

ENFORCEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA: MAKING A CASE FOR PROTECTION

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Abstract

Gender inequality, violence and abuse are not completely an exclusive scenario but a seriously complex situation affecting each other. Women and Men particularly in Nigeria and other part of the world face multiple inequalities, in the past it is generally believed that most violence and abuse are against the women caused by the man but in our present day a woman can also abuse the man. The causes of these inequalities are diverse and are caused by setting up socially attached lower positioning of the woman or the man; in Nigeria particularly women and men face subordination depending on who is abusing the other. This work aim at identifying

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inequalities as they occur, how enforcement of gender equality in Nigeria can be carried out, inequality for women and men and how violence and its respective consequences. Power play between men and women reinforces inequality in Nigeria and increases the likelihood of violence against the man or woman, the subjugation of men or women in Nigeria takes place due to practices based on gender differentiation, interpersonal, socio-cultural based violence can result to established differences between men and women. For example sex trafficking on the side of men and women is the outcome of inequality, this occurs due to the disadvantageous position of either the man or the woman depending on who is affected.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Protection of Gender-based rights, Gender inequalities, Challenges of Gender equality

1.0 Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in combating gender discrimination in Nigeria. They work tirelessly to promote gender equality, address systemic biases, and advocate for policy reforms within the criminal justice system. The following serves as an explanation of the multifaceted role of NGOs in combating gender discrimination in Nigeria, advocacy and policy reform, NGOs engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about gender discrimination issues and promote policy reforms within the criminal justice system. They conduct research, generate evidence-based reports, and develop

policy recommendations to influence lawmakers and stakeholders. By advocating for gender-sensitive legislation, NGOs aim to eliminate discriminatory practices and promote equal treatment under the law.¹

Legal Aid and Access to Justice: NGOs provide legal aid services to women who have experienced gender discrimination in the criminal justice system. They offer guidance, counseling, and representation to victims, enabling them to navigate legal processes effectively. NGOs often collaborate with lawyers and legal professionals to provide pro bono legal services, ensuring that women have access to justice regardless of their socio-economic background. **Capacity Building and Training:** NGOs conduct capacity-building programs and training sessions for justice sector professionals, including judges, lawyers, police officers, and court personnel. These programs aim to sensitize them to gender-related issues, stereotypes, and biases that may influence decision-making. By enhancing the understanding of gender equality principles among justice sector stakeholders, NGOs contribute to fair and unbiased treatment of women within the criminal justice system.² **Public Awareness and Education:** NGOs carry out public awareness campaigns to educate communities about gender discrimination, women's rights, and the importance of gender equality. These campaigns

¹ —NGOs as Advocates for Gender Equality and Women's Rights - Conference of Ingos - www.Coe.Int. | Conference of INGOs, www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/ngos-as-advocates-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-rights. Accessed 25 May 2023.

² —The Role of Ngos in Promoting a Gender Approach to Health Care. | United Nations, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/role_ngo.htm#:~:text=NGOs%20have%2C%20for%20example%2C%20been,t o%20health%20services%20for%20women. Accessed 25 May 2023.

may involve community dialogues, workshops, seminars, and media campaigns. By fostering public dialogue, challenging gender stereotypes, and promoting positive attitudes towards women, NGOs strive to change societal norms that perpetuate gender discrimination.³ **Research and Documentation:** NGOs conduct research and collect data on gender discrimination in the criminal justice system. They document cases, track patterns of discrimination, and compile evidence that highlights the need for reforms. Through research, NGOs provide critical information to policymakers, academia, and other stakeholders, facilitating evidence-based decision-making and systemic changes.⁴ **Networking and Collaboration:** NGOs collaborate with government agencies, international organizations, and other civil society groups to collectively address gender discrimination in the criminal justice system. By forging partnerships and alliances, NGOs leverage resources, expertise, and influence to amplify their impact. Collaborative efforts strengthen advocacy initiatives, knowledge sharing, and coordination among stakeholders working towards gender equality.⁵

2.0 Review of Successful Initiatives and Interventions by NGO's

NGOs in Nigeria have implemented various successful initiatives and interventions to combat gender discrimination within the criminal justice system. These initiatives have had a

³Karki, Samikshya. —Role of Ngos in Addressing Gender Inequality.l proposalforNGOs, 6 Oct. 2021, proposalsforngos.com/role-of-ngos/.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

significant impact on promoting gender equality, empowering women, and challenging discriminatory practices. Here is a review of some successful initiatives and interventions by NGOs in Nigeria:

- i. **Legal Aid and Empowerment Programs:** NGOs have established legal aid programs that provide free legal services to women who have experienced gender discrimination and violence. These programs offer counseling, representation, and support throughout legal processes, enabling women to seek justice and protection. By empowering women with legal knowledge and assistance, these initiatives have helped challenge discriminatory practices and promote access to justice.⁶
- ii. **Advocacy for Legal Reforms:** NGOs have engaged in advocacy efforts to promote legal reforms that address gender discrimination within the criminal justice system. They have actively campaigned for the passage and implementation of gender-sensitive legislation, such as laws on domestic violence, sexual assault, and gender-based violence. These advocacy initiatives have led to the enactment of laws that better protect women's rights and ensure their equal treatment before the law.⁷
- iii. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** NGOs have launched public awareness campaigns to educate communities about gender discrimination, women's rights, and the

⁶Usmani, Faraz&Jeuland, Marc &Pattanayak, Subhrendu. (2018). NGOs and the effectiveness of interventions.

⁷ NGOs as Advocates for Gender Equality and Women's Rights - Conference of Ingos - www.Coe.Int.| Conference of INGOs, www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/ngos-as-advocates-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-rights. Accessed 25 May 2023.

importance of gender equality. These campaigns involve community dialogues, workshops, media campaigns, and outreach activities. By raising awareness and challenging societal norms, NGOs have played a crucial role in changing attitudes and behaviors, reducing stigmatization, and fostering support for gender equality.⁸

- iv. **Research and Documentation:** NGOs have conducted research and documentation on gender discrimination within the criminal justice system. They have collected data, documented cases, and produced reports highlighting the prevalence and impact of gender discrimination. These research efforts have provided evidence for advocacy, influenced policy debates, and contributed to evidence-based reforms. By generating reliable data and information, NGOs have strengthened their advocacy initiatives and contributed to a better understanding of the issues at hand.⁹
- v. **Capacity Building and Skill Development:** NGOs have implemented capacity-building programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of women, particularly those from marginalized communities, in understanding their rights, accessing justice, and advocating for gender equality. These initiatives include training on legal rights, leadership development, entrepreneurship, and life skills.

⁸ Human Rights Activism and the Role of Ngos - Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People - Www.Coe.Int.l Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People, www.coe.int/en/web/compass/human-rights-activism-and-the-role-of-ngos. Accessed 26 May 2023.²⁵

⁹ *ibid*

By equipping women with the necessary tools and empowering them to assert their rights, NGOs have fostered a sense of agency and facilitated their active participation in combating gender discrimination.¹⁰

- vi. **Collaboration and Networking:** NGOs have collaborated with government agencies, international organizations, and other civil society groups to strengthen their impact. Collaborative efforts have involved sharing resources, knowledge, and best practices, as well as joint advocacy campaigns. By working together, NGOs have amplified their voices, influenced policy changes, and created a united front in combating gender discrimination.¹¹

3.0 Cases of Collaborative Efforts with Government and Civil Societies

NGOs in Nigeria have actively engaged in collaborative efforts with the government and civil society to combat gender discrimination and promote gender equality. These collaborations have been instrumental in shaping policies, implementing programs, and driving systemic changes. These are some notable cases of collaborative efforts between NGOs, the government, and civil society in Nigeria:

- i. **Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP):** NGOs, along with government agencies and civil society organizations, played a crucial role in advocating for the passage of the Violence against Persons (Prohibition)

¹⁰ The Role of Ngos in Promoting a Gender Approach to Health Care.l

United Nations,

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/role_ngo.htm#:~:text=NGOs%20have%2C%20for%20example%2C%20been,t

[o%20health%20services%20for%20women](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/role_ngo.htm#:~:text=NGOs%20have%2C%20for%20example%2C%20been,t). Accessed 27 May 2023.

¹¹ Usmani, *supra* n 256.

Act in 2015. This comprehensive legislation criminalizes various forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation, and other harmful practices. NGOs collaborated with policymakers, legal experts, and advocacy groups to draft the bill, garner support from lawmakers, and advocate for its passage. The VAPP Act is a significant milestone in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality.¹²

- ii. **Gender-Based Violence Response Teams:** NGOs have collaborated with the government to establish Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Response Teams at the state and local levels. These teams consist of representatives from NGOs, government agencies, health professionals, law enforcement, and the judiciary. They work together to respond to cases of gender-based violence, provide support to survivors, ensure access to justice, and coordinate services. NGOs provide expertise, training, and support to these response teams, ensuring a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing gender-based violence.¹³

¹² Daniels, Ajiri. —NGO Implores Government to Enforce Vapp, Child Rights Act in Every State. | The Sun Nigeria, 9 Dec. 2022, sunnewsonline.com/ngo-implores-government-to-enforce-vapp-child-rights-act-in-every-state/.

¹³ Nigeria, Guardian. —NGO Releases Report on Gender-Based Violence Response. | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News, 24 July 2022, guardian.ng/news/ngo-releases-report-on-gender-based-violence-response/.²⁶⁴ —Sexual Violence in the Aid Sector: What Should Ngos Be Doing? | The Guardian, 19 Oct. 2015, www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/oct/19/sexual-violence-aid-sector-ngo-action. Accessed 30 May 2023.

- iii. **Sexual Assault Referral Centers (SARCs):** NGOs have partnered with the government to establish Sexual Assault Referral Centers (SARCs) across Nigeria. SARCs provide specialized services to survivors of sexual assault, including medical care, counseling, legal support, and psycho-social assistance. NGOs collaborate with the government to set up and operate these centers, ensuring survivors receive holistic support. These collaborations have improved the response to sexual assault cases and enhanced access to justice for survivors.²⁶⁴
- iv. **National Gender Policy:** NGOs have actively contributed to the development and implementation of the National Gender Policy in Nigeria. They have collaborated with government agencies and civil society organizations in the policy formulation process, providing inputs, expertise, and recommendations. NGOs have advocated for the inclusion of gender-responsive measures within the policy, addressing issues such as gender discrimination, violence against women, women's economic empowerment, and access to justice. These collaborative efforts have led to the development of a comprehensive policy framework for advancing gender equality in Nigeria.

4.0 Lessons Learned and their Applicability to the Nigerian Context

Lessons learned from the efforts of NGOs in combating gender discrimination in other contexts can be valuable in shaping strategies and interventions for NGOs combating gender discrimination in Nigeria. These are some key lessons and their applicability to the Nigerian context:

- i. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** The importance of collaboration and partnerships between NGOs, the government, and civil society organizations cannot be overstated. This lesson holds true for Nigeria as well. NGOs should actively seek collaborations with relevant stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and influence. By working together, they can enhance their collective impact and drive systemic changes.
- ii. **Grassroots Engagement:** Engaging with communities at the grassroots level is crucial for effective intervention. Nigerian NGOs should prioritize community engagement, involving local leaders, community-based organizations, and influential figures in their initiatives. This ensures that interventions are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and sustainable, as they are rooted in the realities and needs of the communities they serve.
- iii. **Intersectional Approaches:** Gender discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as those based on class, ethnicity, religion, or disability. Nigerian NGOs should adopt intersectional approaches that recognize and address the multiple layers of discrimination faced by women. By acknowledging and addressing these intersections, interventions can be more inclusive and ensure that the most marginalized women are not left behind.
- iv. **Policy Advocacy and Legal Reforms:** Advocacy for policy changes and legal reforms is crucial for combating gender discrimination. Nigerian NGOs should prioritize policy advocacy efforts to influence legal and policy frameworks that promote gender equality and protect women's rights. This requires

strategic engagement with policymakers, evidence-based research, and strong coalitions to drive the necessary changes.

- v. **Capacity Building:** Building the capacity of both women and justice sector professionals is essential. Nigerian NGOs should invest in training programs that enhance women's knowledge of their rights, improve their skills, and empower them to challenge gender discrimination. Similarly, capacity-building initiatives for justice sector professionals should focus on sensitization, gender-responsive practices, and addressing biases within the system.
- vi. **Sustainability and Funding:** Sustainable funding is essential for the continuity and long-term impact of NGO initiatives. Nigerian NGOs should explore diverse funding sources, engage in fundraising efforts, and establish partnerships with donors and philanthropic organizations. Additionally, building organizational sustainability by diversifying income streams and implementing sound financial management practices is crucial.
- vii. **Amplifying Women's Voices:** Nigerian NGOs should prioritize amplifying women's voices and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. Women's perspectives and experiences should inform the design and implementation of interventions. This can be achieved through inclusive participation, leadership development, and creating safe spaces for women to share their stories and contribute to shaping the agenda.

5.0 Challenges Bedeviling Non-Governmental Organizations in combating Gender Discrimination in Nigeria

NGOs in Nigeria face various challenges and limitations in their efforts to combat gender discrimination within the criminal justice system.¹⁴ These challenges can hinder their effectiveness and impact. Here is an extensive explanation of some of the key challenges and limitations faced by NGOs in Nigeria:

- i. **Limited Resources and Funding¹⁵:** One of the significant challenges faced by NGOs is the limited availability of resources and funding. Many NGOs operate on shoestring budgets, which restricts their capacity to carry out comprehensive programs and initiatives. Insufficient financial resources hinder their ability to hire qualified staff, conduct research, implement advocacy campaigns, and provide legal aid services. Lack of sustainable funding can limit the scope and duration of their interventions, making it challenging to address the deep-rooted issues of gender discrimination.
- ii. **Cultural Resistance and Backlash:** NGOs working on gender equality often encounter cultural resistance and backlash from conservative elements within society. Nigeria, like many other countries, has deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and traditional beliefs that perpetuate gender discrimination. Challenging these norms can lead to resistance and opposition from individuals and groups who perceive gender equality as a threat to traditional values and power structures. Such resistance can

¹⁴ Olsson, I. Anna S.. —The Roles and Challenges of Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in combating Violence Against Women in Nigeria. A case study of Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA).l (2012).

¹⁵ Ibid

manifest as hostility, stigmatization, and social exclusion, which pose significant challenges for NGOs advocating for gender equality.¹⁶

- iii. **Legal and Institutional Barriers:** The legal and institutional framework in Nigeria may present challenges for NGOs working on gender discrimination. Some laws and regulations may be discriminatory or not adequately protect the rights of women. NGOs advocating for policy reforms and legal changes may face obstacles such as bureaucratic hurdles, resistance from government entities, and slow implementation processes. Limited institutional capacity, corruption, and inconsistent enforcement of laws also pose challenges to achieving meaningful change.¹⁷
- iv. **Lack of Awareness and Understanding:** There is still a lack of awareness and understanding about gender discrimination issues within society, including among key stakeholders such as justice sector professionals, policymakers, and the general public. Addressing gender discrimination requires changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that perpetuate discrimination. NGOs face the challenge of creating widespread awareness and understanding about the impact of gender discrimination and the importance of gender equality. This requires sustained efforts in public education and awareness campaigns.¹⁸

¹⁶Iraq, Tajdid. —What Challenges Facing Ngos. LinkedIn, www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-challenges-facing-ngo-tajdid. Accessed 4 June 2023.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*

- v. **Fragmentation and Coordination:** The NGO sector in Nigeria can be fragmented, with numerous organizations working on similar issues but lacking coordination and collaboration. Lack of coordination among NGOs can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources, and a fragmented advocacy landscape. It is crucial for NGOs to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint initiatives to maximize their impact and avoid duplication. However, achieving effective coordination can be challenging due to factors such as competition for funding, differences in priorities and approaches, and limited platforms for dialogue and coordination.¹⁹
- vi. **Safety and Security Risks:** NGOs working on sensitive issues like gender discrimination may face safety and security risks. Women's rights activists and organizations have been subjected to threats, intimidation, and violence in some cases. The challenging operating environment can compromise the safety and security of NGO staff and hinder their ability to carry out their work effectively. Ensuring the safety of staff and implementing appropriate security measures are crucial for NGOs to continue their efforts in combating gender discrimination.²⁰

¹⁹ Olsson *supra* n 267.

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6.0 Conclusion

The inequality concept of power tussle indicate that there are unequal power relation between men and women, male supported cultural norms and practices in Nigeria and Africa have since supported and given privileges to the man to exploit the woman, this lowers the status of a woman thereby creating inequality that require enforcement that this work seek to address. Violence against women is identified as an attempt by men to maintain power control over women and it is said to have manifested as inequality. The difference between a man and a woman are many times exhibited in the attainment of education, and professional jobs and ownership of assets.