaviour of others simply by virtue of the (privileged) position she/he occupies, even if such power is not actively deployed. Power exists in different forms and could be expressed in several ways. The following are some:

**Physical power** is manifested in the raw strength of individuals or their physical ability to get things done (with the aid of harmful objects or dangerous weapons in extreme cases).

**Economic power** is exercised in the control of money or access to goods and services.

**Political power** is associated with the authority of elected and appointed leaders, or the command and control exercise of dictators.

**Social power** can be expressed in the authority of a leader, a teacher, and parents or seen in the pressure to conform to culture or peer groups. It is within the exercise of social power that certain societal constructs and norms could be weaponised against one gender (the female) and in favour of the other (the male).

**Age-related power.** The exercise of power is sometimes dependent on age and experience, such that the young, the elderly and persons living with disabilities are often considered as having the least power, especially when compared to persons with physical abilities.

**Power is also choice-related.** Often, the more power an individual has, the more options from which to choose, and vice-versa. For instance, an unempowered individual who lacks economic power could have fewer choices and be more vulnerable to abuse than another who has some measure of economic power.

**Perpetrator:**

This refers to a person, group, or institution that inflicts, supports or condones violence or other abuse against a person or group of persons. Perpetrators

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could be persons with real or perceived power, persons in decision-making positions, or persons in authority. Such persons could be intimate partners (husbands, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends), relatives (brothers, uncles, parents, aunts, sisters, etc.), influential community members (teachers, politicians, religious and temporal leaders), members of security forces (police, soldiers and peacekeepers), humanitarian aid workers, strangers and anyone in a position of power. Thus, anyone who exploits the power imbalance in their relationships to inflict pain or harm on another is a perpetrator of violence. Suffice to mention that wherever there are survivors of interpersonal violence, there would be perpetrators as well. Therefore, interventions aimed at responding to the survivors of SGBV should also address the perpetrators.

**Informed consent:**

Informed consent is a free or voluntary choice by persons to do something based on full knowledge of the possible consequences and risks involved. Because informed consent has to do with deciding or choosing freely, certain categories of persons are not considered to be capable of giving informed consent, including persons under the age of reason, and to some extent those considered minors, persons with impaired reasoning, persons under pressure or duress, and persons on the lower end of power imbalance.

**Violence:**

Violence is the use of force or the threat to use force to harm another. It could be physical, emotional, economic, social or structural in nature. According to the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict (RHRC) Consortium, violence involves varying degrees of coercion, threat, or inducement that force people to do something against their will.

**Victim Versus Survivor:**

Victims of Violence (VoV) and Survivors of Violence (SoV) are two terms often used interchangeably in the literature. However, the word *Survivor* is often the preferred description for persons who have pulled through an incident of violence, including those that are gender-based. On the difference between both terms, the RHRC Consortium argues that while 'victim' is a sad, disempowering word which "conjures an image of someone who is weak, sick, small, hunched over, crying, clothed in rags, and unable to function in the world, 'survivor,' on the other hand, is a powerful, empowering word that "conjures an image of someone who stands straight and tall, uses eye contact, walks with confidence, and lives life to the fullest.

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### **Constructs Used in Relation to SGBV**

SGBV is related to such constructs as Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Instead of SGBV, some writers have used GBV with the sexual component implied. Others have used VAW to generally capture the “who” (i.e., women) and “what” (i.e., violence) is being addressed. At the different levels of organizational intervention planning, these terms and acronyms are constructed and used based on how the problem is viewed. **problem.** For instance, the World Health Organization uses VAW, the UNFPA uses GBV, and the UNHCR uses SGBV. However, these terms describe essentially the same sets of social problems faced disproportionately by women and girls.

## **II. Dimensions and Expressions of SGBV in Nigeria**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), SGBV is "any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women because of being women and men because of being men, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." Based on this definition, SGBV could be understood to include but is not limited to the following:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse of children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, and violence related to exploitation.
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and girls, as well as forced prostitution.
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by State structures and institutions, wherever it occurs.

In Nigeria, many women and girls are often sexually violated by the use of force in varying degrees, psychological intimidation, blackmail, threats of physical harm, or barter sex (i.e., the demand for sex in exchange for jobs, grades, or some other favours). In some cases, women and girls that are incapable of giving consent are sexually violated, especially while intoxicated, drugged, asleep, or mentally incapacitated. Also, persons

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living with disabilities are often targets of sexual violence, as some of them are often not able to defend themselves, or are too vulnerable to resist unwelcome sexual advances. Thousands of underage and/or poor vulnerable girls are regularly trafficked – lured into local and international sex trade by unscrupulous merchants, thus putting the poor girls through unimaginable psychological trauma, often leaving them damaged for life.

Several studies have confirmed the prevalence of sexual violence, particularly against women and girls in Nigeria. For instance, the NOIPOLLS in July 2019 reported that "about 3 in 10 Nigerians (26 per cent) disclosed that they knew someone who had been raped in the past, and the rape victims were particularly minors and young adults aged between 1 – 15 years (72 per cent), and 16 – 25 years (24 per cent) respectively. This statistic implies that one in every three girls would have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse by the time they reach 25 years."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, data from the National Health and Demographic Survey (NDHS) carried out across Nigeria in 2018 indicates that at least 30% of girls and women aged between 15 and 49 have experienced physical or sexual violence from a spouse or intimate male partner.

In a related study, Oche et al. (2020) described several acts of sexual violence generally reported by women and girls in Nigeria. These include rape within marriage or dating relationships, rape by strangers or acquaintances, and unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment (at school, work etc.). Others are sexual slavery or trafficking of women for sexual purposes, sexual abuse of mentally or physically challenged people, and 'customary' forms of sexual violence, such as forced marriage or cohabitation as well as wife inheritance.<sup>2</sup>

### **Types of SGBV Affecting Victims in Nigeria**

*(Note to Facilitator - To contextualise the training and make the most impact, if a prior baseline has not been conducted in a given community, state, cultural or religious setting, participants at each training should be put together in small homogenous focus groups to identify, list and describe the various dimensions and manifestations of SGBV in their given communities, states, cultural or religious settings).*

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<sup>1</sup> [NOIPOLLS RAPE POLL REPORT - NOI Polls \(noi-polls.com\)](http://noi-polls.com)

<sup>2</sup> Oche, O. M., Adamu, H., Mallam, S. A., & Muhammad, R. A. O. and A. S. (2020). Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude and Experience of Sexual Violence among Female Employees in Sokoto Metropolis, Northwest Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 24(2), 164–175.

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Across Nigeria, several dimensions and manifestations of SGBV are widely identifiable and common. They include the following.

**Sexual Violence** – The WHO defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, and advances.” Essentially, sexual violence is any non-consensual sexual contact with another person, using any body part or object. It involves marital rape, forced sexual activities, unsafe sex, sexual harassment, or abuse related to reproduction (e.g., forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization, female genital mutilation, etc.), date rape, other forms of forced sexual activities, and the use of sex as a weapon of war and torture.

**Forced Marriage** – The marriage of an individual against her will. Child or ‘early’ marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. Even though some countries permit marriage before age 18, international human rights standards classify these as child or ‘early’ marriages, reasoning that those under age 18 are unable to give informed consent. Therefore, child and ‘early’ marriage is a form of forced marriage as children are not legally competent to agree to such unions.

**Intimate Partner Violence** – A term used to describe the violence that takes place between intimate partners (spouses, boyfriend/girlfriend). It is behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm. Such behaviour could involve physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and other controlling behaviours. It may also include the denial of resources, opportunities, or services. The definition of intimate partner violence can also include violence committed against sex workers by paying clients.

**Sexual Exploitation** – Any actual or attempted abuse of a vulnerable person for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially, or politically.

**Sexual Slavery** – This term applies when sexual abuse was perpetrated while the survivor was being forcibly transported (i.e., being trafficked), or being abducted or held against their will for any form of sexual exploitation.

**Transactional Sex** – This is sex that is defined by the power relationship between the survivor and perpetrator, as well as the circumstances surrounding the incident. For instance, when access to resources is limited, individuals might be compelled by circumstance to resort to transactional sex to help advance their education, gain employment or business opportunities, or simply to meet basic survival needs. This practice is

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sometimes referred to as ‘survival sex’ as well. It also includes accepting sex and tolerating physical or sexual violence to sustain relationships that provide critical income.

**Physical Violence** – Beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming, or killing, or the violent use of objects or weapons.

**Emotional and Psychological Violence** – Any act which causes psychological and emotional harm to an individual, such as isolation or confinement, withholding information, disinformation, and threatening behaviour. Psychological violence can also take the form of coercion, defamation, verbal insult, or harassment. Other examples include threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, stalking, harassment, unwanted attention, comments, gestures, or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, and the destruction of cherished things.

**Harmful Traditional Practices** – These practices include female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, taboos or practices directed at subjugating women, nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices, boy-child preference and its implications for the status of the girl-child, and female infanticide.

**Socio-Economic Violence** – Denial of access to resources or spaces, which may include denial of education and jobs, denial of access to services, restriction of access to pleasure and enjoyment of civil, cultural, social and political rights; access to jobs, but with poor remuneration.

**Human Trafficking** – Human trafficking is prevalent in Nigeria. This involves the act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving persons through the use of force, coercion or other means for the purpose of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced involvement in illicit activities, begging, illegal adoption and forced marriage. Victims and survivors are mostly women and children.

**Dowry-Based Violence** – Women are often treated as slaves because they have been ‘paid for’ through the fulfilment of dowry needs during the marriage. Some men feel that since they paid or gave some money, goods or services as dowry on the occasion of marrying a woman, then the woman automatically becomes their subject, and they have the license to treat such a woman as they wish.



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***Denial of Resources, Opportunities, or Services*** – Denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets or livelihood opportunities, education, health, or other social services. Examples include a widow prevented from receiving an inheritance, or whose earnings are forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member.

***Structural Violence*** – Gender-based violence may be normalised and reproduced due to structural inequalities sustained by societal norms, attitudes, and stereotypes regarding the place and value of women in society.

### **III. Psychosocial Consequences of SGBV**

The negative impact of SGBV on individuals and communities across Nigeria has been tremendous. It has led to an increase in risk factors for victims, including the likelihood of early sexual encounters, rape, sex for benefit, and forced marriage. Survivors of SGBV often experience increased rates of complicated health conditions, including HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, morbidity, physical disability, and even death. There are also cases of undesired pregnancies with associated complications, and mental illness (Terry & Hoare, 2007).

Economically, SGBV hampers women's productivity. It aggravates the problem of poverty which, in turn, makes victims more vulnerable to SGBV. A culture of violence against women undermines efforts to eradicate poverty and promote inclusive sustainable development. It is a barrier to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development, and the attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and their promise to "leave no one behind" cannot be fulfilled without putting an end to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, the greater majority of victims of which are women and girls.

Psychologically, SGBV robs victims of self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotional security. Women and girls who have been subjected to SGBV of any kind often carry emotional scars, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) throughout their lives, and this negatively impacts their perspectives on life and the safety of their environment.

In addition, SGBV can have serious consequences for the future of a nation. A country's wellness, strength and success are entirely dependent on the state of mind of its people. Therefore, if our women and girls, who are the mothers of today and tomorrow, become victims of SGBV which could result in poor mental health, how can they have clarity of thinking and decision-making for themselves and their families or community? If a mother is a victim of SGBV, the aftershocks of her trauma could lead to mental disorders, which

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negatively impact her ability to sufficiently guide her child through a wholesome childhood. This would have its long-term effects on society. It is akin to rendering a teacher handicapped and, by so doing, robbing the learner of the opportunity to develop to the best of his/her ability. The child's ability to optimize his/her life will stagnate, and the vicious cycle of low self-esteem, violent tendencies, and lack of empathy, begins to roll into the future. Often, child victims or witnesses of violence could become perpetrators of the violence themselves. Thus, a nation will only prosper when its girls and women enjoy safe, healthy, and nurturing lives.

Finally, SGBV threatens peace at all levels by limiting the participation of women in socio-economic development and in governance processes. Because their participation is limited, a significant opportunity is lost to create new structures that can challenge the inequities and consequent violence that are often perpetrated by men. Until SGBV is eliminated, no true peace can be attained, for as the popular saying goes, 'No one is safe until everyone is safe.'

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## **Module Two:**

### **Religious and Cultural Beliefs and Practices as they Relate to SGBV**

This module addresses religious and cultural beliefs and practices associated with SGBV in Nigeria, in the light of fundamental Christian texts and teachings. The session is designed to help the participants better understand the pain, the trauma, and the vulnerability of survivors, particularly women and girls; to use Christian teachings to dissuade and deter would-be perpetrators; and to critically address ingrained but unhelpful social and cultural norms, traditions and practices. Specific examples from the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are cited, and trainees are to be encouraged to come up with more examples from their own linguistic/ethnic groups, which could be further explored in such a way as to fully appreciate the extent and impact of traditions and cultures nationwide. The session should eventually culminate in the discussion of possible advocacy mechanisms and activities that will toward eliminating SGBV in Nigeria.

#### **I. Religion and SGBV in Nigeria**

Nigeria is sometimes referred to as one of the most religious countries in the world, and most Nigerians would readily agree that they are deeply religious. Among the religions practised in Nigeria, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) stand out prominently. Within these religions there often exist several denominations, movements or traditions, with their own distinct institutions, cultures and teachings, resulting in a diversity of beliefs, doctrines, and practices. Through their teachings, religious communities and institutions convey values and belief systems by which their adherents live. Thus, while the religious dimension to life is a reality for millions of Nigerians, there exist many, and sometimes conflicting narratives and interpretations of the same religious texts regarding issues of practical living.

In the context of SGBV, religion and religious teachings are potentially powerful agents of positive change that could serve as prime resources in communities, for responding to and preventing SGBV. It is to be admitted, however, that there are often diverse interpretations of religious texts and teachings, beliefs and practices, which impact women differently and could sometimes render women and girls more vulnerable to SGBV. In many cases, selective interpretations of religious texts have served to promote practices that only worsen the situations of women and girls within some religious

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circles.

On the other hand, there are those who seek to blackmail the Christian religion or present the religion in a very negative light with regard to the status of women, by ascribing to Christianity and impugning the religion for stories of evil or violent deeds against women in the pre-Christian era, simply because these stories are contained in the Bible! It gets more ridiculous when the unjust and violent deeds against women in the stories under reference, were already – by the standards of the ancient Jewish religion of the time – condemned as evil, and even when such evil deeds against women were perpetrated by persons that the ancient writers of the Old Testament texts identified as coming from non-Jewish cultures that were called ‘pagan,’ impure, and ungodly.

To illustrate the point, the following are among the biblical texts that have sometimes been used by unscrupulous, unjust or mischievous persons and institutions to conclude that the Christian religion can in some way be used to justify, perpetuate or condone some forms of SGBV.

- The rape of Dinah by Shechem, son of the Canaanite prince (Genesis 34:1-31)
- The rape of Tamar by Ammon, her half-brother (2 Samuel 13:1-22)
- The rape and dismembering of the Levite’s concubine (Judges 19:1-30),
- The banishment (and execution) of Vashti for refusing to appear (naked) before the Persian king Ahasuerus (Esther 1:9-11)
- The false accusation of Suzannah by two elders (Daniel 13:1-64)

It is true that the above stories portray extreme acts of violence against the women involved, yet it must be noted that they were not stories told to teach religious adherents on how to behave. They were not presented as examples of virtuous or godly living. The acts involved were very far from being godly acts, even by Old Testament standards. Instead, they are stories of what fallen men and women were capable of doing, and what they actually did, and not what the Jewish religion taught believers to do. They were a record of evil acts whose immediate consequences demonstrate that they were clearly unacceptable to the Holy God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Readers of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures must learn to distinguish between stories and parables, on the one hand, and commandments and injunctions on the other.

All the scenarios presented above are neither commandments from God on how religious people should behave, nor injunctions from prophets and other religious teachers on how religious people should conduct themselves. Therefore, none of the above stories and similar ones should be

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presented as biblical or Christian teaching. Besides, Christian teaching properly speaking begins with the direct teachings of Jesus Christ found in the Gospels, which were further enunciated by the Apostles and Evangelists in the New Testament Epistles. It is therefore an abuse of biblical interpretation to pick a text or story from the Old Testament and call such text a Christian teaching, even when it directly contradicts the revolutionary teachings of Jesus regarding the equal sanctity and dignity of all persons, including women and all vulnerable persons - those very revolutionary teachings of Jesus that were so counter-cultural (in his day) that they eventually led to his crucifixion.

However, from the Apostles of Jesus like St. Paul, there are a few controversial texts when it comes to the dignity of women. Among texts in this category are 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 in which St. Paul says, "*Women should be silent in Churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as the law also says....*" (see also 1 Timothy 2: 11-14 which says, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve." There is also the passage of Ephesians 5:22 which says, "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*"

These passages are often referenced as condoning the silencing and subjugation of women. But those who exploit or capitalize on passages like these to promote SGBV or to insinuate that the Christian religious teachings could in some way be responsible for any form of sexual and gender-based violence, often conveniently overlook the life-affirming, love-promoting, and equal-dignity-enhancing injunctions of Jesus Christ the Supreme Moral Teacher and Prime Model of the virtuous life.

Even in the case of the passages from the Epistles of St. Paul referenced above, some unscrupulous or mischievous commentators often choose to take certain controversial lines out of context. For example, before verse 22 of Ephesians 5 which says, "*wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord,*" verse 21 says, "*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" And after saying that wives should be subject to their husbands in verse 22, he goes on to tell husbands in verse 25 to "*love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word...In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies.*"

Those who wish to manipulate scriptural texts for their selfish, ungodly purposes, often conveniently ignore not only the religious and cultural contexts within which the referenced passages are found, but they also often isolate single verses that will not make sense on their own, except when read in the context of what comes before, and what follows after.

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### **Authentic Christian Response to SGBV**

In the context of this **training towards the elimination SGBV**, we emphasize that the Christian religion centres on love and, therefore, love ought to be the basis for interpreting the Christian Scripture and practising the Christian faith. The extent to which any biblical text is used as a tool for violence is the extent to which it ceases to be Christian. Therefore, prooftexting (the selective use of a text, usually out of context, to support one's position), which is a common ploy by those who seek to simply justify their actions, cannot be said to be faithful to the overall message of Christianity. Although it seems easy to prooftext a man's prerogative to dominate a woman and violate her God-given rights, such selective use of scripture does not at all represent the teaching of Jesus Christ, and should therefore be rejected as Christian.

For instance, in John 10:10, Jesus Christ teaches that, unlike the thief who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, he has come "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (NRSV). Jesus's ministry was to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to give recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19 quoting Isaiah 61). He told the story of the Good Samaritan to emphasize our responsibility to stop and care for the weak and victimised (Luke 10:25-37), and taught that whatever we do to the least among us, we do unto him (Matthew 25:40). These are some of the fundamental teachings through which other passages of scripture must be interpreted in Christianity.

The task for Christian religious leaders, preachers and theologians, therefore, is to deepen our examination of religious texts and teachings and explore appropriate contextual interpretations which are at the service of love rather than hate. Such efforts will serve to minimize the roadblocks trumped-up by incompetent or manipulative interpretations of scripture and maximize scriptural resources for eliminating or reducing violence against women and girls, or any form of abuse or violation of the dignity and integrity of those created in the image and likeness of God.

Specifically, such efforts should highlight the fact that the Christian message is a message of liberation meant for all, not for men alone. Jesus' treatment of women was radical and revolutionary for his time (see John 4:1-26; Mt. 9:20-22; Luke 7:36-50). He defied the patriarchal views of the world by openly associating with women (Luke 8:2ff); he counted women as friends (Mark 1:29; 5:21-43; Mark 15:40-16:11; John 19: 25-27; 20: 1-18); and he even trusted women with the good news of His resurrection, over and above his male apostles (John 20:17-18). Thus, no woman or girl should ever be forced to choose between her faith or religious community and her safety which authentic religion ought to protect. For Christianity, and indeed for any religious tradition to live up to expectations, it must have faith-based

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resources for advocacy, support and counsel, which every woman and girl, and every vulnerable person for that matter, can access.

In addition to ensuring that Biblical texts are appropriately interpreted, preached, and applied, Christian churches and leaders can take specific steps to join in the fight against SGBV. The following are examples:

- Establish an association that offers practical support – helping women and girls to immediately access treatment and support in the event of an assault, and accompany victims to the hospital or to the police station as the case may require.
- Provide the psychosocial safety net that many victims/survivors lack.
- Incorporate SGBV into pastoral training, establish a help desk, a counselling team, and wherever possible a place of temporary refuge for fleeing victims of SGBV.
- Raise awareness regarding gender-based laws, policies and standards and act as agents of change to promote gender equity.
- Educate and advocate for ending violence against women and girls and shape the discussion on issues concerning violence against women and girls in their communities.
- Assist with social integration of victims/survivors.
- Write articles for publication in newspapers/journals, discuss public policy and funding issues, and support organisations that serve victims/survivors of SGBV.
- Work to ensure that Churches are safe places for adults and children.
- Partner with local agencies/non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in related areas to provide volunteers, meeting spaces, and financial support.
- Train church functionaries to identify sexual and domestic violence, respond appropriately, and utilise community resources whenever possible.
- Connect women who wish to seek justice with the proper networks and hold support groups and counselling sessions for survivors.

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- Recognise international days related to SGBV, such as World Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Cutting (February 6), International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25), 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence (November 25 to December 10), etc.

## **II. Socio-Cultural Practices and SGBV in Nigeria**

Societies free of SGBV do not exist, and Nigeria is no exception. However, SGBV is more prevalent in societies where there is a general culture of violence, and where male superiority is considered as the norm. The belief in male superiority can manifest in men feeling entitled to sex with women, strict reinforcement of gender roles and undue emphasis on hierarchy, women having low social value and power, and associating masculinity with control of women (Jewkes, 2002). In other words, SGBV occurs as a result of normative role expectations and unequal power relationships between genders in society. These factors interact with a number of drivers, such as socio-cultural norms (often driven by the use of language), low levels of women's empowerment, lack of social support, and socio-economic inequality.

### **Socio-cultural Norms in the Context of SGBV**

Socio-cultural norms are unspoken rules or expected behaviour that set social standards of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in a specific culture or social group. Norms define how people think, which regularly become practices when put into action. External and internal pressures like feelings of guilt or shame, social disapproval, stigmatization or punishment, etc., pressure people to conform to certain norms, nurse certain social expectations, or silently endure certain abuses.

Socio-cultural norms differ by ethnic groups in Nigeria. Therefore, in addressing the social and cultural practices that promote SGBV, it is important to have a good understanding of the various forms of violence and the specific cultural beliefs that promote violence in a particular culture or sub-group, rather than the whole population (*The facilitator can engage trainees to share or discuss socio-cultural norms in specific ethnic groups that tend to encourage or tolerate SGBV*).

However, whatever constitutes sexual and gender-based violence in any culture is often subconsciously taken as acceptable in that culture. This socio-cultural acceptability of such forms of violence makes it particularly challenging to address SGBV effectively. Thus, in Nigeria, SGBV seems to pervade the political, economic and social structures of society and is driven by strongly patriarchal social norms and conventions, as well as intersectional power inequalities, including those of gender, class, race or tribe.



The following table shows some of the socio-cultural norms that encourage violence against women. Although the norms were found among Ika-speaking people of Delta State (See Alordiah et al., 2022)<sup>3</sup>, they mostly represent some of the dominant beliefs across various cultures in Nigeria.

S/N	Violence against women
<b>Physical Violence</b>	
1	If a woman gets into a quarrel with her husband and he slaps her, society holds her responsible.
2	Society expects a woman to remain silent if she has a quarrel with her husband and she is slapped.
3	If a woman slaps her husband after an argument, society/culture expects her to apologise, regardless of who was at fault.
4	When a woman gets into an argument with her husband and she slaps him, society considers her untrained.
5	If a woman slaps her husband during an argument, society views her as disrespectful.
6	When a woman gets into an altercation with her husband and she slaps him, society considers her to have done something abominable.
7	A wife has no right to express her anger towards her husband.
8	A wife who gets angry with outbursts is disrespectful to her husband.
9	A good wife is silent when provoked by the husband.

<sup>3</sup> C. O. Alordiah, F.C. Omumu, H. I. Owamah, O. Chenube, I. E. Okokoyo, M. A. Osagiede & H. T Agbajor | Sandro Serpa (Reviewing editor:) (2022) Socio-cultural norms encouraging violence against women from a popular ethnic group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the roles of schools in preventing VAW, Cogent Social Sciences, 8:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2022.2102299](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2102299)

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Violence against women</b>
10	A good wife is silent when brutally treated by the husband.
11	A good wife is calm when being oppressed by her husband.
<b>Infidelity</b>	
1	Society expects women to tolerate husbands' infidelity.
2	Husband's infidelity is normal.
3	Wife's infidelity is abnormal and abominable.
<b>Handling of Spousal infidelity</b>	
1	There is no punishment for the husband's infidelity.
2	The husband should send the wife out of the matrimonial home.
3	The wife must confess to other cases of infidelity.
4	The wife must perform cleansing rites.
5	The husband should stop eating her food until evidence shows that she is innocent or cleansed.
<b>Norms that place blames on women</b>	
1	If the husband is not prospering, society blames the wife.
2	If the wife is not prospering, society blames her.
3	If a marriage does not work, society blames the wife.
4	If a family does not bring up their children well, society blames the wife.
<b>Duties</b>	

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Violence against women</b>
1	Whether she works or not, the wife must do housework and care for the children.
2	It is not a husband's duty to do domestic chores and take care of the children, whether the wife is working or not.
	<b>Discrimination/violence against widows</b>
1	When a widower remarries after a year, society encourages him to move on with his life
2	When a widow remarries two years later, society sees her as too hasty to forget her husband.
3	When a widow remarries two years later, society may conclude that she might have been sleeping around before the death of her husband.
4	If a woman dies mysteriously, society believes that her unconfessed infidelity has caught up with her.
5	If a man dies mysteriously, the wife is the first suspect.
6	If a man dies mysteriously, her in-laws may make her drink the bathwater of her husband's corpse to prove her innocence.
7	If a man dies mysteriously and the wife refuses to drink the bathwater, it would mean that she is guilty.

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### **Language as a Driver of SGBV**

Language helps in perpetuating particular social, cultural and historical experiences of a people. In Nigeria and Africa in general, language is a powerful vehicle for driving and transmitting social and cultural norms through its various verbal and non-verbal forms, including proverbs, folktales, rituals, songs, prayers, advice, counsels, pithy sayings, singing, and even drumming which is often used to enrich the meanings of what people say. Other non-verbal forms of language are gestural communication, dirges, chants, drums, music, and dance.

Regarding SGBV, language plays a very significant role in societal acceptance or tolerance of what constitutes violence to the womenfolk. In *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet*, Mineke Schipper (2004) discovered more similarities than differences in thousands of proverbs about women, originating from hundreds of languages and in more than 150 countries. Many of the proverbs are derogatory, and they reflect all the phases of women's life: from girl to bride, wife or co-wife; from mother to mother-in-law, widow and grandmother; from the joys to the sorrows of love, sex, barrenness and childbearing; and from their work to their talents and power.

### **Examples of Apparent Socio-Cultural Support for SGBV through Proverbs and Common Sayings in Three Local Languages in Nigeria**

Among cultural groups in Nigeria, the cultural correlates of male dominance and prejudice against women and girls are exemplified particularly in the attitude to marriage and, by extension, childbearing, naming practices, and inheritance. A woman's identity is subsumed under a man, that is, the father, the husband or the most elderly male in the family.

#### **Yoruba Language (South-west Nigeria)**

Such expressions as *igbeyawo*, interpreted as marriage, but literally, "carrying/taking a wife." *Note that this example has no male equivalent.* In other words, the man "takes" a wife, the woman does not "take" a husband. This is much like *arole* and *olori-ebi*, both of which refer to the man as the heir, the family head/representative. Although these sayings place heavy burdens on the men, they could be interpreted as implying that women are subordinate in the scheme of things.

There is also the proverb that says, "*ile oko, ile eko*," meaning "the husband's house is a place for learning." This implies that marriage, for the woman, is the start/continuation of her education. This concept of *ile oko* seems to encourage men to exercise superior power, as if in a teacher-student relationship.

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**Igbo Language (South-Eastern Nigeria)**

Among the Igbo, there is the saying, *Onye nwe nwaanyi nwe ihe ya* (He who owns a woman, owns her possessions). There is also the saying, *Nwanyị bu njo ala* (Women are the evil of the land).

**Hausa Language (Northern Nigeria)**

Among the Hausa, there is the saying, *Mata Dangin Shaidan* (Women are close relatives/associates to the devil). There is also the saying, *Ba a yi Komai Ba, Mace ta Haifi Mace* (The birth of a baby girl brings no joy or excitement/Nothing is achieved where a woman gives birth to a baby girl). And, *Matar mutum kabarin sa* (A man's wife is his grave).

### **III. Some Cultural Practices that Encourage and Perpetuate SGBV**

Apart from expressing the subjugation of women through language, several practices accepted (or condoned) as cultural actually constitute SGBV against women and girls. Such practices include the following:

**Preference for male children:** Male-child preference is one of the oldest issues in most Africa societies. Male children are given special treatment over daughters because sons are believed to increase the reputation of the family and protect the family's interests. Most women usually do not get proper recognition in their husbands' families until and unless they have had a son. More so, some communities look down on a man with no son because he is considered one whose lineage would be abolished when he goes to meet his ancestors. The preference for male children over female children is a significant factor contributing to how girl children and women are treated.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** This is a procedure performed on a woman or girl to alter or injure her genitalia for non-medical reasons. It most often involves the partial or total removal of her external genitalia. FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women. In many of the communities in Nigeria, FGM is a deeply entrenched social norm rooted in gender inequality where violence against girls and women is socially acceptable. The reasons behind the practice vary. In some cases, it is seen as a rite of passage into womanhood, while others see it as a way to suppress a woman's sexuality. Many communities practice genital mutilation in the belief that it will ensure a girl's future marriage or family honour. Uncircumcised women (in some cultures) are considered to be unclean and promiscuous. Some associate this

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practice with religious beliefs, although no religious scriptures require it.

**Under-Age/Forced Marriages:** The culture of early marriage is extremely harmful to women. It is more prevalent in the northern part of Nigeria. About 43% of girls in Nigeria are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2016). Global evidence shows that girls married before age 18 have a higher rate of repeated undesired pregnancies, obstetric fistula and intimate partner violence (Erulkar 2013).

**Arranged Marriages:** Parents arrange marriages for their daughters, forcing them to marry without their consent, and often for some gains for the larger family. In some cases, girls are given out in marriage at all costs to satisfy promissory notes between families.

**Wife Inheritance:** This is a practice that is dying out in Nigeria, but is still found in some cultures. It is the transfer of a wife who has become a widow to a brother or cousin of her deceased husband in the event that she has not reached her menopause. Once a wife is inherited by the late husband's brother, they both live together as husband and wife and they can have new children, but the children of the inherited mother are credited to her late husband.

**Widowhood Practices:** Women, in many cases, are considered key suspects and targeted for wrongdoing if their husband dies. They could be made to go through certain demeaning rituals to prove their innocence or they face severe consequences, such as being tagged witches or being banished. Many widows are often stripped of all they have and sent away by their in-laws, leaving them vulnerable to other perpetrators of SGBV.

**Economic Marriages:** In this case, a girl is married off against her wish, and her bride price is used to offset some debts or bills in her family.

**Revenge Marriages:** This is a situation where a man makes all the efforts to marry a woman who had refused him in the past. This type of marriage happens, not necessarily for love's sake, but as a way to massage the man's ego which was wounded by the woman's past refusal.

**Intimate partner violence:** Most men are socialised to think they are superior to women and believe that they have the right to assert power over them. This way of thinking often results in violence against women.

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**Sexual violence:** Sex in marriage is generally viewed as a man's right, even when it is violent or abusive. The woman is expected to simply submit. Girls and women are seen as being responsible for satisfying a man's sexual urges. In some cases victims/survivors of sexual assault outside marriage are blamed by society for their manner of dressing or physical appearance, which is seen as a possible trigger for men to abuse or rape them. If a woman is dressed in a revealing manner, "she is considered fair game and asking for it." Although as Christians we strongly encourage decent dressing, the mode of dressing is no excuse for sexual harassment, abuse or violence.

**Brainstorming Session and Discussion:** *How do we address the socio-historical and cultural norms and practices that encourage SGBV so as to engender a change of attitude towards the elimination of SGBV?*

**Some suggested ways to eliminate SGBV**

- To curtail SGBV, so many actions need to be taken. The first place to begin is the mind of women and their perception of SGBV as a justifiable act. Women need to know that violence against them for any reason is not justifiable. They should know they deserve better than to be battered by a domineering male. And they should immediately seek help whenever they find themselves at risk or as victims of SGBV. When women themselves see violence against them as something that should not be condoned, then the advocacy to end all forms of SGBV would have a strong footing.
- There's also the need for further advocacy for women's rights in general. Women should be enlightened about their rights. Although many women are now standing up to the occasion, more still needs to be done in addressing violence against women. Women need to encourage one another to champion this fight. It will not be an easy task in a patriarchal society, but it is better than doing nothing.
- Also, there is a need for women to be empowered in many ways. Such empowerment starts from ensuring that they are educated to such a level where they could recognise their inalienable rights and strive to ensure that the rights are respected.
- Women should be supported to have a considerable level of economic freedom, so that they are not unduly dependent on some male patrons who may be potential abusers.

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- There is the need to enforce stricter penalties for people that are guilty of SGBV to serve as a deterrent to others who believe that their victims are utterly helpless, and that there will be no sanctions for their crimes. All abusers need to know that when they commit any form of violence against women, there is a punishment waiting for them.
  - All societal norms and the exploitation or manipulation of religious texts to support violence against women, should always be critically interrogated and rejected. Advocates and campaigners for the elimination of SGBV could engage in dislodging harmful social norms that perpetuate SGBV and evolving innovative social norms that promote positive attitudinal/behavioural change.
  - Advocates and Campaigners should work tirelessly to ensure that appropriate legislation is made to criminalise across the country such violent cultural practices as Female Genital Mutilation and Early or Forced Marriage.

Our women and girls deserve better than being subjected to abuse because they were born as females, something they did not choose for themselves.



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## Module Three:

### Legal and Policy Frameworks

#### A Brief Overview

Nigeria has several legislations that encapsulate relevant provisions against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). These legislations are enacted at federal and state levels with the corresponding prescribed punishments. Nevertheless, SGBV remains prevalent, and sadly many perpetrators of these human rights violations and crimes often escape punishment.

Chapters 2 and 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (CFRN, 1999) made provisions for rights available to all citizens and persons within the jurisdiction of Nigeria. Specifically, Section 34, CFRN 1999, provides for the dignity of the human person, including freedom from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. Similarly, Section 42, CFRN, 1999, provides for the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex *inter alia*. However, given the widespread and growing prevalence of SGBV in Nigeria, the atrocity is becoming well reported, albeit formally and informally. It must be emphasised that in many cultures and religious settings in Nigeria, many cases of SGBV remain unreported as the perpetrators are either shielded or the victims remain silent in the face of such abusive conduct for fear of stigmatisation.

However, our concern here is with reported Cases of SGBV. Consequently, victims of SGBV may pursue justice through the instrumentality of Nigeria's civil and criminal justice systems. Again, it must be stated that the existence of specific barriers constitutes an obstacle to effective justice delivery in reported cases of SGBV in Nigeria. In a further quest to eliminate or at least minimise the atrocity of SGBV, the policy thrust of the country seeks to promote a society that believes in inclusion, synergising its potential without gender bias. The National Gender Policy, 2006, encapsulates the policy that seeks to promote and protect the fundamental rights of all the citizens and endorsed by all the states of the federation in 2006.

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## I. Overview of Human Rights

### **The Principle of Human Rights**

Human rights constitute those essential attributes which are inherent in our common humanity – life, dignity, freedom, peace, justice and equality. Every person has these rights by virtue of being human.

The rights are guaranteed by law to everyone without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, birth, national or social origin, property, or other status.

These rights are enshrined in international laws such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and in local laws such as the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which spell out specific rights that countries are required to uphold and protect.

### **Characteristics of Human Rights**

- Universal – Human rights belong to all people.
- Inalienable - Human rights cannot be taken away from the individual.
- Interconnected – Human rights are dependent on one another.
- Indivisible – Human rights cannot be treated in isolation.
- Non-Discriminatory – Human rights should be respected without prejudice.

### **Categories of Human Rights**

- i) Civil and political rights
- ii) Economic and Social rights
- iii) Third-generation rights

#### **i) Civil and Political Rights**

Civil and political rights refer to the right to life, the right to dignity of the human person, freedom of speech, freedom of religion etc. These rights are provided for under Chapter 4 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.

#### **ii) Economic and Social Rights**

Economic and social rights refer to such rights as right to education, right to health, right to a healthy environment, right to decent work etc. These rights are provided for under Chapter 2 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They are elaborately provided for under the African Charter.

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### **iii) Third-Generation Rights**

The Third-generation Rights include the right to self-determination, and the right to live in corruption-free societies.

While civil and political rights are civil liberties that require no significant budgetary implications, economic and social rights have cost implications.

The rights listed below are as outlined in the International Bill of Rights:

- The right to equality and freedom from discrimination
- The right to life, liberty, and personal security
- Freedom from torture and degrading treatment
- The right to equality before the law
- The right to a fair trial
- The right to privacy
- Freedom of belief and religion
- Freedom of opinion
- Right of peaceful assembly and association
- The right to participate in government
- The right to social security
- The right to work
- The right to an adequate standard of living
- The right to education
- The right to health
- The right to food and housing

### **The Responsibility to Uphold Human Rights**

Under human rights treaties, governments have the primary responsibility for protecting and promoting human rights. However, the burden does not rest on governments alone.

The UDHR states:

"Every individual and every organ of society... shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance."

This provision implies that though the primary responsibility lies on government, individuals, civil societies and businesses have a part to play in upholding human rights. When a government ratifies a human rights treaty, it assumes a legal obligation **to respect, protect and fulfil the rights** contained in the treaty. Governments are obligated to ensure that human rights are protected from violation and that effective remedies are provided in the event of a violation.

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- **Respect** - Governments must not deprive people of a right or interfere with persons exercising their rights. For example, governments can sign international treaties, create institutional guarantees of human rights, and provide ways for people whose human rights have been violated by the government, to seek redress from courts.
  - **Protect** – Government must prevent private actors from violating the human rights of others, for example by prosecuting perpetrators of human rights abuses such as domestic violence, educating people about human rights and the importance of respecting the human rights of others, and cooperating with the international community in preventing and prosecuting crimes/violations against humanity.
  - **Fulfill** – Governments must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights, for example by providing free, high-quality public education, creating a public defender system so that everyone has access to legal aid, ensuring that everyone has access to food by funding public assistance programmes, and funding a public education campaign on the right to vote, etc.

#### **The Importance/Benefits of Human Rights to Society**

- Human rights reflect the minimum standards necessary for people to live with dignity.
- Human rights give people the freedom to choose how they live, how they express themselves, and what kind of government they want to support, etc.
- Human rights also guarantee people the means necessary to satisfy their basic needs, such as food, housing and education, so they can take full advantage of all opportunities.
- Finally, by guaranteeing life, liberty, equality and security, human rights protect persons from being abused or oppressed by those who are more powerful.

## **II. Civil Justice Responses to SGBV**

Civil justice is a system of law used to settle disputes between individuals and/or organisations. It is a mechanism for individuals to achieve a fair solution when they have been injured, abused, or harmed as a result of another person's misconduct, recklessness, or malfeasance. The civil justice

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system allows a victim to sue for monetary damages (pecuniary benefits) and obtain a recovery for injuries and deprivation suffered.

It must be noted that SGBV refers to any harmful act perpetrated against a person, based on gender differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty, whether in public or private life.

Victims or survivors of SGBV may pursue justice through civil justice contemporaneously with criminal prosecution, by enforcing their fundamental rights guaranteed by CFRN 1999, and filing a civil suit in deserving cases.

The civil justice response is discussed below:

Section 34 of the CFRN 1999 provides for the right to the dignity of the human person, including freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatments, and punishment.

Section 42, CFRN 1999, provides for the right to freedom from discrimination. SGBV is anchored on discriminatory social norms and the power imbalance between males and females, which is often in favour of the male and tends to undermine females' personal, emotional, and economic well-being.

- **Fundamental Rights Enforcement**

A victim of SGBV, in addition to activating the criminal justice system, can also simultaneously commence the enforcement of fundamental rights through the instrumentality of Section 46(1) CFRN 1999, which states that "Any person who alleges that any of the provisions of this chapter has been, is being or likely to be contravened in any state in relation to him may apply to a High Court in that state for redress."

Since SGBV also constitutes a violation of the fundamental rights of the victims as enshrined in the aforesaid provisions, the perpetrators of such discriminatory acts or acts of inhuman and degrading treatment occasioned by SGBV can be brought to justice, and upon being found liable, be made to pay monetary damages or compensation, to assuage the victim or survivor.

- **Filing of Civil Law Action**

SGBV is, first and foremost, a human rights issue but with significant social and economic repercussions resulting in mental and psychological trauma with attendant devastating consequences.

In a quest for civil justice response, the victim or survivor of SGBV in this regard can activate the civil justice mechanism by filing a civil suit to seek

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redress and punitive and exemplary damages against the perpetrator. The victim who files the civil suit becomes the claimant, and the perpetrator is the defendant.

- **The Civil Justice System**

In a civil suit, liability must be established on the basis of preponderance of evidence, and the victim controls essential decisions shaping the case, including whether to continue with the civil proceedings, accept a settlement or conclude the trial.

The civil justice system does not attempt to determine the innocence or guilt of the perpetrator. However, it seeks to establish whether the perpetrator is liable for the injuries sustained (mental, psychological or physical) as a result of the atrocity of the SGBV.

A court verdict of liability on the perpetrator of the SGBV implies that the perpetrator must pay the victim or his/her family monetary damages. The civil justice system provides victims with the requisite compensation required to rebuild their lives and holds the perpetrators that are found liable directly accountable to the victim.

### **III. Criminal Justice Responses to SGBV**

Criminal justice refers to a system that is derived from criminal law and focuses on concepts such as accountability of the person who commits a crime or offends public order or violates the rights of another, protection and compensation or redress of victims, and fairness in terms of all parties.

Criminal justice presents a mechanism for administering justice for crimes committed with a view to providing a fair result and having appropriate capacity and authority. Victims of SGBV may pursue justice through the criminal justice system by initiating a formal complaint. The criminal justice responses are discussed below:

#### **Part 1 of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015**

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), aims to prohibit all forms of violence against persons in private and public life and provides maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and the punishment of offenders. Essentially, the VAPP Act prohibits sexual violence, female genital mutilation, female circumcision, ejection of females from their homes, as well as economic deprivation of females; and it empowers the court to award appropriate compensation to the victim as it may deem fit in the circumstance.

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Specifically, Part 1 of the VAPP Act outlines the forms of violence classified as offences:

- Section 1 - Rape
- Section 2 - Inflicting Physical Injury on a Person
- Section 3 - Coercion
- Section 4 - Willfully Placing a Person in Fear of Physical Injury
- Section 5 - Offensive Conduct
- Section 6 - Female Circumcision or Genital Mutilation
- Section 9 - Forceful Ejection from Home
- Section 10 - Depriving a Person of His or Her Liberty
- Section 12 - Forceful Financial Deprivation and Economic Abuse
- Section 14 - Emotional, Verbal and Psychological Abuse
- Section 15 - Harmful Widowhood Practices
- Section 16 - Abandonment of Spouse, Children and Other Dependents without Sustenance
- Section 17 - Stalking
- Section 18 - Intimidation
- Section 19 - Spousal Battery
- Section 20 - Harmful Traditional Practices.

### **Section 357 of the Criminal Code Act**

The Criminal Code Act (which is applicable and replicated in all southern states in Nigeria) criminalises certain acts it considers offensive to the state. These extant criminal legislations encapsulate acts classified as rape and sexual offences.

Hence, it prescribes what conduct constitutes rape and sexual offences and the corresponding punishment.

### **The Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015 (ACJA, 2015)**

This is an enactment that makes provision for the administration of criminal justice in the courts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and other Federal Courts in Nigeria. This criminal legislation has also been re-enacted in a number of states across the federation as the Administration of Criminal Justice Law. Hence, the ACJA is to ensure that the system of administration of criminal justice in Nigeria promotes efficient management of criminal justice institutions, speedy dispensation of justice and protection of the rights and interests of the suspects, the defendants, and the victims. Specifically, ACJA, 2015 among other things, provides as follows:

- Section 3 - Arrest, Investigation, Inquiry and Trial
- Section 6 - Prompt Notification of Arrest and Legal Aid

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Section 8 -	Humane Treatment of an Arrested Person
Section 15 -	Recording of Arrest and Electronic Recording of Confessional Statement
Section 33 & 34 -	Report of Supervising Magistrate and Magisterial Monitoring of Police Arrest
Section 232 -	Witness Protection
Section 252 -	Payment of Witness Expenses
Section 319 -	Power of Courts to Award Costs, Compensation, and Damages in Deserving Cases

The criminal justice responses to SGBV can be activated through the instrumentality of the aforementioned criminal legislation as discussed below:

- **Victims'/Survivors' Response**

In this regard, the victim or survivor of SGBV or close associate can activate the criminal justice system in response to an injury suffered by laying a formal complaint or report to the law enforcement agencies, particularly the police.

- **Law Enforcement Response**

The process begins in a criminal justice system after a crime has been committed and reported to law enforcement agents. The police officers, in particular, play a "gate-keeper role" in deciding whether to institute a criminal charge on the basis of the complaint received from the victim or survivor. Thus, the police are responsible for filing SGBV-related offences upon the completion of documentation and investigation.

- **Prosecutorial Response**

SGBV is also considered as a crime against the State. Therefore, the State can undertake or initiate the prosecution of the perpetrators. In this respect, the Attorney General of the Federation or State can either prosecute or issue a fiat to a private \*prosecutor to undertake the criminal prosecution of an offender by filing the relevant count charges or First Information Report as prescribed by the ACJA, 2015.

- **Court/Judiciary Response**

The court can play a critical role in bringing perpetrators of SGBV to justice. The role of the judiciary pursuant to Section 6, CFRN, 1999 in criminal proceedings includes applying and interpreting the relevant criminal legislations, determining facts, protecting the rights of the defendant and victim and, upon conviction, pronouncing appropriate



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punishment. However, courts can be geographically distant from where crimes occurred, and many victims may find it difficult to attend court proceedings on numerous occasions. It becomes imperative for the victim or their close associates to collate relevant and compelling evidence to ground the success of the case in court.

#### **IV. Barriers to Effective Justice Delivery in Reported Cases of Gender-Based Violence and How to Overcome Them**

Judges are often at the far end of the criminal justice system. They place reliance on the police and prosecutors to discharge their statutory obligations in a gender-responsive manner. However, very few cases of SGBV proceed to the civil and criminal courts. Thus, studies across Nigeria consistently showed that only a minority of cases related to SGBV are reported to the police. And unfortunately, not all the reported cases metamorphose into charges being levelled against the perpetrators. Only a small number of these reported cases are initiated in courts.

Notwithstanding, the judiciary (which constitutes the court systems) has a role to play in understanding and rectifying the legal, social, and institutional barriers victims of SGBV face, to ensure an appropriate response. Hence, a court system that caters to the needs of the most vulnerable and traumatised will be effective in justice service delivery. We now examine how to overcome the barriers.

##### **Legal Barriers**

- Concerns about disproportionately lenient sentences in convictions involving SGBV.
- Different criminal legislations that operate in Nigeria (North and South) hinder effective justice delivery in reported cases of SGBV.

In the South, we have the Criminal Code, while in the North, we have the Penal Code and Shari'a Law. For example, Section 55, Penal Code, is anchored on punitive philosophy rather than a criminal legal procedure that permits a husband to discipline his wife.

Section 282, Penal Code, provides that "Sexual Intercourse by a man with his wife is not a rape if she has attained puberty." This provision seems to justify early marriage and child birth for girls just attaining puberty, irrespective of its attendant consequences. It is not surprising that cases of

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Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) are rampant in the North based on the act of abuse promoted unwittingly by the Penal Code.

- The legal framework in Nigeria is biased towards the patriarchal system that traditionally defines the societies in the territory.
- The VAPP Act has only been adopted by 16 of the 36 States of the Federation, and even most of the states that have adopted them hardly implement them. In this respect, Amnesty International reported in 2017 that most of the laws against SGBV in Nigeria are only applicable in the Federal Capital Territory.

### **Social, Cultural and Religious Barriers**

- Family and Community Pressure.
- Social stigma and cultural values.
- The customary and religious systems in the states, particularly in northern Nigeria, operate laws founded on custom and religious considerations.
- By reason of custom and cultural practices, for example, a married woman is expected to endure whatever condition comes her way in her matrimonial home.

### **Institutional Barriers**

- The burden of initiating a formal complaint and subsequent prosecution is often on the distressed victim of SGBV.
- Evidential issues: Over-reliance on physical evidence and the inherent challenges in collating and gathering of evidence to substantiate cases of SGBV.
- Rural and remote access to Police stations and the courts.
- Financial consequences of active participation in the civil and criminal justice system.
- Ineffective and poorly investigated cases of SGBV by law enforcement agents leading to instituting weak cases of SGBV riddled with loopholes that can be easily exploited legally, culminating in the failure of such cases.
- Protracted delays in civil and criminal trials in cases of SGBV. According to the *Daily Post*, 2021, the Minister of Women Affairs stated in April 2021 that only 11 out of over 3,000 cases of SGBV reported in 6 states were prosecuted in Nigeria. The others were left unattended to by the judiciary due to institutional bottlenecks.
- The emphasis on mediation or informal resolution and the lack of legal assistance and victim support services.

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- The Endemic Corruption Syndrome in Nigeria: The prevalence of corruption in Nigeria has also been identified as a barrier to effective justice delivery in SGBV cases. For instance, government officials in the SGBV response team identified the corruption of security agents as a contributory factor to ineffective justice delivery in SGBV cases. Sometimes, the security operatives stall investigations and prevent cases of SGBV from proceeding to court.
  - Inability to fully implement specific provisions of the law, particularly the criminal code and VAPP Act which prescribe stiffer punishment for rape and other sexual offences.
  - Prolonged procedures in the investigation of SGBV cases, and delays during trials occasioned by technicalities employed by counsels in pending cases of SGBV before the courts.

### **Overcoming the Barriers**

Attitudinal change, re-orientation and institutional reforms are required for effective justice delivery and to prevent the repetition of SGBV. This will ensure victims' participation, protecting dignity, safety, confidentiality and privacy.

- Establish free legal assistance system: Victims of SGBV and their associates can solicit for free legal assistance, for instance, from the Legal Aid Council across the federation, *pro bono* legal assistance from the NBA, FIDA and relevant NGOs in pursuit of justice.
- Establish mobile courts and police posts, particularly in rural and remote areas of Nigeria, thereby granting speedy access to justice to victims of SGBV.
- Engage in institutional reforms with an emphasis on strengthening domestic investigation and prosecution capacities. This entails the provision of adequate facilities for law enforcement officers, especially the police, to respond professionally to reports of SGBV.
- Create specialised courts in all the local governments in Nigeria to facilitate speedy dispensation of justice in SGBV cases.
- Focus on training public officials, especially law enforcement agencies and the judicial systems. This will involve training and re-training of the officers on intake, documenting, investigating, prosecuting, and conducting SGBV cases.
- Increase awareness of the necessity of removing victims' obstacles in accessing criminal accountability processes as a result of the absence of medico-social and legal support.

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- Urge states that are yet to pass the VAPP Law to adopt it without further delay, so as to facilitate the enforcement of SGBV-related cases in their territorial domain.
  - Establish Reporting Centres for SGBV Cases: The centres for the report of SGBV cases should be created by the government across all local government areas to fast-track processes of access to justice.

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## Module Four:

### Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence through Strategic Communication and Advocacy Mechanisms

#### A Brief Overview

Communication is the mutual exchange of meaning, and the flow of information between the sender and the receiver. For communication to be effective, there has to be a successful conveying and reception of the content, and this content understood in exactly the manner intended by the sender. In addition, for communication to be effective in achieving its goals, it often requires planning or strategising. Thus, in the context of creating awareness for ending or eliminating SGBV, communication has to be strategically designed to achieve this long-term goal.

Strategic Communication is the purposeful use of communication to achieve a goal or result, and in this context, it is the deliberate and purposeful use of communication to create awareness regarding the challenge of SGBV, to galvanize stakeholders' efforts towards its elimination, and to promote alternative social norms.

To achieve these long-term results, communication must be designed to include advocacy, that is, the making of deliberate efforts to gain public support for a cause or policy. All efforts made across the globe to gain public support for eliminating SGBV come under the broad term of advocacy.

Although greater awareness regarding the evil of SGBV has emerged in recent times through the various means of social communication, through street campaigns, neighbourhood watches, community efforts, and through campaigns by religious institutions, the challenge of raising awareness on the negative consequences of SGBV remains a serious one. Thus, eliminating SGBV requires ever greater and ever more innovative efforts, especially through strategic communication and advocacy.

A successful/effective communication plan for the elimination of SGBV should include the following elements among others:

- **Proper Identification of the Target Audience:** The target audience is the person or groups of persons for whom the information is intended. Because the purpose of the communication is to raise awareness and understanding of the place of the Christian religion and the role of Christian stakeholders in the elimination of SGBV, and to encourage response from various other stakeholders, the target audience should include: women and girls, men and boys, clerics, lay leaders, organizations and groups in Christian Churches, school teachers and

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counsellors, community leaders and leaders of thought, as well as superiors and members of religious congregations.

- **Context, Goals and Objectives of the Communication:** The context and the reason(s) for the communication need to be clear from the outset. When we understand the circumstance necessitating a communication, it makes it easy to clearly understand and identify the goals and objectives of such communication. Our context here is the prevalence in our society of practices that amount to SGBV and the extent to which it contradicts core Christian principles and values. Our goal is therefore to increase the awareness of the members of Christian religious communities on the nature, forms and manifestations of SGBV, to demonstrate how seriously they violate not only core humanistic and Christian values, but also international and local legislations, and the need to mobilise collective action towards eliminating the menace, while equally supporting and responding appropriately to persons who suffer SGBV.
- **Key Messages** - What do we need to communicate? In our context, we need to create awareness of SGBV, identify the causes and the underlying beliefs, practices and factors that aid SGBV, highlight the cost and impact of violence against persons in society, and come up with strategies and mechanisms for eliminating the menace.
- **Appropriate Medium** - How will we communicate? This involves identifying the right channel or medium to be used to ensure that our communication reaches the target audience in a way and manner that they understand, connect with, and respond fittingly to the message.
- **Measure of Success** - How will we know our communication was successful? It is appropriate to identify some indicators or parameters to evaluate the impact of the communication.

### **Setting Communication Goals and Objectives**

The goals of communication are to inform, request, persuade and build relationships. The goal of this project is to eliminate all forms of SGBV, and the messages can be delivered through participatory communication, advocacy communication, behavioural change communication, social mobilisation and interpersonal communication.

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- **Participatory Communication:** This refers to the building of relationships with the community, to facilitate collective action for social change that will bring about gender equality and eliminate SGBV. By means of participatory communication, local communities will be encouraged and empowered to engage in an ongoing interrogation of their traditional and modern-day practices, as well as involve other stakeholders in building an improved policy environment.
  - **Advocacy Communication:** The advocacy component should inform and motivate appropriate leaders to create a supportive environment by taking actions, including funds mobilisation to create awareness, changing policies that will guarantee speedy justice for victims, and supporting the timely investigation of SGBV. Such actions could also involve using dialogue to change social and cultural attitudes that support SGBV and gender inequalities.
  - **Behavioural Change Communication:** This aims at effecting change in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices of individuals, families and communities to stimulate and facilitate wider social change at both local and national levels. This can be achieved through dialogue with individuals and groups to inform, motivate, and promote behavioural change.
  - **Social Mobilisation:** Training sessions and community meetings should be part of the social mobilisation efforts to reflect upon strategies and mechanisms for eliminating SGBV and gender inequality issues. The objective is to gain support from local authorities as well as community stakeholders for the realization of the objectives of the project.
  - **Interpersonal Communication:** This aims at involving each person that the campaigner can reach, and especially those in his or her sphere of influence, including local community leaders, in passing the message to their community members in advocating for change with regard to eliminating all forms of SGBV.

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## I. Campaign Modalities Towards Awareness Raising and Attitudinal Change

In the work to eliminate SGBV, a number of campaign modalities may be adopted to increase awareness, and facilitate attitudinal change and stakeholder response. Some of these include:

- i. **Town Hall Meetings:** This is a public forum to discuss strategies and modalities for eliminating SGBV in the community and it should involve various stakeholders within the community, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, women and youth leaders, etc.
- ii. **Walk for SGBV:** Such can be organised to raise awareness in the public space, particularly on the streets. This is led by a core team that plans, organises, and executes the walk. It can also be a forum to distribute IEC materials to members of the public.
- iii. **Use of IEC Materials:** Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials convey messages to raise awareness and call for attitudinal change regarding SGBV. IEC materials include a range of products like Handbills, Leaflets, Flyers, Stickers, Billboards, and Infographics.
- iv. **Workshops and Seminars:** These can be organised for various groups within the community to further educate and inform members on their roles in eliminating SGBV. A workshop enables the group to learn about SGBV through intensive discussions, case studies, role plays, and related activities. At the same time, a seminar is a more academic form of instruction, which could be at an educational institution or organised by a professional organisation. Facilitators need to be on hand for this.
- v. **Focus Group Activities:** This is organising the community into various groups with set questions on the topic of SGBV, where the teams discuss and come up with modalities on how best to eliminate such in the community and society. Thereafter, the teams present their findings to the relevant authorities.
- vi. **Joint Community Actions:** Community action helps to increase the understanding, engagement, and empowerment of communities in the design and delivery of the awareness programme. Community action includes a broad range of activities and is sometimes described as 'social action' or 'community engagement.'



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- vii. **Sermons and Preaching:** From various pulpits, ministers of the Gospel can harp on this message to reach the hearts and minds of the congregants on the need to eliminate SGBV and promote better relations among community members.
  - viii. **Radio and TV Interviews and Talk Shows:** The broadcast media has a vast reach, and programmes can be designed to promote awareness of the dangers of SGBV. Such can be through interviews, documentaries, news items, radio dramas, TV dramas, talk shows, etc.
  - ix. **Newspaper publications:** The print media can be used as well with opinion pieces, features, articles, reviews and other related stories shared as a means of eliminating SGBV.
  - x. **Social Media:** With the bulk of the population on various social media platforms, this has become a viable and far-reaching campaign tool to spread the message regarding the dangers of SGBV and what community members can do to eliminate it. Targeted messages should be formulated by both young and older groups in the community, and these can be shared in various forms like infographics, videos, pictures, and texts on various platforms.

## **II. Essential Skills for Tackling SGBV**

In the task of tackling SGBV, several individuals and groups shall be playing various roles:

1. Religious Leaders
2. Community Leaders
3. Youth Champions
4. Women Leaders
5. Government Representatives

For the campaign to eliminate SGBV to achieve success in whichever space, a number of skills are necessary. Depending on who is involved and what the audience and context are, the required skills may vary. They include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Effective Communication and Public Speaking Skills
2. Training and Facilitation Skills
3. Conflict Management Skills
4. Intra and Inter-faith Peace Building Skills
5. Social Media Campaign Skills

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**Characteristics of Effective Communication:**

- **Completeness:** The receiver gets all the information he or she needs to process the message and takes necessary action. [The message must contain all necessary facts for the desired response]
- **Conciseness:** The message must be kept on point, simple and direct. [All unnecessary words must be eliminated]
- **Concreteness:** The information shared must be specific. It should not be vague.
- **Correctness:** All elements of the information, including facts and figures, translation of texts from local languages, etc., must be accurate.
- **Clearness/Clarity:** The message must be clear and easy to understand. [There must be clarity in terms of thoughts and expression]
- **Courtesy:** One must communicate in a friendly, polite, and respectful manner.
- **Consideration:** The Communicator must always strive to understand the emotions and sentiments of the receiver.

***Skills for Training and Facilitation (especially for Community level engagements)*****For good facilitation, the trainer should take note of the following:**

- Prepare in advance – advance research work is very important for everyone engaged in any form of facilitation.
- Ensure clear and effective communication.
- Engage in active listening.
- Give room for questions.
- Be good with timekeeping.
- Establish a psychologically safe environment for sharing.
- Create focus amongst the group.
- Ensure (unbiased) objectivity.
- Have organizational skills.
- Be flexible and adaptable
- Be enthusiastic about lifelong learning.

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***Skills for Conflict Management***

- Effective communication - one of the most important skills one requires for conflict management
- Active listening
- Empathy
- Problem-solving skills
- Positive attitude or optimism
- Level-headedness
- Patience
- Ability to understand body language

***Skills for Inter and Intra Faith Peace Building***

- Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution
- Peacebuilding and Reconciliation
- Trust Building
- Active Listening
- Confidence Building

It should be noted that for someone in a role that requires responding directly to survivors of SGBV, the following skills are helpful:

- Basic Counselling Skills
- Reporting and Documentation Skills
- Ability to provide Safe Spaces

### **III. Community Response to SGBV**

Communities have major roles to play in Eliminating SGBV. The following are some activities that communities can take on:

- i. Communities or Churches can set up SGBV Response Desks: These should be readily accessible and linked to security agencies, hospitals, safe spaces, and such other agencies or institutions that can render support in response to victims and survivors of SGBV. Such desks should have non-judgmental, empathetic, and caring people manning them, and they should be in a position to take necessary action very swiftly or at very short notice.
- ii. Communities or Churches can set up safe spaces: These are secure places where survivors of SGBV can run to for temporary accommodation, in the event of a real and urgent threat of violence

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- or harm. The spaces should be welcoming, comfortable, and loving, where survivors can thrive and, if possible, play some game, learn some skill, or engage in some other activity that will help take their minds off the violence experienced. It will also help if such safe spaces are equipped with possibilities of psychological first aid.
- iii. Communities or Churches could help poor, vulnerable persons learn life skills or trades and create avenues for empowerment and confidence building of these persons, thus preventing some dimensions of SGBV.
  - iv. Communities or Churches can set up partnerships with existing institutions like the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Federation of International Women Lawyers (FIDA), Legal Aid Council, Psychological Support Groups, Local NGOs, etc. to facilitate the joint actions as well as support and referral services that may be required.
  - v. Communities or Churches can set up Counselling units: This will greatly help survivors find healing for their trauma, when they know they can be listened to without stigmatization or judgment.
  - vi. Communities or Churches can set up key enlightenment sessions at various levels on the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP Act), Child Rights Act, Fundamental Human Rights, the Constitution, and other such laws to ensure that community members know their rights as citizens of the country.
  - vii. Communities or Churches can help to educate people on the need to stop abuse, victim-blaming and judging, as well as stigmatization. People should be encouraged to show survivors love, care, and support, as this is all they need at critical times.
  - viii. Communities or Churches can champion campaigns and street walks to raise awareness of the dangers of SGBV and encourage survivors to speak out and not die in silence.
  - ix. Communities and Churches can use regular media and social media platforms to speak up against any type of violence. When community members see that there is a great concern about the subject matter of SGBV from their religious and community leaders, they will eventually begin to do the right thing.

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## **IV. Advocacy Mechanisms for Change in Legal and Policy Frameworks and Justice Delivery**

Advocacy refers to efforts to promote public support for a particular cause, behaviour or policy change. It involves promoting the interests or cause of someone or a group of people. An advocate is a person who argues for, recommends, or passionately supports a cause or policy. Advocacy is also about helping people find their voice and standing up for issues that concern them.

An advocacy strategy essentially answers some questions, including what the advocacy issue will be, where and how it will work, and how its results will be measured. Advocacy can be complicated, but a well-focused and clearly defined strategy can simplify things by providing a 'route map'.

The policy changes we wish to see in eliminating SGBV will often be due to a dearth of resources, especially when individuals and groups engaged in the advocacy compare themselves to the government and other interest groups that they are desiring to influence. There is, therefore, a need to harness the resources at the community leader's disposal, and strategic planning helps to achieve this.

One of the key success factors for advocacy is to achieve widespread support and participation. Strategic planning is a systematic approach that makes it easier for others to become aware of our plans and to get involved in our project. Strategic messages are targeted to relevant audiences, resulting in effective communication.

For the Elimination of SGBV, various means are necessary to ensure the advocacy speaks to a change in attitude and promotes justice delivery. To make such advocacy successful in various communities, the following are a few steps to consider:

1. **Determine a Clear Objective:** The more immersed you get into one issue, the more others surface. Don't get distracted. An effective strategy must be clear, concise, and constant. Frequently shifting goals and objectives creates confusion and can ultimately lead to digression, disgruntlement, and possibly defections by members and volunteers who need to see some progress being made in order to sustain their interests.
2. **Do Your Research:** There is a need to ensure the campaign or advocacy team is clear not only on the objective but also on any nuances around the topic. Find out what has been done to eliminate SGBV in your community, and build upon it.

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3. **Focus on Building Relationships:** You never really know who will prove to be very useful, until situations for advocacy arise. Team members should be a network of relationships with people of influence and then leverage such relationships.
  4. **Develop a Grassroots Strategy:** The messaging and communication around eliminating SGBV must be simple and easy to understand for all members of the community. Such messaging needs to carry everyone along to ensure they buy into the campaign.
  5. **Use social media and other Digital Tools:** In an ever-changing world where digital technology is becoming the order of the day in every sphere of life, campaigners and advocates must seriously engage the social media to drive the desired positive change. And if strategically done, messages calling for the elimination of SGBV from various communities can be an effective tool to drive change. Such messaging should be targeted at the youth, religious leaders, policymakers and other influential members of communities, to show the rest of society that community leaders and advocates have taken a stand.
  6. **Make National Issues a Local One:** The famous phrase goes, “All politics is local,” and the same could be said about advocacy. Tying the issues around SGBV to the day-to-day life of the people in the community is the best way to inspire the right action. The issues must be made personally relevant to the people, so they can also drive support for eliminating SGBV.
  7. **Respect is key:** Even in working for policy change and especially advocating for the elimination of SGBV, the language of advocacy should be respectful and not threatening in any way. Demand for attitudinal change and eventual policy change should always consider the greater good of various communities.

For the elimination of SGBV to become a reality, there has to be various levels of advocacy for policy change.

Although some laws and policies already exist to ensure the elimination of SGBV, there is a need to advocate for domestication, proper implementation, and monitoring of these laws to achieve better results. A well-planned and effectively executed advocacy mechanism can make a difference in various communities.

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Some of the laws and policies already in place and which various communities could come together to advocate for their implementation include:

1. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015. This is a robust piece of legislation passed by the National Assembly to tackle cases of SGBV in Nigeria. Though it does not expressly define GBV, the prevailing opinion is that GBV is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that disproportionately affects persons of a particular gender. While majority of the states in Nigeria have domesticated this law, there are still a few that are yet to do so. Implementation of this law in the various states would definitely be a giant step taken towards eliminating SGBV because offenders would be punished and be seen to be punished for such crimes. Such would definitely serve as a deterrent to others who may have similar tendencies.
2. In 2019, Nigeria launched the National "*Sexual Offender Register*," which is managed by Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking Persons (NAPTIP) and funded mainly by the European Union. This was to name and shame rapists and offenders of other forms of violence against persons across the country. A sex offender register is a list of all convicted sex offenders in a state, and it generally includes the offender's address, physical appearance, and criminal history.

Unfortunately, only 10 out of the 36 states in Nigeria keep databases of those convicted of sexual offences. The states are Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Bayelsa, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Adamawa, Abia and Kaduna. Yet, only Lagos, Ekiti, Edo, and Akwa Ibom states publish the full details of the offenders in order to 'name and shame' them. Sadly, these registers are not updated regularly, defeating the purpose of establishing them. There is now therefore a widespread call for a national register which will be monitored and updated frequently. Properly updating and monitoring this register would serve as one other means of eliminating SGBV in Nigeria.
3. As of January 2022, 11 states were yet to adopt the Child Rights Act passed in 2003. This was an early effort by the Nigerian government to address issues of violence in a child's formative years. Unfortunately, such issues have far-reaching consequences on the child's physical, mental, sexual, and emotional well-being. Sexual harassment within the school environment can interfere with students' educational opportunities. Sexual and Gender-based violence (SGBV) devastates survivors and their families and also has high social and economic costs.

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Nigeria's enactment of the Child's Right Act 2003 is meant to respect the rights of children, and protect them from every form of violence, including sexual harassment and abuse, as well as child labour. Heightening the advocacy for domesticating and wholly implementing this law in all communities across the federation will help to protect children and minors from the devastating effects of SGBV.

In summary, advocacy is necessary and can be engaged in at various levels using the resources at the disposal of community stakeholders. There should be strategic planning to see what works best in each community and how voices can be rallied around the subject matter of eliminating SGBV. The mass media and a variety of digital tools should be incorporated into the advocacy plan to ensure a wider reach.

There is also the need to ensure that the language is simple enough for, and respectful of everyone involved, both the policymakers and ordinary citizens. At the end of the day, such policy change and policy implementation will provide for the greater good of all community members (men, women, youth, and children), and ensure that all are protected from the devastating effects of SGBV.



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## **Module Five:**

### **Introduction to Psychological First Aid and Referral Services for Responding to survivors of SGBV**

#### **A Brief Overview**

**B**ecause emotional distress is not always as visible as physical injury, even though it is just as painful and debilitating, Psychological First Aid is designed to help people cope with the stress, shock, confusion, fear, feelings of hopelessness, grief, anger, guilt, as well as a withdrawal that arise when a catastrophe has occurred. In survivors of gender-based violence, these feelings are undoubtedly powerful. The emotional shock impacts their short-term well-being and their long-term psychological stability, including their ability to survive, cope and care for themselves and their loved ones. Getting these survivors the psychological help they need to regain a sense of safety security, and self-esteem is absolutely essential, and Psychological First Aid provides the tools to make this possible.

#### **What is Psychological First Aid?**

Psychological first aid (PFA) is a short-term disaster relief technique with the goal of providing safety, stability, and resources to people in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event so as to increase survivors' abilities to cope with the experience.

#### **PFA is guided by certain understandings of people's coping needs:**

- The need to feel safe, connected, and hopeful
- The need for access to support
- The need for self-confidence and self-reliance

#### **Components of PFA**

- Making initial contact with survivors
- Ensuring that survivors are safe and comfortable
- Helping survivors to calm down and get their orientation right
- Identifying survivors' immediate psycho-social needs
- Offering practical assistance to survivors
- Connecting survivors with resources
- Assisting survivors with coping strategies
- Linking survivors to collaborative services

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**Who can provide PFA?**

Anyone can be trained in psychological first aid. However, because certain people are more likely to be present following a disaster, PFA is commonly used by healthcare workers, police, religious leaders, road safety workers, crisis response teams, or disaster relief organizations.

**Limits of PFA**

PFA is not therapy, mental health treatment, or debriefing. Therefore, those who provide PFA must avoid the following:

- Forcing survivors to tell their stories. Instead, focus on keeping them safe and calm, and meeting their immediate needs.
- Offering false reassurance with statements like, “Everything will be alright.”
- Instructing survivors on what they should be thinking or feeling.
- Making promises that cannot be kept.

**Important Notice**

It is important to note that the kind of psychological first aid to be provided can vary from crisis to crisis, and even from person to person in the same or similar predicament. And this is because each situation is unique, just as each person affected is unique. While there are common reactions to disasters, each person has an individual response, and their immediate needs also vary. Everyone reacts differently to trauma. However, the earlier survivors are assisted in gaining a sense of calm and having their immediate needs met, the better they can cope with their state of trauma.

**SECTION TWO:**  
**GUIDE TO EXPERIENTIAL FACILITATION AND ACTIVITIES**

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## **Guide to Experiential Facilitation and Activities**

### **Overview**

Effective facilitation of adult learning must go beyond just “telling” (Display of Slides and a Q&A). It must be interactive so that participants can remain engaged and focused on the content, and be able to apply what they have learned outside the class and back in their communities.

To achieve this, content developers and facilitators must get familiar with the complex theories and practices that have come to be known as “Adult Competency-Based Learning Mechanisms.” It involves a variety of experiential teaching and learning methodologies, techniques, tools and activities.

These activities can be incorporated into the design of learning interventions and captured in the Facilitators notes that will guide the actual delivery of the training.

The following is an introduction to Adult Learning Theory and some of its implications. It explores a variety of experiential, discovery-based group facilitation activities and techniques that facilitators can adopt and apply.

### **Adult Learning Theory**

Andragogy – adult learning – is quite distinct from pedagogy (traditional education targeted at children and youth). Adult Learning Theory is built on the following truths about adults in a learning environment, originally articulated by Malcolm Knowles:

- Adults have a base of knowledge and experience already, unlike children, so it is important to engage them adequately and include their existing knowledge and experience into your design and delivery.
- Adults need to understand why they are learning and how they will apply it to solving real-life problems. Your content and delivery should therefore focus on exploring the importance of certain bodies of knowledge and getting participants to reflect on and plan for how to apply the knowledge after the training.
- Adults need to have control, so you must reflect this in your design and delivery by democratizing some aspects of your delivery and giving your participants choices about groups to which they belong, and how they go about certain activities.

- Adults are more interested in learning things that they can use immediately, so be careful in your needs analysis and in selecting participants for training. It is also important to ensure proper context in content design and delivery so that examples and references are relevant to the participants and their realities.

Like children, adults also have different learning styles and preferences. Auditory learners learn by listening; visual learners enjoy pictures, kinesthetic learners learn by doing; logical learners enjoy solving problems and analyzing; social learners enjoy working with others and learning with others; solitary learners prefer to learn on their own; while verbal learners like to talk and express themselves when learning.

The following are examples of ways in which the Adult Learning techniques can be applied in the design and delivery of the training:

<b>S/No</b>	<b>Technique/Activity</b>	<b>Description/Benefit</b>
1.	Write-Along Workbooks	This is one of the best ways of ensuring that participants pay attention and stay engaged during a workshop.  Adults can be easily distracted, but by getting them to write along as you speak and capture key words and phrases or fill in the blanks, you ensure that they pay attention.
2.	Pre-Reading	You can give participants a case study or other reading material before the training. This way they can start to think and reflect on the content and the subject matter. The Pre-Reading can even be discussed at the beginning of the training.
3.	Read and Discuss	One of the challenges with adults today is that we do not read enough. Giving participants something to read and discuss in your workshop will challenge them to read and inculcate reading habits. It also boosts their ability to analyze and interpret written information.

4.	Group Quiz Competition	You can put participants into groups and ask one group to challenge the other with difficult questions, to test their knowledge of the content.
5.	Puzzles	Crossword puzzles and other forms of puzzles are great in stimulating the analytical capacity of participants and they are also fun.  You can create puzzles on the content itself using a variety of free and licensed apps.
6.	Pre-Tests	One way to get participants to pay attention to the content is to give them a pre-test. They will tend to pay attention more particularly to find the correct answers to questions they got wrong.
7.	Post Tests	The post-test is a great way for you to evaluate transfer of knowledge. You can compare it to your pre-test scores to measure learning transfer. It is great for Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) activities and reports.
8.	Virtual Games	For a younger generation of participants, virtual games that may include scenarios and tests will be fun and engaging. They can be built with eLearning authoring tools like <i>Articulate</i> .  Older persons also enjoy them. Gamification is an important part of modern learning mechanisms.
9.	Mind-Mapping	This tool is useful in getting participants to come up with ideas especially in training related to communication skills or content development. Mind mapping is a powerful tool for coming up with creative

		communication ideas.
10.	Brainstorming	This is useful to get participants to come up with ideas to solve a problem. There are many methods of brainstorming like round-robin, free-wheeling, slip method, etc.
11.	Brainwriting	This is a unique form of silent brainstorming and is considered one of the most effective ways of brainstorming.
12.	Teach Back	Participants can be challenged to teach-back certain parts of the content to the rest of the class. This is a good way to assess their actual capabilities.
13.	Case Studies	Case studies are a great tool to get participants to connect to a real-life situation. Stories are a great way to teach lessons and case studies are stories related to your content.
14.	Turn to Your Partner	<p>This can be done from time to time to get participants to talk. It is very effective because everyone gets to talk to somebody, everyone gets their views heard by somebody, and this can all be achieved within a very short period of time.</p> <p>It is a better way to get people to talk while managing time, compared to always asking participants to address the whole group.</p>
15.	Matching Games	Participants can be challenged to match concepts to each other. This challenges them to read, analyze and make connections. Matching can be done by drawing a line to connect the related concepts on a worksheet or in the workbook.

16.	Board Games	Board games are an important tool of gamification that can be used to enhance learning experiences. You can visit <a href="http://www.bebetterbooks.biz">www.bebetterbooks.biz</a> to take advantage of board games in a variety of learning areas.
17.	Card Sort Games	Participants can be asked to sort out information written on cards. For example, organizing facts related to certain subjects, descriptors of values, etc.
18.	Action Planning	At the end of each lesson or module, participants can be asked to come up with an action plan for applying what they have learned back at work or in their lives.  They can also be asked to plan a project using a project planner by assigning tasks to different people with clear deliverables and timelines.
19.	Commitment Sheets	Similar to the action planning sheets, commitment sheets can even be created and sent to the participants' supervisors, spouses or other accountability partner as they commit to doing things differently after the workshop.
20.	Role Plays	A role play is an opportunity for participants to act out or demonstrate something like giving feedback, listening, responding to a complaint, coaching or counselling. Usually there will be an observer to give the role players feedback.
21.	In-Basket Activities	Rather than just discussing a case study, an in-basket challenges participants to act out their ideas on the case study like a role-play.  So instead of just commenting on the case



		study on leadership and saying the character should have been more professional with his feedback, you will be required to demonstrate through a role play what professional feedback is.
22.	Journaling	Participants can be given a notebook to journalize - capture notes of important things that they do and learn during the workshop and ideas for implementation, after the workshop.
23.	Reflective Practice	Similar to journaling, participants can be asked to reflect on something and come up with ideas/responses/actions based on their reflections.
24.	Root Cause Analysis	To analyse problems and challenges, participants can use the Why Tree or the Fishbone diagram together.
25.	Group Discussions & Presentation	Participants can be pooled into various groups to discuss an issue and then make a presentation to the entire group.
26.	Group FAQs	Participants can read a material together, discuss and learn from each other and then come up with questions that still require clarification which they will now ask the facilitator. Some people call it “Face the Facilitator”
27.	Lunch and Learn	During a long lunch break, participants can continue specific discussions in groups while enjoying their meal. This way, the learning continues, and it also encourages participants to bond with each other.
28.	Videos & Discussions	Videos should be used to engage participants. They could be documentaries, drama, excerpts from movies, seminars or

		even TV interviews. They are very effective in bringing in the ideas and perspectives of experts into your workshop.
29.	Traffic Lights	This can be used to get people to think about what they should STOP doing (Red), Continue doing (Amber) and Start Doing (GREEN). You can create a worksheet with these colours for some of the activities.
30.	Physical Games	There are a variety of physical games that you can use as icebreakers and warmers and also to teach valuable lessons in leadership, communication, customer service etc. like bingo, Jenga, building straw towers, blindfold games, crossing the great divide etc.

These experiential techniques, approaches and tools are not exhaustive, and they can be deployed in a variety of creative ways and adapted to various situations. Armed with these tools, you can help your participants prepare to translate their learning into their post-training activities and achieve desired results.

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## APPENDIX: A

### Scriptural Messages supporting the Elimination of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

#### Wife-Beating

1. Battering is not a sign of strength; it is a sign of weakness and abuse of power! The Bible says: *"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (Ephesians 5:21).
2. God abhors anyone who loves and uses violence: *"The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, but His soul hates him that loves violence"* (Psalm 11:5).
3. Do not beat your wife! She is a blessing and a source of favour from God, for you have been told: *"He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the Lord"* (Proverbs 18:22).
4. To batter a woman is to take pride in your weakness. Stop the battering, for the Scriptures say: *"But now you must get rid of all such things - anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth"* (Colossians 3:8).
5. If you love her as you love your own body, why beat her? Did you not know that the Scriptures say: *"In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself"* (Ephesians 5:28).
6. Your wife is your helper, not your punching bag. "Then the Lord God said, *'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner'* " (Genesis 2:18).
7. *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her"* (Ephesians 5:25). If you love your wife, you will not beat her. STOP THE BATTERING.
8. Your wife is your other self; to beat her is to beat yourself (cf. Ephesians 5:28).

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9. Your wife is a gateway to your answered prayers. For it is written, *"Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your lives together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may hinder your prayers"* (1 Peter 3:7).
  10. The only hand that a husband should put on his wife should be the hand of love (cf. Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19).
  11. By loving and sacrificing himself for his wife, the husband resembles Christ (cf. Ephesians. 5:25).
  12. Harming your wife harms yourself because, in marriage, two become one. Treat your wife as yourself, *"For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does the church"* (Ephesians 5:29).
  13. Do you not know love conquers all wrongdoing? *"Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).
  14. Be strong in love and weak in violence because nothing good comes out of violence. Remember, God defends the defenceless as the Psalmist says: *"May He defend the cause of the poor of the people; give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor"* (Psalms 72:4).

### **Wife-Abandonment**

1. Your wife is a member of your body, do not abandon her. Instead, nourish and cherish your wife and treat her kindly (cf. Ephesians 5:29-30).
2. None of us would like to be abandoned by those we love; why then should anyone abandon their spouse? Do you not know that you are supposed to *"do to others as you would have them do to you?"* (Luke 6:31).
3. Do not abandon your wife. No one ever abandons his own body, your wife is a part of your own body *"for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"* (Ephesians 5:31).

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4. Your wife is God's gift to you; she is a suitable partner. Stay with her and cherish her (cf. Genesis 2:18).
  5. Wife-Abandonment is evil. STOP THE WICKED ACT (cf. 1Peter 3:7).
  6. Do not be so unkind to abandon your wife. Were you not taught to *"be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you?"* (Ephesians 4:32).
  7. What is it that will lead you to abandon your wife? Did the scriptures not enjoin you to *"do your best to live in peace with everybody?"* (Romans 12:18). Do your best to live in peace with your wife.

### **Early/Child Marriage**

1. Allow the children to fulfil their purposes in life. Do not push them into early marriage. The Scriptures admonish: *"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven"* (Matthew 18:10).
2. Children are the future! Train them well to fulfil your Christian obligation, for Scripture commands: *"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray"* (Proverbs 22:6). STOP CHILD MARRIAGE!
3. Early marriage will destroy the innocence of children. We must preserve their innocence, for Jesus placed a high premium on them: (cf. Matt. 18:10).
4. Child marriage is provocative. Do not provoke your children as you have been told: *"Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged"* (Colossians 3:21 NLT).
5. Let the children wait for the right time, do not impose marriage on them because *"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Children should not be rushed into marriage.

### **Forced Marriage**

1. Marriage should be consensual between two consenting adults. *"Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?"* (Amos 3:3 NLT).

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2. God designed true love as the foundation of a marital union; why force people into marriage? Remember Jesus said: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* (John 13:34).
  3. Why force women and girls into marriage? Love is never forceful, unkind or coercive. Rather: *"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
  4. God has blessed us with free will and does not force us to do anything. He deals with us in love. Why then should we force anyone into the lifelong covenant of marriage? The Scriptures teach that *"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them"* (1 John 4:16).
  5. A forced marriage is a form of slavery; God did not design marriage that way. It is God's will that the society should enable women and girls to live in dignity and freedom as the Scriptures say, *"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"* (Galatians. 5:1).
  6. Don't force a woman to marry you. Love is freely given (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

### **Rampant Divorce**

1. Marriage is sacred and binding! *"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate"* (Matthew 19:6).
2. Do not join the ignorant in distorting God's plan. Divorce is not part of God's design for marriage, for Jesus said to them, *"It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."* (Matthew 19:8).
3. If you are not ready for the long haul of marriage, do not start the journey! *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to finish it?"* (Luke 14:28).

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4. Marriage is a union for life. Did you know that *"From the beginning of the creation, 'God made them male and female'? For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate"* (Mark 10: 6 - 9).

## **Rape**

1. The female body is not an object of pleasure; respect her, do not lust after her to cause her pain and agony, but *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:39).
2. Rape is evil. Stop the sacrilege, do not defile her body. *" I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"* (Rom. 12:1;1 Cor. 6:19).
3. Men should imbibe and promote a culture of respect for the female body; *"for the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 6:15:20).
4. Speak up against rape and defend those who have been abused. It is your Christian duty as commanded by the Scriptures: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice"* (Proverbs 31:8-9 NLT).

## **Denial of Education**

1. The education of the woman and the girl-child is a Christian duty. The Bible admonishes us to *" Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray"* (Proverbs 22:6).
2. Reject the traditions that undermine the education of women and girls just as Jesus opposed harmful traditions of his time (cf. Mark 7:1-16).
3. Ignorance will destroy our generation if we deny our children education, for as the Lord said: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hosea 4:6).

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4. Education is a good thing, do not withhold it from our women and girls. Remember what the Bible says: "*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do so*" (Proverbs 3:27).

### **Female Genital Mutilation**

1. Do not mutilate any part of the body because it is not yours but God's. "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?*" (1 Corinthians 6:19)
2. Christians, do not conform to the world but to the will of God, to respecting your body and that of your neighbour. "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God -- what is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Romans 12:2).
3. It is the grace of God that is needed to achieve sexual purity, not Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10).
4. Men who support the practice of Female Genital Mutilation as a means to sexual purity should note that St. Paul condemns those who say, "*Let us do evil that good may result*" (cf. Romans 3:8).
5. "But our bodies have many parts, and *God has put each part just where he wants it.*" Stop the distortion, Stop Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)! (1 Corinthians 12:18).
6. FGM is as intrinsically evil as it is fatally harmful. One can only compare it to wielding power without conscience, for it is written, "*do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock*" (1 Peter 5:3).

### **Suppression**

1. The woman was created as a collaborator and supporter to man. She is not to be trampled upon for "*So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female He created them*" (Genesis 1:27).
2. Why do you suppress the woman? Is she not a part of you? "*This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken*" (Genesis 2:23).



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3. The suppression of women and girls will always be a mark of fallen humanity, NOT the redeemed person: *"I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"* (Genesis 3:16).
  4. When we have authority and power, we should not undermine others, particularly women. *"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 7:12)
  5. The Bible celebrates women heroes who did what men would not do. Stop the suppression of women and celebrate their efforts (cf. Esther 4; Philippians 1:1-10).
  6. Positions of power are gifts from God for the service of others, not for the suppression of others, as the Scriptures teach: *"Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant"* (Mark 10:43 NLT).

### **Discrimination**

1. Stop discrimination against women and girls. *"You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* (Mark 12:31).
2. Stop the discrimination. *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; there is neither male nor female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).
3. To discriminate against women and girls is to discriminate against God (cf. Genesis 1:27).

**“Women are sources of life.  
Yet they are continually offended,  
beaten, raped,  
coaxed into prostitution  
and to kill the life that occurs  
in their womb.**

**Any violence  
inflicted on women  
is a profanation  
of [the Son of] God,  
born of a woman.”**

***Pope Francis***

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## APPENDIX B:

### Exhortations targeted at Christian Stakeholders on Ten Common Areas of SGBV in Nigeria

#### 1. Wife-Beating

When a Pharisee asked Jesus, which is the first and the greatest of all the commandments, Jesus went back to the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4-5) to draw his answer. He replied the man: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. This is the great and first commandment.”* Jesus did not stop here. He immediately added: *“And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets”* (Matthew. 22:34-40).

Jesus makes it clear that the whole of the Christian religion is founded on love: love of God and love of neighbour. Nothing is more important in the entire Law and the Prophets than these. Love is the core of Christian life, the basis of Christian morality. It guides and orients all our Christian behaviour. All our words, thoughts, and actions are expected to flow from this ethic of love. Saint John the Evangelist enjoins us: *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love”* (1 John. 4:7-8). With this commandment in mind, a Christian man who raises his hand against his wife should ask himself: Does my action show that I love God? Does my action show that I love my neighbour?

Wife-beating is an act of physical violence, which is contrary to this law of love. Saint Paul teaches how a husband should treat his wife: *“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”* (Eph. 5:25). Paul goes further to tell husbands: *“Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church”* (Eph. 5:28-29).

The basic idea in this injunction of Saint Paul is not simply that a man should treat his wife in the way he wants his wife to treat him, but that he should treat his wife in the way that Christ treats his Church. And how does Christ treat his Church? He loved the Church to the very end and sacrificed his life for the Church. This means that an essential aspect of the love that should bind husband and wife is their mutual love of God. If a man and his wife fall in love with God, their relationship will be devoid of any act of violence, whether physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. God is love; as such, those

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who claim to love God have to live the kind of life that God lives. This is why Paul begins by telling both husband and wife: *“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”* (Eph. 5:21).

If a husband reveres Christ, he will not treat his wife in a way that Christ will not like. The First Book of the Bible affirms that man and woman were created for each other: *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”* (Gen. 2:18). God’s desire to create the woman is to be a helper and not a punching bag. The woman is the man’s best friend. For this reason, husbands should be understanding and patient with their wives. In giving general norms for Christian behaviour, Paul admonishes us to forebear one another, *“and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”* (Col. 3:13). Going further, Paul specifically instructs husbands: *“Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them”* (Col. 3:19). Surely, this is not an easy admonition. But it is also not an impossible one. *“With God all things are possible”* (Matt. 19:26).

The truth is that true love has no place for any kind of anger or impatience that results in wife-battering. The high standard of the law of love to which the Bible holds all Christians is better seen in the clear statements of Saint Paul when he says: *“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”* (1 Cor. 13:4-7). In the interest of love, a husband will resolve any issue with his wife amicably and peacefully instead of raising his hand on her.

Consider this lovely attribute of love: *“Love bears all things.”* This means that there is absolutely nothing that your wife does that you cannot excuse or overlook because of love. For this reason, the only hand a man should lay on his wife should be the hand of love.

## **2. Wife Abandonment**

There is no better description of true love between a beloved and a lover, between a bride and a groom than we find in the Song of Songs: *“for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love; neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned”* (Songs 8:6-7).

In Christian marriage, a man and a woman pledge: *“For better for worse”* or *“in good times and in bad... till death do us part.”* Marital love is meant to be enduring; it is not a casual or temporary thing. True love is like a

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blazing fire that no amount of water can quench; not even a flood can drown it. *“Love never ends”* (1 Cor. 13:8), says Saint Paul.

A man who abandons his wife is failing the test of true love. If you love your partner only when the times are good, that is no love at all. If you love your partner only when there are no difficulties or challenges in the marriage, that is not true love. The shape of true love is its capacity to endure rough and tough times. There is no perfect marriage, but husband and wife can make the best out of each other and work towards the kind of marriage they desire. This means that when God pours joy into a marriage, the couple should rejoice and thank Him for it. When trials come, they should hold on to Jesus the Good Shepherd in whom we place our trust even when things get out of hand: *“Yes, though I walk through the (deep, sunless) valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil, for You art with me; your rod (to protect) and Your staff (to guide), they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4). Jesus never abandons us. He never leaves us stranded in the dark alleys of life. He is always there to accompany us. This is how marriage should be.

There are several reasons why some husbands abandon their wives. It could result from a lack of children in the marriage or the woman’s attitude or bad behaviour. It could be the result of marital infidelity. But this is precisely why the marriage rite is realistic. When a couple says *“for better, for worse”* or *“in good times and in bad”* on the day of their wedding, they should know that these words mean that moments of joy and moments of trials might come their way. This marital commitment prepares them for whatever challenges might come their way. This is why couples should strive to build their marriage on God Himself, who is the foundation of true love. If a marriage is built on this solid foundation, it will last and stand the test of time. It will be like a house built on a rock. *“the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock”* (Matt. 7:24-25).

In the Book of Genesis, we read that when Adam saw Eve after God created her, he exclaimed: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”* (Gen. 2:23). This is an exclamation of joy and fulfilment. Finally, Adam had found the most suitable companion for himself – what all the animals could not be for him (cf. Gen. 2:20). *“Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”* (Gen. 2:24).

The act of leaving one’s own parents and being joined to one’s wife is the Bible’s way of expressing the intimate bond of love and friendship that now exists between husband and wife. The woman is the man’s Other Self. To cleave to one’s wife is to become one body, one mind, one heart, and one soul with her. Where this intimate bond exists, nothing can break it. This is why a man who abandons his wife is like a man who abandons himself. In marriage, the man and woman are expected to accompany each other on the journey of

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life “till death do us part.” Nothing else should come between this love of man and woman in marriage.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk. 10:25-37) is one of the most powerful stories told by Jesus Christ, which put abandonment within a larger context. In the Parable, we hear that a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho fell into the hands of brigands. They stripped him, beat him and went off, leaving him half-dead. A priest who came upon the wounded man did not help him. A Levite did the same too. Only a Samaritan stopped by to help. Even though the moral of this gospel story is that we should put aside our differences and help those in need, the issue of abandonment also comes to the fore. The Priest and the Levite did not consider the wounded man a neighbour, which is why they abandoned him and did not stop to help him.

If Jesus expects Christians never to abandon their “neighbour,” how much more is this parable valid for married couples who are not just neighbours in the strict sense but even more intimately united in a bond that lasts a lifetime. In the very least, if a man can consider his wife as his neighbour, then he would have no reason to abandon her. At the centre of the Parable is the question: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’ answer will be: Do not abandon your spouse. Love her. Care for her. Be there for her.

### **3. Child Marriage**

Here is disturbing data on child marriage in Northern Nigeria: “Adolescent Girls (AGs) in Northern Nigeria have minimal choices and opportunities to reach their full potential. Cultural and religious socializations have resulted in girls feeling isolated and powerless and therefore conforming to cultural pressures to marry early. Although 43% of girls in Nigeria are married before 18, in the North-West, child marriage prevalence is as high as 76%.”<sup>4</sup>*Christian Aid* puts the burden on religious actors to help fight against early marriage, which deprives women and girls of reaching their full potential.

Marriage of children under 18 years old (which is the international norm for adulthood) is a violation of human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16). A child below 18, by law, is not able to give full consent. If one goes into marriage before this age, it will have negative effects, some of which are deprivation of the benefit of education and dangers to a woman’s health of early childbearing. This is why forced

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<sup>4</sup>“Religion and Time of Marriage: The Role of Faith Leaders in Advancing the Cause of Adolescent Girls” (May 2018). *Christian Aid*. Available online: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Religion-and-time-of-marriage-May-2018.pdf> (Accessed on 4 August 2021).

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marriage today is considered a form of modern slavery and a clear violation of the child's rights, especially for girls.

God gives children to parents and families so that they may be nurtured to full maturity in the fear and love of God. Jesus has preferential love and affection for little children, and he showed it clearly during his public life and ministry. He brought Jairus' 12-year-old daughter back to life (cf. Matt. 9:18-26). When he noticed the attitude of his disciples towards the little children that were brought to him, Jesus told them, "*Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God*" (Mk. 10:14). When his disciples wanted to know who the greatest is in the kingdom of heaven, "*And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'*" (Matt. 18:1-3).

All these and many other passages in the gospels show the high premium that Jesus placed on children's physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Jesus would strongly oppose whatever stands in the way of this well-being. Child marriage is a violation of the child's right to make a free and informed decision on an issue that requires the use of one's full faculty. It also violates the bodily integrity of children. Beyond this, it deprives the girl-child of the benefit of education since child marriage, and early childbearing often tends to put the girl-child out of school. A parent or guardian who loves their girl-child will not coerce her into child marriage, aware that she is not yet ripe for the enormous commitment that marriage demands.

In Ephesians 6:4, Saint Paul tells fathers: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." In this short statement, Saint Paul shows parents that they have serious responsibilities for the life of their children. They are to nourish and guide, inspire and instruct their children in the way of the Lord. This means that children have a right to expect love and care, instruction and guidance, provision and protection from their parents. An essential dimension of these responsibilities is protecting children from harm. Jesus issues strong words against those who mislead or harm children, "*but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea*" (cf. Matt. 18:6).

#### **4. Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage is a term used to describe a marriage in which both or at least one of the parties is married without their consent or against their will. In

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the context of violence against women, forced marriage refers to the coercion of a woman or girl-child into marriage or into marrying a man against her wish. Often, those at the centre of this practice are the girl's parents who believe that their girl-child should have no say as to whom she might want to marry. This practice is a violation of the girl's fundamental human rights and does not respect the equal dignity of man and woman.

In the Book of Genesis, we read that God made the human person male and female in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27-28). Being created in God's image and likeness means that the human person possesses an inalienable dignity that should never be violated on any pretext whatsoever. A forced marriage makes the girl-child or woman a slave in the marriage because it is against her consent and desire. Forced marriage tends to objectify women and deprive them of freedom of choice and a voice regarding their own personal lives.

On this issue of forced marriage, it is important to note that there are some instances in the Old Testament where it appears that the Bible speaks about forced marriage in a positive light. There are few occasions when fathers handed their daughters over to marry men they had just met without asking their daughters' opinions. Two prominent cases are the marriage of Rebekah to Isaac and the marriage of Rachel to Jacob (cf. Gen. 24:50-51; 29:15-19). In fact, in Deuteronomy 21:10-14, the Bible allows men to take captive women and force them to be their wives.

As church leaders, we have to look at these texts within the context of the regime of sin. Suffering, toil, and pain are now daily features of human life. In the light of this, the human person is wounded, having suffered the affliction of sin, and the tendency is to inflict harm on others – whether physical, moral, psychological, or spiritual. Forced marriage here is a symptom of the abuse of power or its irrational use to dominate others. Therefore, the Christian leader must see forced marriage as a defect from the proper order of things.

Since God has created every human person with intelligence and freedom, no one should be forced or coerced into a lifelong relationship that should be founded on genuinely free love and mutual consent. The marital pledge of 'two becoming one' is a function of mutual consent. Love is not coerced but freely given. This is a way of saying that marriage is a voluntary union of man and woman. A man and a woman need to give their consent to be married. With this consent, they each agree to give the other all they are as free beings. Such consent ought to be given with some understanding of the nature of the institution into which they both enter. Here, we can draw resources from several passages of the Bible that point to the beauty of marriage as instituted by God.

Several factors can trigger situations of forced marriage. Some poor parents give their girl-children in marriage to well-to-do men to cater to their



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own family's needs. Here, the wealthy husband supports the family of the girl financially and otherwise. Even when such union is against the expressed wishes of the girl-child or young woman, she is made to see it as good for herself and her own biological family. In some other situations, parents force their children to be married for the sake of lessening the burden of taking care of many children, or when they feel that if they do not marry any man who comes they might pass marriageable age and find it hard to get a husband.

In these and many other situations, the reasons proffered for forced marriage are totally extraneous to the interest of the girl or young woman. She is, as it were, being used as a means to satisfy other ends. Human beings are ends in themselves, and no human being should be used for the satisfaction of other ends. Although Jesus did not get married, his attitude to women in the gospels offers us enormous resources for treating women with respect, love, compassion, and consideration. From his way of relating to the woman caught in adultery (cf. Jn. 8:3-11) to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well (cf. Jn. 4:1-42), to Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus (cf. Lk. 10:38-42; Jn. 11:1-44), to Mary Magdalene (cf. Jn. 20:1-18) and several other women in the gospels, we can see Jesus teaching us through his words and actions that women are human beings, that they have been created in the same image and likeness of God as men, that their dignity ought to be respected and their rights upheld. A Christian leader who takes account of the example set for us by our Lord will always find good reasons to work against any religious or cultural practice that seeks to diminish the dignity and rights of women.

## **5. Rampant Divorce**

The Bible has clear teaching about divorce. Under the regime of the old law, Moses permitted a man to obtain a divorce on just about any grounds. This is what we read in the Book of Deuteronomy: *“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house<sup>2</sup> and goes off to become another man's wife.<sup>3</sup> Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies);<sup>4</sup> her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).*

Two things are clear in this passage. First, a man can do away with his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce if he finds something “indecent” in her. Second, he cannot re-marry a woman he has divorced. Even though the

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Law of Moses allowed divorce, it guaranteed something of the woman's dignity by refusing her re-marriage to a man who had divorced her before.

When some Pharisees came and asked Jesus if a man is allowed to divorce his wife on any grounds whatsoever, Jesus said that Moses gave permission for a man to divorce his wife because of the hardness of the people's hearts. Still, *it was not so in the beginning* (Matt. 19:8). In other words, divorce was not part of God's plan for marriage when he brought the institution in place. "Have you not read that in the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and he said: *"For this reason a man shall leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one body?" So they are no longer two but one body; what God has joined together, let no one separate*" (Matt. 19:4-6).

The divine author of marriage willed that husband and wife should love each other to the end. Marriage is supposed to be "till death do us part." Before God, marriage is a lifetime relationship that human beings should never sever since God Himself joins husband and wife together. Thus, seen in this light, divorce is a deviation from God's purpose for marriage.

In Malachi 2, the Prophet rails against the unfaithfulness of Judah to Yahweh. One of the two violations of the people is the grave sin of dealing badly with their wives, for those who are married. It is precisely for this reason that "the Lord refuses to look at your offerings and does not take them into account" (Mal. 2:13). Here is what Malachi says: "It is because the Lord has seen how you dealt with your first wife, the wife of your youth. You betrayed her, although she was your partner with whom you made a marriage covenant. Has not God made them one? In the flesh and spirit, they are his. What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's offspring. So have respect for yourself, then, and do not betray the wife of your youth. I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one's garments with violence, says the Lord of Hosts. Respect yourself, and do not break faith" (Mal. 2:14-16).

Malachi makes an important connection between the rampant situation of divorce in society and God's refusal to answer the prayers of men. The men are accused of betraying the wives of their youth, their first wives, and marrying another. They have severed the bond that made them one flesh. And since God has joined them together, he is displeased when husbands go against his plans and purposes for their marriage life.

Respecting the institution of marriage today means taking great care to enter into it and to commit one's married life into the hands of the Creator who instituted it in the first place. If the foundation of one's marriage is God, then one who honours marriage honours God. Today, we live in a provisory culture where people are not willing to make permanent commitments. They want to

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enter into marriage on their own terms and not on the terms specified by God, which is why many marriages are breaking down today.

Jesus underscored the importance and sacredness of lifelong marriage in his teaching (cf. Matt. 19:6). Saint Paul further taught that the marital relationship is an ongoing demonstration of the sacrificial love that Christ showed his Church (cf. Eph. 5:22-33). These biblical teachings guide the lives of Christian husbands and wives, knowing that the witness of their faith to the marriage covenant is essential for their own salvation and the good of society.

When it seems that the sweet wine of marriage is running out, husbands should implore the Lord to open the lines of communication between them and their spouses and help restore the love in their relationship. Praying for the grace of patience and a forgiving spirit is also vital to the lifelong sustenance of the marriage union.

## **6. Rape**

Rape is the act of forcefully having sexual relations with a person without their consent. It could be considered as one of the most traumatic, pervasive, and most common human rights violations. Rape can happen to anyone at any age and can be perpetrated by parents, caregivers, relatives, intimate partners, and strangers. Victims are often unwilling to speak out or seek help due to the fear of being shamed and stigmatized or the threats of death by their abusers. Women and girl-children are more susceptible in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, where cultural beliefs and practices and political structures favour the male folk against their female counterparts. We have seen the evil of rape perpetrated in all sectors of society, including the religious, health, educational, and political sectors.

In addition to the traumatic experience of being raped, women and children often have to deal with the effects of the experience, including depression, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, mental instability, and even suicide. Victims who are unable to get help and love could have the rest of their lives altered. Harrowing tales of rape and the attendant consequences are recorded in the Old Testament scriptures as cautionary tales or warnings about what happens when the powerful become corrupt and the vulnerable are suppressed and silenced. The stories of Dinah in Gen. 34:1–31, Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:1–9, and the concubine in Judges 19:1–20 all portray the evil of rape and its harm to the dignity of the victims.

Church and religious leaders have important roles to play to address the evil of rape in our society:

- For instance, church sermons drawing from the Scriptures can create awareness and educate congregations about how rape is not only evil

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and sinful but also undermines the Scriptures: Do you not know that your body (her body) is the temple of the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor. 6:19).

- Sermons can specifically target elements of cultures that encourage victim-blaming and protect perpetrators.
- Churches and Christian communities can periodically organize workshops and seminars on the empowerment of vulnerable women and young girls and the safety measures available to them when faced with the threats and dangers of rape.
- The church should create safe spaces where victims can tell their stories and get help. To hear the cries of rape victims and learn their stories is to honour each of them as a beloved child of God.
- The church must be ready to address abuses perpetrated by church leaders and workers and speak brutal truths. Protecting abusive agents of the church mars the institutional integrity of the church and breaches the trust reposed in the church by the poor and vulnerable. Thus, religious leaders and church workers who engage in such demeaning behaviour as rape should be made to face the law. A church leader must have “*a good reputation. He must...be sober, use good judgment, be respectable, hospitable to strangers, and teachable*” (1 Timothy 3:2).

## **7. Denial of Education**

In many low-income communities, as we have in Nigeria, schooling investment continues to favour boys. Women and girls often have to grapple with some inherent socio-cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors that deny them the right to quality education. This lack of formal education leaves many women and girls disadvantaged and without opportunities, freedom, and a sense of self-worth, making them vulnerable and hindering their full development as human beings. Thus, promoting female education will empower more women and ensure their personal well-being. It will increase their participation in the labour force and reduce forced early marriages and pregnancies.

All children are created equal by God; no gender is superior to the other. Jesus did not discriminate when he said in Matthew 19:14: “*Let the children come to me, for to them belongs the kingdom of God.*” More so, Romans 2:11-13 tells us that God has no favourites. The education of all children, especially girl-children, is essential and should not be

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neglected. Verses abound in the Bible commanding us to train and discipline our children. Notable among them is Proverbs 22:6, which says: *“Train up a child in the way she should go; even when she is old, she will not depart from it”*.

- Church institutions should develop relationships with or partner with stakeholders of their host communities toward identifying and addressing aspects of cultures that discourage girl-child education.
- Although the church has made tremendous contributions to the education sector of our society, more efforts can be made to help women and girl-children, especially by identifying and giving scholarships to indigent girl-children. Also, another contribution can be by allowing women to play conspicuous roles in churches to show the importance of girl-child education, challenging the limiting cultural factors, and encouraging women and girls.
- Given the economic situation and the abject poverty in many rural communities, the church can help women and girls acquire quality education by making it more affordable.

## **8. Female Genital Mutilation**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. According to the WHO, approximately 200 million women and girls have undergone the practice, with higher occurrence rates in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> A principal cultural reason for this practice is to tame the sexual urges in women and girls and thereby keep their virginity intact. Although the social pressure on the families may be high and the necessity to conform to what is considered right may be reason enough to continue FGM, this traumatizing and painful practice does not necessarily guarantee sexual purity in women and young girls.

FGM has no foundation in the religious texts of Christianity. On the contrary, Christian doctrine is evident in the sanctity of the human body. 1 Cor. 12:18 says: “God arranged the organs of the body, each one of them, as He chose.” Also, that the human body was made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27) explains the tremendous responsibility we hold as stewards of the gift of the body we have received and our obligation to treat it with respect. So, to engage in FGM is to tamper with God’s sacred creation. Paul also implies the

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. (2020). Female genital mutilation. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation> (Accessed August 2021).

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sacredness of the human body in Romans 12:1, where he enjoins believers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. So, from the Christian perspective, the virtue of purity in women and girls consists not in genital mutilation but the mastery and overcoming of the passion of lust. FGM represents a violation of human rights, and it must be fought until it is eliminated.

- As part of the fight to end FGM, Church sermons can serve as veritable means of educating congregations of which some members may themselves be perpetrators of this harm due to ignorance. Church authorities and pastors of local churches must create and implement educational and awareness-building programmes for some members who may be ignorant in this regard.
- Church leaders must find ways to partner with local communities and relevant stakeholders to influence gradually and ultimately change the cultural beliefs that encourage this form of violence against women.

## **9. Discrimination Against Women**

Discrimination against women and girls refers to conditions whereby the female members of society are denied the same rights and opportunities that the male folk enjoy across all sectors of the society. In a patriarchal (male-dominated) society like Nigeria, the power structure in individual relationships and public life generally favours male members against females. The girl-child often faces discrimination from the early stages of life through childhood to adulthood. There are a lot of gender stereotypes in everyday life. In most cultures, boys are favoured and better prized than a girl-child. Gender discrimination begins even before birth with the desire of the typical parent for sons rather than daughters. Girls are considered inferior to boys, which is reflected and reproduced by countless social and economic practices and norms throughout the life cycle.

Girls are mostly kept at home and made responsible for additional domestic work or sent to the streets for some informal labour for the benefit of the household. In contrast, boys are sent to school to gain an education and prepare to take up professions because they are usually considered to need education and training for their future gender roles as heads of families and communities.

Sometimes Bible passages on the submission of women to men like Ephesians 5: 21-33 and Colossians 3: 18 are selectively quoted (out of context) to support the belief in and practice of male superiority and female inferiority. It is important to note that these passages are not prescriptive but rather

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descriptive of the authors' world. They are not directives on how Christians should act. Pope John Paul II, while addressing the misinterpretations of these passages, wrote: "All the reasons given in favour of the subjection of woman to man in marriage should be understood as mutual subjection of (man and woman) to one another out of reverence to Christ" (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988: p. 24).<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in the eyes of God, we are all equal. God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11). In his own image, God made human beings, male and female (Genesis 1:27). In Galatians 5:14, the Scripture teaches, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Therefore, Christianity teaches that girl-children must be raised in an atmosphere equal to boys and be given the opportunity to grow to their full potential.

- Church leaders need to be dynamic and gender-sensitive to draw newer insights into biblical inspiration and revelation concerning the challenges posed by lived experiences of injustices suffered by women due to past misinterpretations.
- The church must be heard and be seen to champion the fight against tendencies and practices that sustain discrimination against women. For instance, more female representation in the leadership councils of churches/Christian communities and groups could demonstrate the need to be gender aware and sensitive to our patriarchal cultures.

## **10. Suppression of Women and Girls**

Suppression of women and girls refers to the adverse impact of particular cultural, social, and religious beliefs and practices that consider and treat the female folk as subordinate to men. This kind of violence against women undermines their dignity and their agency in determining the course of their lives. In many African cultures, a woman is prevented from being critical of or challenging her husband on any family issues, including her material well-being. More so, under African customary law, a married woman is often perceived as an unpaid servant of the husband: she works for him and not with him, looks after children, and acquires and preserves property for him.

The distribution of tasks and responsibilities of women in society has mainly restricted them to the domestic sphere and has unduly burdened them.

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II. (1988) *Mulieris. Dignitatem*[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html) (Accessed August 5, 2021)

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As a result, women have often been regarded and treated as men's inferior, unequal in their activities outside the domestic spheres, and have suffered violations of their human rights. In many communities, women have only limited access to resources and participation in decision-making.

The economic activities open to girls and women are thus reduced, and this often forces them to low skilled, low paying jobs in the informal sector or street trades. Their lower social status means less protection from economic predators and more vulnerability to bonded labour. In our context of poverty in Nigeria, many girls are lured into commercialized sex or `survival sex` and have relations with older men. Many others become prey to sexual exploitation through trafficking for sexual purposes, pornography prostitution, child prostitution, or as domestic house helps. All these constitute grave abuse of their rights.

The Bible does NOT suppress women, nor does it even suggest validation for the suppression of women. In both the Old and New Testaments, female heroes are celebrated for doing what men would not or could not do in their faithfulness to God. In the Old Testament, Deborah, a Judge of Israel (Judges 4–5) and Jael (Judges 4:17–24) are heroes as they were willing to do what men like Barak were afraid to do. Ruth's loyalty and faithfulness to Naomi (Ruth 1: 16-17) saved an entire family's legacy and established the lineage for King David. Esther was elevated to be queen to rescue her entire nation in the face of blatant bigotry and deception (Esther 4).

In the New Testament, we see female heroes like Mary, Elizabeth, Martha, Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman who has great faith, and the women who were strong supporters of the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the early Gentile churches. Lydia, for example, was a businesswoman who sold and used purple dye and supported ministry personally through her home (Acts 16:12-15, 40; Philippians 1:1-10).

- The Church must always be conscious of God's broader plan for humanity. God's over-arching message of inclusion and equality for men and women in the biblical narratives should be implemented in the day-to-day life of the church. Using biblical narratives as a model for the culture of the church is one effective way to stimulate a positive change.
- Healthy dialogues to build bridges instead of unhealthy debate that tears down should be promoted, and the hard conversations about the role of women held with love and grace in order to transform an entrenched culture that limits women to an inclusive culture. This will require openness, honesty, and truth.





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## Profile of Contributors

### **Rev. Fr. George EHUSANI**

Fr. George holds a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Howard University, Washington DC. He is the Executive Director of Lux Terra Leadership Foundation and was former Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. He has published several books, written numerous journal articles and maintained regular newspaper columns. He is an advocate for social inclusion and social justice and the 2017 winner of the prestigious Konrad Adenauer Foundation award for International Development.

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Fr. Richard Ehusani is a Catholic priest from the Diocese of Lokoja, Nigeria. He was ordained priest in 2007 after his formation at the Seminary of Saints Peter and Paul, Bodija, Ibadan. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy (University of Ibadan, 2002); a Bachelor of Theology (Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome, 2006); a Master of Arts degree in Theology (Creighton University, Omaha - Nebraska, USA, 2017); a Master of Science degree in Psychology (California Southern University, Costa Mesa - California, USA, 2018); and a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (Walden University, Minneapolis – Minnesota, USA, 2021). He is a member of the American Psychological Association and a lifetime member of the Golden Key International Honor Society. He is the Director of the Psycho-Spiritual Institute of Lux Terra Foundation, Abuja.

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### **Taiwo ABIOYE**

Taiwo Abioye is a Professor of Discourse Stylistics and Applied Linguistics. She was former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Covenant University, Ota and former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences at the Koladaisi University, Ibadan. She has published several books and articles in high-impact journals and chaired and participated in several development initiatives targeting women and girls in northern and southwestern Nigeria. She is a Research Professor at Lux Terra Leadership Foundation.

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### **Inya J. ODE**

Inya is a broadcast journalist, media influencer and development professional. Between 2010 and 2020, Inya carved a niche as a celebrated on-air personality in radio broadcasting in Nigeria. She was the host of popular radio shows “Let’s Talk Abuja” and “The Midday Dialogue” on 95.1 Nigeria

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Info Abuja until November 30, 2020. She currently, heads the New Media Unit at Lux Terra Leadership Foundation and also Coordinates the Network and Advocacy Project, an OSIWA Foundation & MacArthur Foundation-supported project advocating National Integration, Peaceful Coexistence, Civic Responsibility, Patriotism and Social Justice in the Nigerian State. She has been involved in various humanitarian outreaches with various organisations to cater to the needs of the poor and vulnerable including IDPs, orphans, widows and young people. Inya has compered and moderated high-flying International and national conferences, meetings and events for clients such as UNICEF, UNHCR, UNWomen, Government agencies, corporate bodies, private individuals and many more.

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### **Henry N. IJOMAH**

Henry Ijomah is a learning and development professional, training facilitator and content developer with experience across several industries in Nigeria. He holds professional certificates in Training Essential and Project Management as well as Masters degrees in Business Psychology and Business Administration. He is the Manager, Training at Lux Terra Leadership Foundation, and Lead Partner at Learning Dimension Ltd. Henry has led the design and implementation of various development initiatives for the prevention of violence against women and children, including the US Department of State funded Zuwanen Against Domestic Violence program.

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### **Solomon AGBONHULU**

Solomon AGBONHULU is a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. He is the current Lead Counsel of the Abuja office of Kevin Martin Ogwemoh Legal (KMOL), a leading firm of Legal Practitioners. He possesses several years of experience in active litigation and teaching law. He holds a Doctorate Degree in Law (with specialisation in Public International Law) and has to his credit numerous articles published in high-impact journals. Solomon is also a legal consultant to some organizations and an avowed advocate for social justice.

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