



**PUTTING SURVIVORS AND COMMUNITIES FIRST:
Policing Approaches to Prevent and Reduce
Violence Against Women in West Africa**

July 2023



Disclaimer: The purpose of this report is to present a comprehensive analysis of the survey results and provide insights into the perceptions and experiences of the respondents. It should be noted that individual responses may be influenced by personal biases, preferences, and subjective interpretations.

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Policing Approaches to Prevent and Reduce Violence Against Women in West Africa

This report was authored by Deborah Mancini-Griffoli with technical inputs from Farmata Ndoye and Mary Okpe. The report was copy-edited by Elaine Robbins. The layout and design was done by J Jackson Design.

About the Partners Network

PartnersGlobal, The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative (also known as Partners West Africa - Nigeria), and Partners West Africa - Senegal are each independent non-governmental organizations with common membership in the Partners Network - a global coalition of 20 civil society organizations dedicated to supporting peaceful change and resilient civic space.

PartnersGlobal advances resilient civic space through authentic partnership and accompaniment, inclusive processes, and conflict sensitivity to bring about more peaceful, secure, and accountable societies across the globe.

The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative also known as Partners West Africa - Nigeria enhances citizens' participation in improving security governance in Nigeria and West Africa.

Partners West Africa - Senegal promotes collaborative security, dialogue, transparency, good governance and the participation of women and youth in development processes at the national and regional level in Senegal and West Africa.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without support by the Ford Foundation. We would particularly like to thank Olufunke Baruwa, Program Officer, Gender Racial and Ethnic Justice, West Africa, for her enthusiasm, support, and flexibility throughout the implementation.

We are grateful for the important contributions made by our reviewers Petra Aldrich, Aissatou Bâ, Krystin Borgognone, Megan Corrado, Cristina Finch, Andrew Friedman, General Celestin Guidimey, Scott Jacobs, Muthoni Kamuyu-Ojuolo, Anahid Matossian, Kayla McGill, Diago Ndiaye, Innocence Ntap Ndiaye, Salimata Thiam, and Dr. Fatima Waziri-Azi.

We appreciated the support of **Partners**Global team members Christian Labossiere, Jeffsky Poincy, and Leonora Smart-Abbey in the production of this report.

We would like to express our gratitude to the committed representatives of law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations in Nigeria and Senegal who offered their valuable perspectives during the interviews and engaged in joint reflections on the findings. Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the survivors who were willing to share their painful experiences in order to address and improve current support structures.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSO	civil society organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FGC	female genital cutting
FGM	female genital mutilation
FCT	Federal Capital Territory (territory around Nigeria's capital, Abuja)
IDP	internally displaced persons
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
LGA	Local Government Area (of Nigeria)
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPTIP	National Agency for the Prohibiting of Trafficking in Persons
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPF	Nigeria Police Force
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps
ODA	official development assistance
REPSFECO	Réseau Paix et Sécurité pour les Femmes de l'Espace CEDEAO (Peace and Security Network for Women in the ECOWAS region)
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Center (SARC)
VAPP	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act
VAW	violence against women
WACOL	Women's Aid Collective
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

FOREWORD

For more than a decade, **Partners**Global, The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative (also known as Partners West Africa Nigeria), and Partners West Africa Senegal have prioritized and furthered the Women, Peace, and Security agenda across the Sahel. Dozens of initiatives launched together with civil society organizations and security sector actors, many of which are female, reflect our shared commitment to promote women's participation in peace and security, protect women from violence, and prevent such violence in the first place.

Despite the efforts that we and so many others have undertaken, women in West Africa continue to suffer appalling abuses. The unfolding of the Sahel crisis and the outbreak of COVID-19 have triggered peaks of violence in recent years, but social norms that reinforce the idea of women's inferiority to men are the underlying root cause that continuously allows individuals, families, communities, and institutions to tolerate and perpetuate abuses.

Through our work with law enforcement agencies, we have witnessed considerable reform efforts to better address women's rights; yet, we also continued to hear the voices of survivors who shared accounts of police officers ignoring their needs. This study is an attempt to examine more closely the police response to violence against women and to identify which aspects of the response are effective in preventing and reducing abuses and which areas require adaptations.

We focused our analysis on the needs of survivors, because we strongly believe that responders must prioritize the medical, psycho-emotional, legal, social, and economic adversities women suffer as consequences of attacks. We also focused on the role of communities, because families, clans, and religious groups in West African societies strongly influence survivors' decision to report abuses to the police. Our approach was to be constructive, yet honest, with the aim of creating space for dialogue that will allow the further expansion of survivor-centered policing.

We hope that our recommendations will inform the design of legislation, institutional policies, and training programs and will provide a roadmap for policymakers, practitioners and international donors who want to join our efforts to eliminate violence against women and help survivors recover.



Kyra Buchko
Co-Executive Director
PartnersGlobal



Kemi Okenyodo
Executive Director
Partners West Africa - Nigeria



Dr. Adjaratou Wakha Aïdara
Executive Director
Partners West Africa - Senegal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence takes a severe toll on women in West Africa. More than one in three women in the region have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime—36 percent compared with a global average of around 30 percent¹—and the numbers are rising.² Persisting patriarchal socio-cultural norms, climate change, the spread of “violent extremism,” and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic make women in West Africa increasingly vulnerable to experiencing violence.

Although some countries in the region have adopted progressive laws to protect women from violence, the problem persists. Legislative loopholes, or gaps, allow violence against women to go unpunished, and a “culture of silence” prevents women from reporting cases to the police.

Preventing and reducing violence against women (VAW) is everyone’s responsibility, but law enforcement agencies are particularly well-placed to prevent and reduce VAW. They can act as first responders, observers, mediators, investigators, advocates, and

connectors to support survivors of VAW and promote behavioral changes within their communities.

To investigate opportunities to improve the police response to VAW, PartnersGlobal, The Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative (also known as Partners West Africa Nigeria), and Partners West Africa Senegal, with support from the Ford Foundation, conducted interviews and led focus groups discussions with 385 research participants in 14 locations, 7 in each of the two research countries, Nigeria and Senegal. Research participants included representatives of national law enforcement organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), regional and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as VAW survivors. The research found that a survivor-centered and community-based police response can contribute significantly to halting abuses and providing relief to survivors. Such a response is based on the principles of respect, safety, confidentiality, and nondiscrimination and seeks to establish trust-based partnerships with local communities.

In recent years, law enforcement agencies in Nigeria and Senegal countries have made important strides to better serve the needs

¹UN Women, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

² R. Kishi, “Political Violence Targeting Women in West Africa,” *West African Papers*, No. 34 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

of VAW survivors and their communities. They have increased female representation, adopted policies and procedures that better take women's needs into account, and provided increased reporting and referral mechanisms for VAW cases. But opportunities remain to strengthen the survivor-centered and community-based police response in several key areas. In this report, we share best practices and make the following recommendations learned from our work in Nigeria and Senegal.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

1. Ensure that existing legislation to prevent and reduce VAW is deliberately survivor-centered
2. Harmonize survivor-centered legislation and policy across regions and countries
3. Review and standardize survivor-centered policies and procedures within each agency, considering the needs of the most vulnerable groups
4. Encourage inter-agency coordination to better meet survivors' needs
5. Increase budgets for staffing, equipment, and services for survivors
6. Increase professional opportunities and benefits for female police officers
7. Institutionalize training on the survivor-centered approach
8. Transform the organizational culture of the police
9. Increase partnerships with multi-sectoral service providers to support survivors
10. Increase partnerships with informal justice providers

11. Increase trust in the police among survivors and communities
12. Increase public awareness about VAW to shift social norms

Recommendations for International Donors

1. Increase funding to support police forces to end VAW
2. Invest in adequate VAW data monitoring systems
3. Include the most vulnerable groups
4. Broaden the stakeholder groups across countries and the region
5. Prioritize funding and accompaniment of women-led local CSOs
6. Utilize more flexible and longer-term funding mechanisms to support initiatives to transform social norms in demonstrable ways

Although more research is needed to gain a more comprehensive look at policing across the region, we hope that these best practices and recommendations for improvement can contribute to strengthening the police response in West Africa and ending the scourge of violence against women.

INTRODUCTION

More than 36 percent of women in West Africa are victims of violence at least once in their lifetimes.³ The region ranks second highest in the world for prevalence of violence against women (VAW), surpassed only by Central Africa.⁴ The proportion of women in West Africa who report having experienced VAW in their lifetime has increased in recent years.

VAW happens in urban, semi-urban, and rural communities and affects old and young women across all identity groups; women between the ages of 15 and 30 are most affected.⁵ All forms of VAW are present in West Africa. Women experience domestic violence, sexual violence, femicide, human trafficking, female genital cutting (FGC), child marriage, and online violence (see Annex for UN Women's definition of types of VAW). Violence by a husband or male intimate partner (physical, sexual, or psychological) is the most widespread form of violence against women in West Africa.⁶

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ouedrago et al., "The Scourge of Sexual Violence in West Africa, Unveiled." *The Conversation*, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-scourge-of-sexual-violence-in-west-africa-unveiled-190806>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UN Women, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

VAW rates peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic, when women and girls were confined to their homes, often under one roof with their aggressors.⁷ A study conducted in six countries in the Sahel region found that domestic violence, whether physical or verbal, increased 12 percent during the pandemic, from 40.6 to 52.2 percent. Chad, Senegal, and Mali recorded increases of 30, 14, and 10 percent respectively.⁸ Women who were primarily employed in the formal sector were also more likely to lose their jobs than men, thus creating financial hardship that made them more vulnerable to violence. The pandemic also disrupted ongoing efforts to eliminate FGC and child marriage, leading to more frequent occurrence of these practices. Courts and legal aid centers reduced their activities, limiting the legal protection for survivors.

Rates of VAW vary significantly across countries and are usually higher in countries affected by violent conflict. In times of conflict, warring parties have deployed several

⁷ African Union, UN Women, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Population Fund. Gender-Based Violence in Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic, December 2020, [https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field Office Africa/Attachments/Publications/2021/Policy Paper- GBV in Africa during COVID-19 pandemic EN 18 Feb compressed.pdf](https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2021/Policy%20Paper-GBV%20in%20Africa%20during%20COVID-19%20pandemic_EN_18_Feb_compressed.pdf).

⁸ Ibid.

forms of VAW, most frequently using rape as a weapon. This was the case in Liberia and Sierra Leone, for example—two countries that continue to exhibit the regions’ highest rates of physical and sexual violence against women due to the legacy of civil wars that victimized women in particularly brutal ways.

The spread of “violent extremism” in West Africa has further exposed women and girls to violence. Extremist groups target women with kidnappings, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. They restrict women’s movements and socioeconomic development. Women disproportionately experience internal displacement and lose access to livelihoods because of terrorist threats, which makes them more vulnerable to experiencing violence.⁹

Food insecurity and natural disasters often put women further at risk. Research indicates that women and girls are up to 14 times more likely than males to be harmed during a disaster.¹⁰ Drought increases stress in communities, which may cause community members to engage in child marriage, differential feeding to foster the survival of males, and intimate partner violence. During times of resource scarcity, women are more likely to be coerced into sexual exploitation in exchange for goods or services. They may need to walk increasingly longer distances to find potable

water and food, making them vulnerable to sexual assault.

The region’s colonial legacy also has had a significant impact on the high prevalence of VAW. A study based on data from the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the United Nations shows that countries that were formerly colonized are 50 times more likely to have a high prevalence of intimate-partner VAW. Colonization put in place racial and exclusive forms of citizenship that were often particularly damaging to women. This legacy continues to actively shape the world today. For example, the exclusion of women from land ownership in Nigeria dates to the British colonial system. Such history of colonialism combined with the prevalence of patriarchal societies increases the risk of domestic violence even further.¹¹

Persisting and pervasive sociocultural gender norms are a main driver of VAW in the region.¹² Traditional norms and customs in West Africa establish hierarchical relationships in which men have greater access to power in society and women hold less power. This is most often seen in terms of domestic division of labor. From an early age, girls are taught to be wives and mothers, performing unpaid

⁹ See UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Response to Terrorism*, Vienna, 2019.

¹⁰ Soliman et al., *Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence: Interlinking Crises in Africa*, World Bank Blogs, 2022, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/climatechange/climate-change-and-gender-based-violence-interlinked-crises-east-africa>.

¹¹ Jenevieve Mannell, “How Colonialism Is a Major Cause of Domestic Abuse against Women around the World,” *The Conversation*, 2022.

¹² Ndèye Amy Nidaye, *Gender-Based Violence in West Africa: The Cases of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021), <https://pscc.fes.de/e/gender-based-violence-in-west-africa-the-cases-of-senegal-mali-burkina-faso-and-niger>; Bouchamai et al., “Gender Inequality in West African Social Institutions,” *West African Papers*, No. 13 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1787/fe5ea0ca-en>.

household responsibilities such as housework, child rearing, and subsistence agricultural labor. Men are expected to be primary decision makers, earn income through formal employment or entrepreneurship, and take active roles in public life. This system generates and sustains derogatory social stereotypes and prejudices that indirectly justify violence against women.

Many communities pressure women to endure traditional and customary practices such as FGC, early marriage, and discriminatory family practices (for example, concerning marriage, divorce, or inheritance) and expect men to subjugate their wives and daughters to them.¹³ While some of these practices are less prevalent in urban communities, and group acceptance varies based on ethnicity, religion, and other identity factors, they are widespread across the region. Most countries have established a strong legal and policy framework to address VAW in all spheres, from the family to the workplace and public life, but legal loopholes and customary laws allow VAW to persist.

The police are well placed to address VAW. Police officers are physically present in the communities where VAW occurs. Their local presence allows them to act as first responders, witnesses, and mediators. They can help survivors gain access to medical, psychosocial, or legal services. They can also gather evidence and regularly monitor

abusive activity. Police officers can support other justice actors to follow up on cases and help ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Finally, they can use their platform to raise public awareness and mobilize citizens to protect women from violence.

However, few incidents of VAW in West Africa actually are recorded by the police, fewer are investigated, and even fewer are either prosecuted or result in convictions of the perpetrators. For instance, since rape was criminalized in Nigeria in 1973, there have been only 65 convictions in rape cases. In 2021, only 1 out of 444 reported cases of VAW resulted in a conviction in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT).¹⁴ A study of 144 survivors of domestic violence in Dakar in 2019 found that only 6 survivors had filed a complaint with the police or gendarmerie. Of those 6 cases, only 2 led to convictions.¹⁵

Women decide not to report incidents of VAW to the police for a variety of reasons. They may fear social stigmatization and shame. They may also face structural barriers, such as financial vulnerabilities or lack of childcare and transportation. Their families and communities may also pressure them not to report to the police but to settle VAW-related disputes out of court for reputational, religious, or economic reasons. Many survivors also prefer not to report violence to law enforcement agencies because they do

¹³ Ahmadu, Fuambai, S., and Richard A. Shweder, "Disputing the Myth of the Sexual Dysfunction of Circumcised Women," *Anthropology Today* 25(6)(2009):14-17.

¹⁴ Partners West Africa - Nigeria (PWAN), "Promoting Survivor-Centered Policing in Nigeria," 11.

¹⁵ Mohamed Maniboliot Soumah and Ousmane Diop, "Domestic Violence in Dakar," *Forensic Science International: Reports*, Vol. 2 (2020), 100109.

not trust the police officers to help them seek redress. They believe that the police will not be effective in helping them obtain justice or that the police may subject them to further victimization.

This report looks at the police response to VAW in Nigeria and Senegal to identify current best practices and gaps and to make recommendations for further improvements. Nigeria and Senegal were selected as countries of focus because, although they both have a high prevalence of domestic and sexual violence, female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage, their criminal justice systems are different (Nigeria inherited the English common law tradition and has a tripartite judicial system, whereas Senegal is built on the same structure as the French monist system). Both countries have centralized police forces reporting to the Ministry of Interior - the National Police Force (NPF) in Nigeria and the *Police Nationale* (National Police) in Senegal. In Nigeria, two additional law enforcement agencies address issues related to VAW: the paramilitary Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) and the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). In Senegal, the *Gendarmerie Nationale* (National Gendarmerie) is responsible for responding to VAW. The Gendarmerie—a term derived from the ancient French *gens d'armes*, meaning “men-at-arms”—is a military force under the command of the Ministry of Armed Forces with law enforcement duties among the civilian population. Traditionally, the Gendarmerie

operates predominantly in rural areas. While the data collected thus reflects the situation regarding VAW in these two West African nations, many of the recommendations may be relevant for other countries in the region.

“According to UN Women, VAW continues to be one of the greatest human rights violations of this era, threatening the health, wellbeing and empowerment of women and children.”



METHODOLOGY

This study relied on qualitative data collected from primary sources and quantitative data collected from secondary sources. Data collection methodologies included in-country key informant interviews and focus groups discussions, remote interviews, and a desk review. In-country data collection locations were selected to provide a nationally representative sample of areas based on population density, economic status, education levels, and ethnic and religious composition.

Research participants included representatives of national law enforcement organizations, CSOs, regional and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as survivors of VAW. A total of 385 individuals were interviewed, of which 86 were survivors. A total of 68 percent of the research participants were female.

In Senegal, opinions of members of the *Police Nationale* (National Police) could not be considered because the agency failed to authorize its representatives to participate in the study.¹⁶ Instead, members of the *Administration Pénitentiaire* (Correctional Services) agreed to participate.



Snowball Sampling

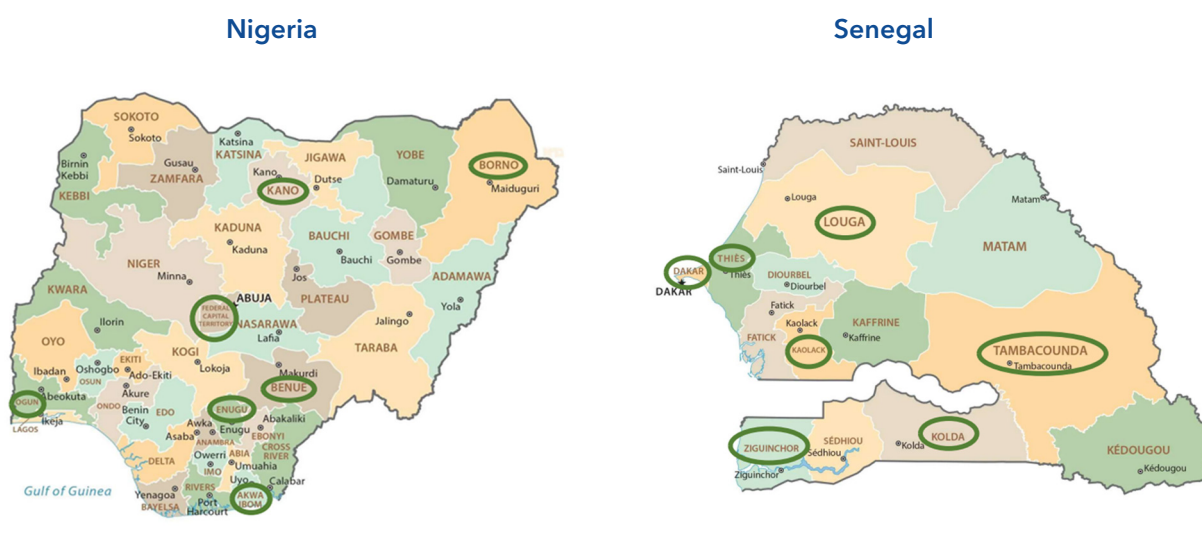
This non-random and semi-self-directed sampling method identifies research participants who have desired characteristics based on referrals from other research participants. After the initial source helps recruit participants, the participants then recruit other participants. This method is more effective than other sampling methods in reaching groups that are not easily accessible (for example, police officers) or are particularly vulnerable (for example, survivors of VAW). The method also strengthens trust and rapport between researchers and research participants.

¹⁶ The data collection period coincided with an election season in which VAW became exceptionally politicized.

Table 1: Research Locations

Nigeria	Senegal
Akwa Ibom	Dakar
Benue	Kaolack
Borno	Louga
Enugu	Thiès
Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)	Ziguinchor
Kano	Kolda
Ogun	Tambacounda

Figure 1: Map of Research Locations



TERMINOLOGY

Violence against Women vs. Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as “any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity.”¹⁷ Since women in West Africa are disproportionately affected by GBV, the experience of female survivors of GBV is at the heart of this study. We recognize that girls, boys, men, and gender-nonconforming individuals also suffer from GBV, but the scope and context of this project does not allow us to shed sufficient light on their particular experiences. We therefore use the term “violence against women” (VAW) throughout the report.

Regional vs. Local

The term “region” is used to designate an administrative division directly below the country level. In Nigeria, subnational units are called states. In Senegal, they are called regions. In some instances, the word “region” may also refer to the West African region. The context will make clear whether the word refers to the supranational or subnational

unit. The term “local” designates divisions below the regional level, which are called Local Government Areas in Nigeria and *départements, arrondissements, or communes* in Senegal.

Police vs. Law Enforcement

The term “police” is used as a general designation of any type of law enforcement agency that addresses VAW and interchangeably with the term “law enforcement agencies.” It therefore includes institutions such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) or the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Nigeria, and *Police Nationale* (National Police) and *Gendarmerie Nationale* (National Gendarmerie) or *Administration Pénitentiaire* (Correction Services) in Senegal. When referring to a particular agency, the specific name of the agency is listed.

Survivor vs. Victim

The terms “survivor” and “victim” both designate persons who have been subjected to one or multiple forms of VAW. Some individuals who have suffered VAW prefer to be called “victims,” as this term marks the fact that they have been aggressed. But others prefer the term “survivor” because it implies an ability to overcome the aggression and regain control of their lives. We acknowledge preferences that survivors may have by using the terms interchangeably.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women’s Issues, *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally 2022*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/united-states-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gender-based-violence-globally-2022/#:~:text=Leveraging%20public%20diplomacy%20opportunities%2C%20such,and%20to%20amplify%20their%20voices.>

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT OF VAW

Women in Nigeria and Senegal face similar types of aggression. Domestic violence, rape, FGC, and child marriage are widespread in both countries. The percentage of women in each country who have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime is similar—22.3 percent in Nigeria and 21.5 percent in Senegal.¹⁸

Both Nigeria and Senegal have ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Maputo Protocol; committed to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 1325); and adopted national legislation and policies aimed at protecting women against all forms of abuse and violence.

Both countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.¹⁹ Nigeria adopted its first NAP in 2013 and revised and updated it in 2017. Senegal adopted its first four-year NAP in 2011 and has updated and revised the plan twice, in 2016 and 2020. Various regions have also

¹⁸ UN Women, Global Database on Violence Against Women, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>.

¹⁹ National Action Plans, or NAPs, are national-level strategy documents that outline a government's approach and course of action for localizing action taken by the United Nations Security Council.

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security

UNSCR 1325, adopted in 2000, recognizes the disproportionate number of women and girls affected by armed conflict and the need to protect them in conflict and post-conflict settings. The resolution calls on United Nations Member States to actively prevent conflict, protect women from violence, and increase the active participation of women at the decision-making level of all peace and security processes, including national law enforcement agencies.

In the aftermath of UNSCR 1325, the UN Security Council adopted several other resolutions on women, peace, and security:

- UNSCR 1820 (adopted in 2008) calls on Member States, armed groups, and international organizations to actively protect women from GBV during conflict.
- UNSCR 1888 and 1889 (adopted in 2009), focuses on preventing sexual violence in armed conflict. Resolution 1888 additionally provides for the establishment of mechanisms to address sexual violence in conflict, including the appointment of a United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence and the inclusion of female peacekeeping personnel in missions.
- UNSC 1960 (adopted in 2010) and UNSCR 2106 (adopted in 2013) reiterate the importance of ending sexual violence in conflict and provide the operational details for combating sexual violence.
- UNSCR 2242 (2015) highlights the effect of “violent extremism” on women and the role that women can play in preventing and countering “violent extremism”.

Select priorities of Nigeria and Senegal's 1325 National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security

Nigeria:

- Increase women's participation at the decision-making level in security sector institutions and security governance structures
- Adopt laws and policies to better protect and promote the rights of women and girls
- Harmonize, update, and apply existing laws to better protect the rights of women and girls
- Increase awareness to reduce rates of child marriage
- Set up operational mechanism and structures to strengthen the physical security and safety of women and girls
- Increase access to justice for women and girls whose rights are violated
- Increase general public's awareness of women's protection needs and prosecution options
- Mainstream gender in security sector reforms

Senegal:

- Increase recruitment and representation rates of women in the security sector
- Effectively institutionalize gender in all security policies
- Address specific needs of women in conflict and post-conflict situations
- Protect women's physical, reproductive, and mental health; their food and economic security, and fundamental rights
- Increase the responsibility of security actors to guarantee the physical security and protection of women
- Reinforce prevention and protection mechanisms for women and girls in crisis situations and involve them in setting up such mechanisms
- Increase family and community awareness to change behavior and better support victims of sexual violence
- Increase collaboration among women, youth, and the security sectors

formulated regional 1325 action plans. The NAPs outline objectives and activities to secure the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings, prevent armed conflict and violence against women and girls, and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace and security.²⁰

In Nigeria, the most progressive legislation is the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), a comprehensive law to protect women from violence, introduced at the national level in 2015. Rape was criminalized in Nigeria in 1973, though marital rape has only been included in the definition of rape as part of the VAPP Act. In Senegal, another prominent national-level instrument is the *Plan d'Action National de Lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre et la promotion des droits humains* (National Action Plan for the Eradication of Gender-Based Violence and the Promotion of Human Rights), elaborated as part of the 1325 NAP. In Senegal, all forms of rape were criminalized in 2020.²¹

Both countries provide survivors with similarly designed safe spaces and support structures that governments and CSOs run either independently or in partnership. These support mechanisms promote women's rights and provide legal services, housing, and educational services. In Nigeria, Sexual Assault Referral Centers (SARCs) are the main government-run support structure for

survivors. The SARCs are led by steering committees made up of state and non-state actors, including members from state ministries of health, justice, women's affairs, and youth development; the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), and representatives of civil society and media organizations. Currently, there are 32 SARCs in 19 Nigerian states and the FCT.²² Each SARC provides a slightly different set of services, but most provide forensic analysis to support prosecution of rape cases in court. They also offer shelter, medical and psychosocial support, as well as legal counsel. In Senegal, there is no specific support mechanism dedicated to VAW, but survivors can access services at the state-run *Centre Départemental d'Assistance et de Formation pour la Femme* (Departmental Center for the Support and Education of Women - CEDAF), which offers legal and socioeconomic support to women. The *Action éducative en milieu ouvert* (Noninstitutional Educational Action - AEMO) and the *Comité Départemental pour la Protection de l'Enfant* (Departmental Child Protection Committees, CDPEs) support girls. In addition, *les maisons des femmes* (women's houses), *les maisons de justice* (justice houses), and *les boutiques de droit* (legal aid offices) provide services to VAW survivors. Locally elected female community leaders, called *baneju gox*, also sensitize citizens and monitor VAW at the community level.

²⁰ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1325 Action Plans, 1325naps.peacewomen.org.

²¹ Before the 2020 law, Senegal's Penal Code of 1965 criminalized rape only in cases in which the victim died as a consequence of the rape.

²² Information provided by Dr. Fatima Waziri-Azi, Director General, National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) Nigeria, during a virtual roundtable discussion held by **PartnersGlobal** on January 17, 2022.

Table 2: Key National VAW Legislation in Nigeria and Senegal

Nigeria:²³

The **Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP)** of 2015 criminalizes all forms of VAW, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as traditional practices such as FGC and forced marriage. This law has been adopted in 35 out of Nigeria's 36 states.

The **Framework and Plan of Action of the National Gender Policy**, first adopted in 2006, contains minimum standards to promote gender equality, good governance, and accountability across all areas of government.

The **Child's Rights Act (CRA)** of 2003 provides protection for children from all forms of abuse, including VAW. It also establishes a system for reporting and responding to cases of child abuse, including VAW.

Senegal:²⁴

The **Law Criminalizing Rape and Pedophilia** of 2020 defines both rape (including marital rape) and pedophilia as criminal offenses with prison sentences up to life imprisonment; before they were only considered simple offenses with sentences of five to ten years.

The **Act on the Prevention and Repression of Gender-Based Violence** of 2012 defines VAW as any act that results in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm to a person. The law includes provisions related to the protection of victims, the prosecution of perpetrators, and the promotion of gender equality.

The **Criminal Code** of 1999 punishes physical (but not sexual, psychological, or economical) violence against a spouse with sentences up to a maximum of life imprisonment and sexual harassment with up to a maximum of three years of imprisonment. It also criminalizes FGC and punishes rape with five to ten years imprisonment, though marital rape is excluded from the definition and rape is only considered a simple offense.

The **Family Code** of 1972 regulates marriage, divorce, succession, and custody. It gives women the same rights as men to enter into marriage and make decisions over property. The code has contradictory provisions on forced marriage and allows for succession to be regulated by either civil or Islamic law, the latter being discriminatory against women.

²³ UN Women, Global Database on Violence Against Women, Nigeria, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>.

²⁴ UN Women, Global Database on Violence Against Women, Senegal, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>.

Specific Local Risk Factors

Some types of VAW are more prevalent in one context than the other. For example, Senegalese women suffer proportionally higher rates of FGC—24 percent of Senegalese women have endured this practice compared to 19.5 percent Nigerian women²⁵—while 43 percent of girls in Nigeria are forced into marriage compared to 30.5 percent in Senegal.²⁶ In Nigeria, women face specific forms of abuse related to the various conflicts that are currently affecting the country.

Armed non-state actors, such as Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād, also known as Boko Haram, are abducting and abusing women and girls, including subjecting them to sexual slavery. In Senegal, women are facing significant political backlash since any topic related to the term “gender” became highly politicized in the July 2022 elections. Political groups have given the term a disparaging connotation and exploited it to justify hate speech against LGBTQ+ individuals to galvanize political support. This surge in homophobia drives an increase in violence against women, specifically lesbian women or women who are perceived as lesbian. It also makes it more difficult for women’s advocates to keep up their work and thus weakens support for survivors.

Specific local risk factors increase levels and types of VAW in certain regions in each

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ UN Women, Global Database on Violence Against Women, Nigeria, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en>.

Cultural Perceptions of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and Other Traditional Practices

Anthropologists have shown that debate around traditional practices such as FGC often pits predominantly Western critics who judge the custom as “harmful” and thus wrong against African supporters who defend it as “purposeful” and right. Both camps tend to cite similar and often stereotypical arguments ranging from health factors to emotional and sexual well-being, aesthetics, and cultural symbolism. In post-colonial contexts such as Nigeria and Senegal, such debates are particularly sensitive, as the Western view seems to reflect historic attitudes of cultural righteousness and dominance.

The purpose of this report is not to critique traditional practices from a Western point of view, nor to favor local customs over Western ones. Instead, we consider all forms of culture as valid and right, as long as women are able to decide freely if they want to take part in them.

See: Ahmadu, Fuambai S., and Shweder, Richard A., “Disputing the Myth of the Sexual Dysfunction of Circumcised Women,” *Anthropology Today* 25(6) (2009):14–17.

country. Such risk factors include traditional value systems, violent conflict, ecological threats, internal displacement, migration, tourism, and extractive industries (see Table 3).

Table 3: Example of local risk factors that increase VAW at the community level

Risk Factors	Example
Cultural and Religious Value Systems	Nigeria's Borno State has a patriarchal culture that promotes male supremacy and female subordination, making women more vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence and preventing them from disclosing abuse.
Violent Conflict	Violent conflict over land and water restricts access to these resources for women in Nigeria's Benue State. It also makes them more vulnerable to other forms of violence and limits their ability to seek justice.
Ecological Threats	In Nigeria's Kano State, food shortages due to floods have made women vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.
Internal Displacement	Women in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps who have been displaced due to violence between herder and farmers in Benue State, Nigeria, are at heightened risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.
Migration	In the Louga region of Senegal, female migrants are exposed to exploitation and abuse by human traffickers.
Tourism	In Senegal's Thiès region, women experience sexual exploitation and abuse in seaside resorts in the area.
Extractive Industries	Female mining workers in Senegal's Tambacounda region face economic exploitation.

In regions in which one or several of these risk factors exist, women run a higher risk of suffering abuses. For example, in Nigeria's Borno State, women live in a patriarchal culture and are subjected to violence and displacement due to the protracted conflict with Boko Haram in the North East, banditry in the North West, and farmer-herder conflict in the North Central part of the region. Borno State has frequent incidents of rape, including against children (717 cases reported between January and May 2020), domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, early marriage, kidnapping/abduction, denial of resources, sexual harassment, and FGC.²⁷

²⁷ PWAN, *Promoting Survivor-Centered Policing in Nigeria*, 51.

The Specific Needs of Women Who Have Suffered Abuses by “Extremist” Groups

Women play complex roles in groups that are considered “extremist.” They act as instigators and perpetrators of violence and are also victims of abuses. Although the magnitude of VAW by these groups remains largely unknown due to the lack of data, there are frequent reports about abductions of women and girls, rape, and sexual enslavement.

Women who return to their communities after voluntary or forced recruitment into an “extremist” group face a particular challenge. They have suffered severe forms of physical injury and trauma and experience increased social stigma when they return to their communities. They usually have little support from government and civil society since their legal status is often not clearly defined, and counter-terrorism laws affect CSOs’ ability to receive funding and respond to their needs. Some victims of abuses are held in detention facilities where they have no access to services, including rehabilitation and reintegration programs. If detained in all-gender facilities, these women are also vulnerable to suffer repeated abuses by male inmates.

To properly address the needs of female returnees, police and community actors need to adapt existing policies and practices for return and reintegration to make them gender-responsive for both men and women.

See: International Civil Society Action Network and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Invisible Women. Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism.” UNDP, 2019.

Differences Between Rural and Urban Areas

In addition to national or regional variations, there are differences in how women in urban and rural communities experience VAW.

- **Women in rural areas tend to experience higher levels of VAW than women in urban municipalities.** For example, in Nigeria’s Kano State, research participants reported that 70 percent of rape cases occurred outside the metropolitan local government areas.²⁸ Earlier studies in the country’s Enugu State confirmed that significantly more women in rural Local Government Areas (LGAs)²⁹ experienced violence during the period of study than did women residing in urban LGAs. In Senegal, percentages of women between 15 and 49 who have experienced physical or sexual abuse are also reported to be higher in rural areas than in urban ones.³⁰
- **While some types of VAW seem ubiquitous, others seem to differ between rural and urban settings.** Research participants cited domestic violence and sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment, as the most prevalent types of violence across all 14 regions studied. Research participants in rural areas also cited human trafficking, FGC, and child marriage as common types of VAW, whereas online violence was reported as an increasing phenomenon in the areas around Dakar and Abuja.

²⁸ Ibid., 81.

²⁹ Ajah et al., “Comparison of Domestic Violence Against Women in Urban versus Rural Areas of South-east Nigeria,” *International Journal of Women’s Health* 6(2014):865–872, <https://doi.org/10.2147/IJWH.S70706>.

³⁰ République du Sénégal, Ministère de l’économie, du Plan et de la Coopération. *Violences basées sur le genre et pouvoir d’action des femmes*. (L’Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie [ANSD], 2019), 33, 36, <https://www.ansd.sn/sites/default/files/2022-11/Rapport-VBG-ANSD-2019%281%29-0.pdf>.

- **Although women in rural areas experience higher levels of VAW, they tend to report the abuses less frequently than women in urban areas.** Research participants in both countries noticed an increase in reporting in the areas around Abuja and Dakar but said that in more rural regions, cases remain widely underreported. Other studies have confirmed that social acceptance of VAW is greater in nonurban areas,³¹ likely because traditional social norms are more ingrained in these settings.³²

Legislative Shortcomings

Although the governments of Nigeria and Senegal both have adopted robust national legislative frameworks on VAW in accordance with international treaties, these laws cannot always be put in practice unequivocally at the local level. Legal gray areas arise due to:

- **Limitations within specific VAW laws.** Some laws have limitations that provide perpetrators with loopholes, or ways to evade prosecution. For example, the Senegalese Constitution and its laws lack an explicit definition of discrimination, and the country's marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws still discriminate against women, in contradiction to the provisions of CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, which the country has already ratified.

³¹ Ajah et al. demonstrated that the proportion of women who believed that VAW was excusable was significantly higher among rural dwellers than among urban dwellers (58.5 percent vs. 29.6 percent). In Senegal, researchers showed that about 69 percent of urban women disagreed with wife beating, but only 36 percent of rural women disagreed with wife beating. See Zegeye et al., "Urban-Rural Disparities in Wife-Beating Attitude Among Married Women: A Decomposition Analysis from the 2017 Senegal Continuous Demographic and Health Survey," *Archives of Public Health* 79(102)(2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-021-00612-5>.

³² Bouchamai et al., "Gender Inequality in West African Social Institutions."

- **Contradictions between different VAW laws.** Some VAW laws adopted at the national level are inconsistent with others. In addition, Nigeria's 1965 Penal Code has a more restrictive definition of rape than that provided in the 2015 VAPP Act.
- **Inconsistencies between national and state legislation.** In Nigeria's legal system, VAW laws adopted at the national level do not always automatically translate into laws at the state level. Each of the 36 state parliaments must first adopt or "domesticate" national legislation before it becomes enforceable within the municipal context. States therefore have substantial leeway in how and when they domesticate a national law. Until recently, some states based their VAW legislation on the regressive Penal Code—which exempts spousal rape from punishment, for example; others have already adopted the progressive Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP). The legislative autonomy of regions can slow down domestication, preventing the uniform application of national laws and their implementation.

“ We can ask ourselves: What is the impact of this law? Has violence increased or decreased? That’s the type of analysis we need. In my opinion, the real issue is the implementation of laws. We need to think about mobilizing and educating people. If people are not aware of certain laws, they cannot implement them.... The laws are good, but they need to be supported by society. ”

– Regional Human Rights Expert

Another limitation of current legislation is the lack of provisions that reflect a focus on survivor's needs. In Nigeria, more recent legislation contains survivor-centered provisions. For example, the 2015 VAPP Act stipulates protection orders for at-risk victims, seeks to guarantee the privacy of victims, and provides for the compensation of victims by offenders. The 2020 Nigeria Police Act demands respect for victims and an understanding of their needs and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. The 2022 National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons in Nigeria and the Protocol for Identification, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons also contain survivor-centered principles. Yet earlier laws, such as the 2007 Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Act and the 2009 Fundamental Rights (Enforcement Procedure Rules or the 2011 Evidence Act), which do not contain such provisions, are also still applied.

Finally, the most significant shortcoming is that existing laws are not always enforced at the local level. The inclination of local government actors, including police, to apply existing laws often depends on political will, the availability of funds, or the individual capacity of institutions. One main finding of this report was that laws and institutional policies approved at headquarters are not always disseminated efficiently to the district or community-level police divisions, and that officers in

these divisions have too much discretion in applying laws and policies.

A Culture of Silence

For survivors of VAW to seek redress for abuses and support services, they must disclose what happened to them; yet sociocultural barriers often force them to remain silent. Survivors interviewed for this study admitted to being hesitant to recount any abuses they have experienced out of shame or fear of endangering their marriage or family relations. In most cases, perpetrators of VAW are partners, spouses, or other family members. Survivors fear that husbands may divorce them, putting them in a vulnerable socioeconomic situation, or that their own families might blame and exclude them, which could also leave them without shelter and access to economic resources. Some victims worry about the impact of reporting on their children. Often, they will first turn to trusted family members and friends before seeking help with authorities.

According to research participants in both countries, families usually do not encourage reporting and prefer that VAW is not discussed outside of the home. Even within the home, families tend to either ignore or conceal VAW out of fears of dishonor and stigmatization of the survivor, the perpetrator, the family, or even the community as a whole. In Senegal, for example, religious families and communities pressure women to conceal

Senegalese Customs of Accommodation and Discretion

In Senegal, sociocultural behaviors, such as *masla* (amicable arrangement) and *surtura* (discretion that implies shielding personal issues from public view) contribute to women muting their experiences of abuse.



rape, or they blame the victims, rather than reporting incidents to the authorities, to preserve the family's moral and religious reputation. Families of perpetrators often attempt to appease survivors and their families, sometimes with financial offerings, to protect their reputations. Families of survivors may prefer to obtain those benefits rather than report the incident. In some cases, rather than reporting incidents to the authorities, families may decide to report cases informally to community-based entities such as churches, mosques, and other places of worship, as well as community vigilante and neighborhood watch groups. These religious, tribal, or citizen-led institutions, many of which originated in pre-colonial times, exercise authority over everyday life within communities parallel to state authorities, which colonial rulers superposed. Informal actors have a strong influence within the community. In some contexts, they exercise even greater influence than government structures—for example, when communities

are geographically distant from the centers of state power or feel marginalized because of their minority status.

Due to their status in society, informal actors can play an important role in addressing VAW at the community level. Indeed, when survivors of VAW and their families decide to report the occurrence of VAW, they often first approach their pastor or imam, bring the matter in front of a council of elders, or ask advice of a local CSO before reporting to a formal structure such as the police. Whether traditional authorities encourage survivors to also report to the police depends on the local context.

- In some communities, traditional rulers are open to formal reporting and follow-up on VAW cases. For example, the traditional ruler in the Jahi community in Nigeria's FCT proactively advocates for women's rights and supports VAW awareness raising in the community. Such leaders can connect survivors with professional services and ensure that their needs are met.

- In other communities, traditional authorities advise women to remain silent and/or reconcile with their perpetrators, even if the survivors want to file a police report. This is because they favor solutions that restore community unity and trust. For example, research participants in Senegal reported that certain traditional authorities discourage reporting to the police, fearing that it will divide the family. Traditional authorities may also discourage reporting because they believe it is contrary to Islamic principles.
- In other circumstances, informal authorities may decide to apply their own rules. For example, self-defense vigilante groups or neighborhood watch groups in Nigeria have been reported to punish or ostracize survivors, who are perceived to bring shame to the community when they report abuses, thus further increasing their trauma.

Women in West Africa face common types of VAW and particular risk factors that make them even more vulnerable to abuses, especially if they live in rural communities. Although national laws exist to protect women from VAW, these laws are not always domesticated or applied at the local level. Women also face severe sociocultural barriers to disclosing abuses, which prevent them from seeking redress and accessing support services. Due to severe sociocultural barriers, women usually prefer not to report their cases. If they are forced to do so – for example due to a related medical issue they prefer to report to informal groups.



KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE POLICING TO PREVENT VAW

This study compared regional and global policing strategies to address VAW and yielded insights into best practices that are considered effective in preventing and reducing VAW.³³ Two of these approaches are most relevant for the West African context: the survivor-centered approach and the community-based approach.

The Survivor-Centered Approach

In recent years, the survivor-centered approach, which prioritizes the needs of survivors, has become the most prominent and widely accepted method to effectively addressing VAW in all its forms. The survivor-centered approach was globally recognized and endorsed in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467 (UNSCR 2467) on April 23, 2019. In the resolution, the Security Council recognized (1) “the need for a survivor-centered approach in preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict

and post-conflict situations,” (2) “the need for survivors of sexual violence to receive nondiscriminatory access to services such as medical and psychosocial care to the fullest extent practicable,” and (3) the related “need to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”³⁴ The voluntary Murad Code further codified its basic elements. The code, named after Nadia Murad, Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist and 2018 joint Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was launched on June 19, 2020. Since then, UN agencies, the World Health Organization, the International Organization for Migration as well as international and local NGOs have all developed their own survivor-centered standards and expanded their approach to sexual violence other forms of gender-based violence.

The survivor-centered approach places the human rights, needs, and priorities of survivors of violence at the forefront of the response. The approach represents a significant departure from traditional policing approaches, which tended to doubt the credibility of VAW victims and focus on whether perpetrators should be penalized and how.

“Survivors know best what they need to heal and recover.”

– Nadia Murad,
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

³³ This study looked at policing approaches in Australia, Brazil, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zanzibar.

³⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019). Adopted April 23, 2019. Accessed July 17, 2021. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/118/28/PDF/N1911828.pdf?OpenElement>.

The Four Key Principles of the Survivor-Centered Approach

RESPECT**SAFETY****CONFIDENTIALITY****NON-
DISCRIMINATION**

The core tenets of the survivor-centered approach are:

- **Respect:** Respect agency and choices of survivors, even if you disagree with them. Provide information, not advice.
- **Safety:** Prioritize the survivor's physical and psychological safety while recognizing that they know best what will keep them safe.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect the survivor's identity and do not repeat their stories unless it is safe to do so, and they have given informed consent.
- **Nondiscrimination:** Policies, programs, services, and resources that address VAW should be available to all survivors independent of their age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion, and regardless of disability and marital or socioeconomic status. This approach recognizes survivors' individual situations, abilities, challenges, and vulnerabilities. Interventions usually refer survivors to medical, psychosocial, or legal services, and connect them to educational and economic opportunities as desired. This approach also considers potential risks that the survivor faces because of disclosing their abuses and making use of services, and it attempts to prevent unintended negative consequences for survivors.

Survivors benefit from this new focus on their needs. The requirement to provide psychosocial services acknowledges that survivors have endured trauma that is often likely to have a long-lasting effect on their well-being and their relations with intimate partners, family, friends, and the community. Helping survivors live with trauma and providing them the ability to make their own decisions about recovery gives them agency and helps them regain control over their lives.

Best Practice of Community-Oriented Approaches: One-Stop Centers

Thuthuzela Care Centres in South Africa are one-stop facilities that have been introduced as a critical part of the country's anti-rape strategy. The facilities aim to reduce renewed victimization and improve conviction rate. They are run by multi-disciplinary teams consisting of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, health professionals, and the South African Police Service. When victims arrive at these facilities, they receive medical care, crisis counseling, and assistance with court cases. Similar centers have been opened in countries such as Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.



The Community-Oriented Approach

Survivors cannot recover in isolation from their communities, especially in regions where communities exert a high level of influence over people's daily lives, as is the case in West Africa. Survivors in Nigeria and Senegal are deeply connected to family members and members of their traditional or religious communities. UNSCR 2467 recognizes the social dimensions of VAW when encouraging religious and traditional leaders to participate in the response to VAW to avoid marginalization and stigmatization of survivors and their families. Community members play a key role in condemning VAW and supporting the recovery of victims. Healing is not just an individual process; to recover successfully, survivors must also be able to reintegrate and thrive in their communities. Both female and male community members can significantly impact the experience of survivors by either promoting recovery and rehabilitation or increasing stigma and divisions. Some community members may take sides with

either victims or perpetrators; others may disagree on whether VAW issues should be dealt with in public. The better that police understand these attitudes and the potential for tension around VAW among female and male community members, the better they can help restore the well-being of individuals and communities, thereby preventing further incidents of violence.

Community-oriented policing, an approach that has been implemented around the world for decades, promotes better understanding between police and local communities.

Role of the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) in Nigeria's Enugu State

WACOL worked with various ministries and the NPF to set up the one-stop-center Tamar SARC in Enugu State, which provides VAW survivors with shelter as well as medical, psychosocial, legal, and financial support. WACOL also educates the public on VAW and its effects and contributes to the passage of laws protecting women from violence. For example, it advocated for the passing of VAPP in Enugu State in 2019.

This approach emphasizes partnership and collaboration between police and the communities they serve. The objective of the approach is for police and citizens to collaborate on issues relating to public safety and jointly respond to violence and victimization. Community-oriented approaches require a high degree of trust between community members and police. In contexts in which communities do not trust the police and perceive them negatively, such approaches can backfire, instead increasing mistrust violence and crime. Police can engender trust among communities by communicating an awareness of community needs, responding to these needs, and avoiding behaviors that citizens perceive negatively, such as discrimination and corruption.

Programs based on community-oriented policing aim to increase contact between police and citizens and encourage the collaborative design of security strategies that address citizen concerns. When addressing VAW, such approaches can strengthen prevention and response. For preventive purposes, police and community leaders can jointly design and implement VAW awareness-raising campaigns or design monitoring and early-warning mechanisms to anticipate attacks on women (for example, in conflict zones or IDP camps). They can jointly plan and implement support services and referral mechanisms and set up collaborative restorative justice mechanisms to support the recovery of survivors and their communities.

Local CSOs can play a key role in supporting police to be more survivor centered and

community oriented. CSOs are frequently in contact with survivors and their families, and many have gained a high level of trust and legitimacy within the community. Often survivors or community members even inform CSOs about abuses before they tell families. CSOs often understand the relational dynamics between actors as well as potential political sensitivities at the community level. They can leverage their networks to connect survivors to social, legal, and other service providers. Although CSOs must be sure not to try to substitute government responsibilities, they can exercise the following key functions:

- Become well informed about VAW abuses within the community
- Advise survivors and their families on reporting options that minimize harm to the survivor and the community
- Sensitize all community actors, including police, to survivors' needs
- Convene survivors, families, traditional leaders, police, and other government actors to jointly address survivors' needs
- Address tensions and bridge divides that may arise due to VAW incidents within the community
- Support investigations into VAW
- Map out and provide access to quality services and resources for survivors and their families

Law enforcement agencies can take advantage of the capacities of local CSOs and build partnerships with them to better address the needs of survivors and their communities.

CURRENT POLICING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS VAW

Police in Nigeria and Senegal are making steady efforts to address VAW. Their efforts have focused on enhancing care, support, and justice for survivors. They have (1) increased female representation among their staff to better respond to the needs of female survivors, (2) put in place institutional policies and procedures to prevent and reduce VAW, (3) strengthened the capacity of staff who first respond to VAW cases, (4) increased access to essential care and services for survivors, (5) expanded reporting and referral mechanisms, and (6) conducted advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns around VAW.

Civil Society Organizations in Senegal

The following are three examples of CSOs in Senegal that provide VAW prevention and support services.

Law Shops of the Association of Senegalese Jurists

The Association of Senegalese Jurists (*Association des Juristes Sénégalaises*, or AJS) is a nonprofit association that promotes the rights of women and children. The association engages in advocacy, awareness-raising, and research. AJS provides legal and judicial assistance by listening and by guiding and supporting survivors via its support centers, called “law shops,” which are spread across the country.

The Committee to Combat Violence against Women and Children

The Committee for the Fight against Violence against Women and Children (*Comité de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux femmes et aux enfants*, or CLVF) contributes to the eradication of all forms of violence against women and children. CLVF supports survivors through concerted actions that push for legislative reform and the implementation of laws that protect vulnerable groups. The committee also raises public awareness to support victims of abuse. The organization has set up a listening center for the reception, assistance, and guidance of victims of violence. It also provides mediation and medical, legal, judicial, and psychological assistance.

The “Kullimaro” Center

Kullimaro is an integrated regional center in Ziguinchor that focuses on the protection and care of women and the promotion of their health. The Mandinka word *kullimaro* means “rainbow” and reflects the idea that good weather often follows the rain, thus providing hope to VAW survivors. *Kullimaro* welcomes minors and adults who are victims of rape, early pregnancy, and domestic violence. Using an integrative approach, center staff listen to survivors when they tell their stories; provide them medical, legal, and psychosocial care; and offer them opportunities for socioeconomic and educational integration. For example, women can gain and exchange training in sewing, embroidery, dyeing, fruit and vegetable processing, and micro-gardening.

Female Representation Among Police Forces

Police in both Nigeria and Senegal have increased the percentage of female officers among their ranks over the last decades. This is in line with global efforts to increase female representation based on UNSCR 1325. In Nigeria, women have been recruited into the country's police force since 1955.³⁵ According to the latest report by the National Bureau of Statistics, as of 2017, out of a total of 225,339 Nigerian police officers, 40,059 (18 percent) were female.³⁶ In Senegal, the recruitment of female police officers started in the early 1980s, with women representing 9.35 percent of the total workforce as of 2022.³⁷ The Gendarmerie in Senegal began recruiting female officers in 2006; in 2020, 4.7 percent of its total workforce were female.³⁸ In both countries, more women than men occupy positions as gender desk officers.

Women join the police force for a variety of reasons. According to an assessment

published by the *Centre des Hautes Etudes de Défense et de Sécurité (CHEDS)* in Senegal, 40 percent of female police officers say that joining the Police or Gendarmerie “was a childhood dream;” 33 percent joined for job stability, 30 percent because they wanted to help people; 27 percent for adventure; 9 percent for financial or salary reasons; 7 percent for the social benefits; 6 percent “because they had family” in the Police or Gendarmerie; 6 percent because of a desire for heroism; and 2 percent because they “had friends” in the Police or Gendarmerie. A total of 44 percent of female police officers surveyed had a family member in the Police or Gendarmerie.³⁹ Women interested in joining the police are often discouraged by their families and friends due to the cultural stereotype that the police force is not a female sphere and those who do join can face stigmatization.⁴⁰

Across the various police forces in both countries, there remain significant entry barriers and gender equality gaps. In Senegal, women tend to be given fewer “on the job” training opportunities than men.⁴¹ In Nigeria, women are disadvantaged when it comes to recruitment due to age, educational and civil status requirements. For example, the minimum recruitment age for women is 19, whereas for men it is 17; although the same educational requirements exist for women and

³⁵ Moses Oluwafemi, “Gender Inequality in Nigeria Police Force,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* 3(8)(2019):431–437, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/Digital-Library/volume-3-issue-8/431-437.pdf&ved=2a-hUKEWjS9LHH_qH8AhVOi_0HHWt3BKEQFnoECBUQA-Q&usq=AOvVaw0Kh8jYgvzw0oSH9F2wQw5n.

³⁶ National Bureau of Statistics, 2020 Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria, 2021.

³⁷ DCAF (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance). Police and Gendarmerie of Senegal. Results of the 2020-21 Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment for the National Police and the National Gendarmerie of Senegal, 17, <https://www.dcaf.ch/senegal-police-gendarmerie-mowip-report-2021>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁰ O.A. Ilesanmi, “Women in/and the Security Sector in Africa.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, edited by O. Yacob-Haliso and T. Falola (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 421.

⁴¹ PWAN, “Gender Baseline Assessment,” 38.

men, women are disadvantaged because they have lower literacy rates and lower enrollment levels at universities. In addition, while women must be unmarried when enlisting, this restriction does not apply to men. Once hired, women are also less likely to receive training than men, and they are not eligible for certain roles.⁴² Though institutions may have gender-equitable promotion policies in place, statistically women are less likely than men to be promoted to a higher rank.⁴³ Women do not always receive the same level of housing or medical benefits as male police officers, and often lack sufficient maternity leave or childcare options. They also experience discrimination and harassment, especially if unmarried or pregnant.⁴⁴

There is a need to intensify efforts to recruit women into the police and reduce entry barriers and “glass ceilings,” as women’s presence significantly contributes to preventing VAW and increasing protection for survivors. A research participant in Senegal interviewed for this project noted that VAW in her district had significantly decreased after the deployment of a female police commissioner: “Late at night, we could hear victims of VAW screaming. Today,

everybody is cautious.... People know that the commissioner will immediately send out a team.” Survivors in Nigeria feel that female police officers empathize with them more than male officers.⁴⁵

Other studies confirm that the presence of female police officers increases reporting rates of VAW by survivors and other community members, correlates with declines in intimate partner homicide rates and in rates of repeated domestic abuse, and helps challenge repressive gender norms and stereotypes about women by providing alternative role models.⁴⁶

“ I can see improvement from the police and other law enforcement agencies. Before...the police were reluctant and asked silly questions when victims reported VAW cases. But now most victims go to the police station with NGO staff, and the police response is better now compared to before. There is great improvement ... the attitude is changing. ”

– CSO Representative in Nigeria

⁴² Obianuju Osude, “Security Sector Reform: Nigerian Men, Gender Rights and Organizational Culture,” SSRN, 2016, 57, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2959081>; PWAN, *Gender Baseline Assessment in Strengthening Explosive Ordnance Treat Mitigation Capacity of Security Service Providers in North-East Nigeria*, 17, 18. In contrast, women in Senegal are eligible for all roles and trainings (DCAF, *Police and Gendarmerie of Senegal*, 34).

⁴³ Ibid., 27; Oluwafemi, “Gender Inequality in Nigeria Police Force,” 431.

⁴⁴ PWAN, *Gender Baseline Assessment*, 27; Oluwafemi, “Gender Inequality in Nigeria Police Force,” 431–433.

⁴⁵ PWAN, “Promoting Survivor-Centered Policing in Nigeria,” 86.

⁴⁶ Amalia R. Miller and Carmit Segal. Do Female Officers Improve Law Enforcement Quality? Effects on Crime Reporting and Domestic Violence Escalation. Working Paper No. 9 (2014), University of Zurich, UBS International Center of Economics in Society, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2519470.

Abolition of Discriminatory HR Rules within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF)

A female corporal who became pregnant during her probation period at the NPF recently received monetary compensation after she was sacked in 2021. According to Section 124 of the Nigerian police regulations rules, female police officers must serve at least three years and require permission from their superiors before they get married. The judge ruled that the regulation constituted discrimination on the basis of gender. NPF has now abolished the rule.

dedicated gender desk officers. Their role is to mainstream gender within each institution and ensure the implementation of gender policies at the sectoral level. The Gendarmerie set up a gender division in 2018, and there are currently plans to create a similar gender division within the Police.

In collaboration with regional and international partners and local CSOs, some police commands have designed or revised standard operating procedures relating to VAW to ensure that the needs of survivors are met. For example, UN Women, the International Organization for Migration, the Economic

Institutional Policies and Procedures to Prioritize Women's Needs

Police in both countries have established or are currently establishing institutional policies and dedicated positions to address VAW and other gender-related issues. In Nigeria, the police adopted an institutional gender policy in 2012, which is currently under review. NPF and NSCDC have set up dedicated gender desks across all commands and zonal offices that have been operating since the policy adoption. NAPTIP provides a platform that brings together government agencies, CSOs, and other service providers to strengthen the implementation of the VAPP Act. In Senegal, the National Police is currently developing its first institutional gender policy. The Gendarmerie operates under the Armed Forces gender strategy. Both the Police and Gendarmerie have

VAW Responsibilities of the Gender Advisors in the Nigeria Police Force

- Thoroughly investigate and prosecute VAW cases
- Prevent and respond to incidents
- Maintain database of perpetrators
- Partner with stakeholders/NGOs to address VAW
- Enforce government policies and laws relating to the VAPP Act and the Child Rights Act
- Advise the Inspector-General of Police
- Sensitize the public
- Build capacity of gender desk officers across the various commands and zonal offices
- Receive and respond to online reporting of abuses

Zac Mbao: A Model Police Station for VAW

The police station in the arrondissement of Zac Mbao in Senegal's Thiès region is led by the gender focal point of the National Police. A countrywide pilot initiative to support survivors of VAW was set up at the station in 2021 with funding from the European Union.

This modern police station has three floors, including a separate residential unit for police commissioner Bintou Guissé. Out of 35 staff, 6 are female, including the commissioner and two investigators.

The Zac Mbao police stations applies the following practices:

- All staff, including male officers, have been informally trained on how to address VAW
- Community actors such as religious leaders, youth, and women's associations have been informed about the services the police station provides
- The commissioner participates in community activities such as VAW awareness-raising in schools; roundtable discussions with NGOs and visits to baneju gox, imams, schools, and health centers
- Survivors who come to the station for help are welcomed by the commissioner herself, who then leads them to a female investigator
- Female investigators interview survivors in dedicated private areas
- Separate waiting rooms are available for men or women who need to stay at the police station for extended periods
- Prioritizes survivors' safety by offering them a separate reception area. Police staff with special training on VAW receive the survivors and refer them to services.

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Democratic Center for the Control of Armed Forces, and REPSFECO have advised select police staff across the region on the survivor-centered approach and relevant standard operating procedures such as protocols for initial contact, interview and investigation techniques, Do No Harm risk assessment techniques and safety guidelines, and protocols for particularly vulnerable groups such as children.

Law enforcement agencies have also increased their coordination with other ministries and agencies to better address the needs of survivors. For example, in Nigeria, NAPTIP coordinates a high-level multi-agency task team involving NSCDC, the National Bureau of Statistics, the Justice Ministry, and the Human Rights Commission. The agency also coordinates with NGOs, CSOs, and SARC Centers.

However, existing policies and procedures were not always applied uniformly across all locations that were part of this study. Research participants noted inconsistencies, especially in rural areas, where command structures and education levels are weaker than in the urban centers. For example, they stated that:

- **Police officers in field locations may not always be aware of policies and procedures that have been adopted at the headquarters level.** For example, in Nigeria's FCT, the NPF gender desk officers at headquarters had knowledge about VAPP provisions and the NPF's gender policy, but the desk officers at FCT Command in Kubwa and Gwagwalada districts were not familiar with these guidelines. At the Enugu State police command headquarters, the majority of officers had received training on VAW regulations, but this was not the case at the divisional level.

Efforts of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to Address VAW

Nigeria's ICPC has made strides to reduce VAW within its institution and at the country's universities. The commission has a policy against sexual harassment among its staff and has trained its officers in the departments of Operations, Prosecution, and Public Enlightenment. To address sexual harassment at universities, ICPC is encouraging all higher education institutions in Nigeria to adopt policies to counter sexual harassment. In addition, the commission built a partnership with local CSOs to raise awareness about sexual harassment among students and the greater public. ICPC has also processed 17 reported cases of sexual harassment, with two resulting in convictions via plea bargain.

- **Police officers in urban areas tend to be more knowledgeable and prepared to respond to VAW than officers serving in rural areas.** In Nigeria's Benue State, gender desk officers in urban centers receive training on human rights and VAW-related issues, but those in the semi-urban and rural areas do not. Officers in semi-urban and rural areas often still rely on the penal code as a legal reference point, while those in urban centers refer to VAPP, as required and per the direction of state police headquarters.

Capacity Building to Prevent and Reduce VAW

Most law enforcement agencies have increased the knowledge and capacity of police officers and agency staff on various aspects of VAW, in collaboration with international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and local CSOs. Training topics typically include defining and understanding types of VAW, VAW-related laws and policies, and approaches

Examples of VAW Training for Police in Senegal

UN Women conducted a study to identify barriers, gaps, and best practices of the police response to VAW. It recommended integrating VAW training in standard training curricula at all levels of the police. UN Women also produced a training guide and organized training sessions on specific VAW topics with police officers at Senegal's National Police Academy.

and protocols to prevent and reduce VAW. In Senegal, UN Women produced a comprehensive mapping of local initiatives to improve police response in its "Handbook on Gender-Responsive Police Services for Women and Girls." The handbook provides practical guidance for an effective and gender-sensitive response to VAW and promotes institutional transformation.⁴⁷ In Nigeria, the NPF Gender Unit piloted a training program on VAW together with the Ford Foundation and the CLEEN Foundation. The unit also integrated the curriculum into the NPF training curriculum of standard operating procedures on violence committed against girls, designed in collaboration with UNICEF, and designed a training manual on VAW together with UN Women. UNICEF and UN Women have trained gender desk officers and trainers across the 36 state commands and students of the Nigeria Police Academy (POLAC) have completed training on how to handle cases of VAW.

Increased Reporting and Referral Mechanisms for Survivors of VAW

In recent years, police stations have expanded availability of and access to reporting mechanisms, increasing the number of referrals provided to survivors for services. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs designed a framework for tracking cases of rape and allocated 394 million Naira (850,000 USD) to counter VAW and convened a national coalition to increase

⁴⁷ The UN Women team in Senegal included the Partners West Africa - Senegal research undertaken for this project in its mapping report.

“When survivors come to the police station, they are received first at the front desk. Upon filling of complaint form, when it is discovered that it is a matter of VAW, they are then directed to the gender desk unit of the division, where they are attended to by female police officers, who take them to a secluded part of the station and try to make them comfortable enough to respond to questions about their experiences. If there is a need to do a quick physical check on the victims, it is also done in a secluded part of the station, away from other eyes, and then where medical attention is seen to be needed, the victims are taken to the hospital for professional medical help and check-ups.”

– Police Officer in Nigeria

reporting. In 2021, NAPTIP recorded and investigated a total of 1,112 cases of VAW. The agency reported that it cannot always carry out its mandate to prosecute and convict perpetrators of VAW because survivors frequently withdraw their cases due to fears of retaliation and increased vulnerability. Especially in cases where women and children are financial dependents of the perpetrators, NAPTIP proceeds with caution to respect survivors' wishes and often prioritizes counseling services rather than prosecution. The police gender unit also developed an online complaint platform in partnership with the Ford Foundation and the CLEEN Foundation. The platform is accessible via its website (fciidgender.net), Twitter (@FIBGender) or email (gender@fib.gov.ng). It encourages survivors to report cases to facilitate access to justice and establish accurate data on VAW.

Citizens in Senegal can use the so-called “numéros vert” (“green numbers”)—telephone helplines for reporting crimes, including

VAW. Nigerian CSO representatives surveyed also pointed out that recording procedures have improved. In some districts, police have been trained in protocols to record survivors' statements in writing and in much more detail than was done previously. Alleged perpetrators are being investigated thoroughly, and cases are referred to the relevant prosecutor's office or ministry. Some law enforcement agencies also have their own medical clinics. In Nigeria, for example, the NSCDC offers survivors first-aid treatment in an in-house clinic and notifies family members once a survivor has reported abuses. Several CSO representatives reported that divisional police officers usually refer rape cases to the State Command, whereas the Commissioner of Police directs them to the gender desk officer for investigation. Most police representatives interviewed emphasized the efforts they made to cooperate with CSOs and expressed satisfaction about those relationships.

These measures reflect an increasing interest and willingness of police to make efforts at all levels to meet survivors' needs and work in collaboration with local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Thanks to the policies and guidelines put in place by Nigerian and Senegalese law enforcement agencies in recent years, support for survivors of VAW has improved significantly. But there remain ample opportunities to strengthen the survivor-centered and community-based police response in several key areas. Policymakers and implementers can encourage legislative, procedural, and budgetary changes that will increase protective measures and ensure a more uniform and coordinated application of existing laws and practices. They can broaden and institutionalize individual officer and department knowledge and capacity building on VAW. They can also engage community-based actors, including traditional authorities, more consistently to ensure a greater survivor-centered and community-based response to VAW.

1. Ensure that Existing Legislation to Prevent and Reduce VAW is Deliberately Survivor-Centered

Existing legislation relating to women's rights should be revised to better address the needs of survivors. Laws must broaden the definition of VAW to include all types including online violence. They should prioritize the physical safety and emotional well-being of survivors by giving survivors the right to access health

care, psychological and social support, security, and legal services by providers who possess the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills to prioritize survivor's experiences. Laws must also safeguard the privacy of survivors by ensuring anonymous reporting in governments reporting systems. In light of widespread social stigmatization of survivors in West Africa, legislators should move cautiously regarding mandatory reporting requirements, as such requirements could put survivors at risk of experiencing further violence and discrimination within their communities. Laws should not limit the ability of survivors to freely access and choose from the widest possible options for recourse.

Legislation should also promote a more transparent, accountable, effective, and unbiased justice system by addressing corruption and discrimination within institutions and by increasing judiciary performance in areas such as case management, forensic evidence, and communication with citizens. This will strengthen survivors' trust in the judiciary and enable them to pursue legal action against their perpetrators as appropriate.

2. *Harmonize Survivor-Centered Legislation and Policy Across Regions and Countries*

Given the ambiguities and omissions in VAW legislation and inconsistencies among law enforcement agencies' policies and procedures for VAW, there is an opportunity to streamline and enforce minimum legal standards and institutional protocols across the region. In line with relevant ECOWAS guidelines,⁴⁸ governments can agree on joint legal definitions—for example, of rape and domestic violence—and on punitive measures that apply across the region. They can also decide to standardize key protocols, such as those for receipt or investigation of VAW cases. This will improve the consistency of the response and send a clear message to perpetrators. It will also prevent people from taking advantage of legal loopholes to continue to expose women to violence. For example, some Senegalese communities in the Tambacounda region are currently sending girls across the border to Mali, where FGC is still legal. Finally, a regionally harmonized response will ensure adequate support to survivors who cross borders, either to escape stigmatization in their home communities or because armed conflict or natural disaster force them to leave their homes. Regional CSO umbrella organizations such as REPSFECO are ideally placed to convene relevant actors and facilitate conversations around regional harmonization.

⁴⁸ For example, the Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region or the ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance.

3. *Review and Standardize Survivor-Centered Policies and Procedures Within Each Agency, Considering the Needs of the Most Vulnerable Groups*

Although a law enforcement agency may have adopted VAW guidelines and procedures, such guidelines are not always uniformly applied across the agency. Especially in rural areas, where command structures and educational levels might be weaker than in urban areas, agency-wide policies and procedures might not always be followed.

Improved internal communication, more frequent training, and performance measures related to enforcing VAW policies and procedures can be effective tools to ensure a more uniform implementation of VAW policies and procedures within each agency. Agencies should prioritize standard operating procedures for initial contact between police officers and survivors and police interviewing and investigation techniques that are trauma aware and survivor centered. Agencies should also emphasize protocols and reporting mechanisms for particularly vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, and women who have suffered abuses by armed non-state actors.

4. *Encourage Inter-Agency Coordination to Better Meet Survivors' Needs*

Law enforcement and justice agencies can better coordinate their work to ensure that survivors' needs are met. In Nigeria, research participants explained how police sometimes see lawyers as antagonists who hinder the investigation, such as when lawyers insist that rape victims first receive medical attention before their interview with the police. In turn, lawyers accuse police of illegal practices, such as when police interview victims without the presence of a lawyer. Some research participants also reported that agencies frequently fail to exchange information and employ redundant procedures. Survivors may be required to retell their stories several times to different agencies, which can increase their sense of victimization; representatives of several agencies may need to visit the crime scene, which can significantly lengthen the investigation process. To better support survivors, police and other justice agencies can:

- Share information to strengthen accurate data collection and management
- Design shared procedures and protocols that clarify individual and joint responsibilities to avoid redundancies and accelerate case management
- Jointly review cases and take

coordinated action to advance case management

- Mutually enforce confidentiality requirements to guarantee survivors' anonymity and safety
- Provide consistent information to survivors to help manage their expectations
- Share and harmonize best practices to increase performance and better coordinate in the areas of evidence collection, victim and witness interviews, confidentiality requirements, follow-up, perpetrator identification, and arrest
- Map out and coordinate referrals for immediate psychosocial care and/or medical attention, shelter, legal assistance, as well as more long-term socioeconomic support

Coordination among justice agencies in cross-border areas is especially helpful for clarifying jurisdictional issues, ensuring proper transfer and follow-up of cases, preventing perpetrators from absconding, and ensuring the probability of appropriate punishment.

5. *Increase Budgets for Staffing, Equipment, and Services for Survivors*

While law enforcement agencies have started to adopt policies and procedures that are more survivor centered, these changes are not always accompanied by the necessary budgetary allocations.

In Nigeria, for example, NAPTIP is tasked with implementing the VAPP Act, but the agency has no separate budget to conduct activities relating to VAPP. The agency's rapid response team only has one car available to rescue victims of violence and therefore often prioritizes cases of child abuse over VAW cases. Research participants witnessed police officers housing victims in their own homes or paying for medical expenses out of pocket to compensate for their agencies' lack of funding for such services. Budgets specifically dedicated to preventing and reducing VAW could include the following measures:

- Increase staffing of gender desks to ensure a 24/7 presence
- Install separate reception and waiting areas at police stations to ensure privacy and confidentiality of communications between police and survivors
- Make rape kits available at local health care centers
- Conduct medical examinations to document injuries and diagnose potential diseases
- Provide shelter for victims who fear abuse at home
- Collect forensic evidence
- Improve data filing and storage systems to better maintain confidentiality of survivors' accounts
- Produce VAW information materials that help survivors and their families identify support services and resources

Law enforcement agencies can coordinate budget design and allocation with social welfare and health services. Making these additional resources available will ensure more adequate support to survivors.

6. Increase Professional Opportunities and Benefits for Female Police Officers

To create a more gender-sensitive institutional culture within the police and put more focus on the needs of survivors, female police officers should have equal opportunities to advance to all levels of the institution and be integrated into internal and external decision-making bodies on police reform. Providing women and men equal pay and benefits and giving female officers adequate access to maternity leave and childcare options will incentivize more women to join the police.

7. Institutionalize Training on the Survivor-Centered Approach

Training police officers on how to respond to VAW cases helps raise awareness of VAW among police officers and ensures consistent application of policies and procedures across

“We can’t just sensitize the female officers and make gender-based violence a ‘women’s thing.’ Men need to be sensitized as well.”

– Regional Human Rights Expert

“ We often invest in trainings and then learn that [participants] leave their posts shortly after for a variety of reasons, professional as well as personal ones.... Sometimes the training is also given to the same person several times, while others have not received any training. I think this is something that needs to be corrected. The police leadership can take the lead on this. And often, they already have the relevant module. In Cameroon, the police use a training module that they have built themselves. This is a good practice because it increases their ownership over the content and enables consistency of training materials.... It is important that we train focal points, gender unit members, and other police officers across the entire territory. They are the bottom of the chain that will allow us to stop VAW. ”

- Regional Gender Expert

all divisions. Often, the central command has outlined guidance to clarify procedures, but the procedures are then not disseminated sufficiently to all divisions and are not being followed consistently across the country. For example, research participants in Nigeria in Senegal reported that some police officers treat domestic violence cases as criminal cases, while others view them as civil cases or as “family matters” which they are not able to address. Law enforcement agencies can better institutionalize trainings by taking measures to:

- Increase specialized instruction on VAW issues. Few police officers interviewed for this report ever had the opportunity to attend specialized training on VAW. In some regions in Nigeria and Senegal, even gender desk officers have not participated in specialized training. More opportunities for training should be offered, with topics such as: impact of gender norms and dynamics on

women; legal definitions of VAW; patterns and early warning signs; safety of survivors; overview of response approaches (i.e., survivor-centered approach), trauma-aware protocols to communicate with victims during initial contact and investigation; and referrals of support services for victims

- Target training more intentionally and effectively. In Senegal, training on VAW is often provided to female gender desk officers but not to their male colleagues. This can create a perception that VAW is a “women’s issue” that male officers do not need to understand. Integrating men into these trainings emphasizes that VAW is a societal issue and that male allyship is essential to advancing protections for women and reducing the incidence of VAW. According to a regional expert interviewed for this study, certain individuals may attend the same training several times, whereas others never receive any training. Given

the high staff turnover among law enforcement agencies, trained officers may also move on quickly. Therefore, VAW training should be part of the onboarding procedures for new hires.

- Integrate VAW training into existing internal curricula and onboarding processes. Specialized VAW training is generally delivered on an ad hoc basis by external actors. In some regions, government bodies organize trainings on VAW for law enforcement agents. In Nigeria's Enugu State, for example, the Ministry of Gender Affairs has provided training. In other cases, training is provided by external actors, including other government agencies, donors, or international organizations and is scheduled based on their availability. This results in inconsistency in the trainings, which are disconnected from other internal processes. Instead, VAW trainings should be integrated into the core curriculum that police officers must complete at the police academy. VAW-related soft skills, such as trauma awareness or trust-building, can usefully complement hard skills (e.g., physical fitness, weapons proficiency, legal knowledge, and forensics) emphasized in the core curriculum to make the police response to VAW more effective.
- Produce tailored response kits and other materials. Law enforcement agencies should develop clear guidelines that explain the best practices to follow when conducting initial interviews, investigations, and in providing referrals. Clear and concise protocol guides and refresher documents will help to

promote regular review and application of best practices and established protocols to address VAW.

- Hold joint trainings that include non-police actors. Training courses can be a useful opportunity to encourage dialogue and coordination among police and other actors involved in responding to VAW, such as CSOs, other service providers, justice actors, parliamentarians, and those who allocate funds for VAW activities. Joint training allows these organizations to clarify each other's roles, agree on common VAW objectives, and design processes and budgets to achieve them.

8. *Transform the Organizational Culture of the Police*

Training programs are only effective if supported by institutional mechanisms and structures that uphold the same guidelines internally and provide accountability.

Given the male-dominated organizational culture of the security sector in West Africa, it is essential for senior leadership to set an example by reflecting on institutional and structural barriers to gender inclusion and equity. Gender-sensitive practices to combat patriarchic stereotypes should be implemented across all levels of the organization. Codes of conduct, nondiscrimination policies, a zero-tolerance response to all forms of VAW within the institution, as well as internal control and oversight bodies that deal with VAW speedily and transparently are all key to eradicating VAW within the police and building females

employees' trust and confidence in police leadership to treat staff fairly and equitably. In some countries, this may require the passage of national laws, decrees, and labor codes to prohibit gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which can then guide the development of security sector-specific protocols.

9. *Increase Partnerships with Multi-Sectoral Service Providers to Support Survivors*

Depending on the level of abuse or violence, survivors may have particular and immediate needs relating to their health, psychosocial well-being, safety and security, legal situation, accommodation, and other material or nonmaterial needs. However, the accessibility of these services varies greatly from region to region. In Senegal, research participants in the Ziguinchor region were familiar with support services and could name specific centers that offered these services. Research participants in Louga could not name a single support mechanism. In Dakar, research participants could name structures but reported that such services are difficult for survivors to access due to transportation issues. For many women in Senegal, services related to their psychosocial well-being are particularly challenging to access due to sociocultural barriers.

In Nigeria, research participants seemed to have better knowledge of available services than in Senegal, but there was also variation across regions. For example, Akwa Ibom was reported to have few services while Benue, a

state with one of the highest VAW rates in the country, was reported to have a significant number. Some law enforcement agencies such as NAPTIP regularly refer victims to services across all states, whereas agencies such as NPF and NSCDC were reported to refer in some states, but not in others, even if safe spaces were available in those states. Law enforcement agencies can increase and standardize the availability and accessibility of services for survivors who seek help. To make support services better available to survivors, police departments should increase their partnerships with law clinics, health providers, psychological counselors, and providers of educational, financial, and employment services.

10. *Increase Partnerships with Informal Justice Providers*

For survivors and their families, informal justice providers such as traditional courts can be viewed as having more credibility and authority than the police. Yet these institutions often revictimize survivors. With a few exceptions, research participants reported that informal justice providers are usually keen to enforce traditional sociocultural norms. They are rarely aware of VAW legislation and advise survivors not to file police reports or access any services outside of their community. Law enforcement agencies can engage in dialogue with informal justice providers to educate them about VAW laws, referral options, and legal pathways. Informal authorities and police can work together to design joint reporting

and referral pathways for survivors with clear roles and responsibilities for each institution. Local CSOs are well placed to convene law enforcement agencies and informal justice authorities around VAW issues.

Example of a Community-Based Multi-Stakeholder Initiative to Support VAW Survivors

In North East Nigeria, UN Women supported the establishment of multi-sectoral Peace and Community Security Architecture Dialogue Observatory Platforms to improve women's access to formal and informal judicial systems at the state and local government level. These platforms include representatives from various government ministries, departments, and agencies, including law enforcement, religious and traditional leaders, women's groups, legal practitioners, health professionals, and CSOs. These actors provide coordinated solutions for tracking, documenting, and responding to VAW.

11. *Increase Trust in the Police Among Survivors and Communities*

A positive experience with law enforcement is critical for women who seek support after having been abused. Among the most widely held negative perceptions in Nigeria and Senegal is the lack of transparency and accountability in the police response to VAW. This deficiency is linked closely to the perception of endemic corruption and widespread discrimination in the law enforcement system. To change such perceptions, the following measures can be useful:

- **Start internal dialogues on corruption, discrimination, and abuse.** This can mean bringing together local police divisions to raise awareness and discuss the vulnerabilities to corruption. Police can also facilitate a dialogue that leads to participatory design of action plans to effectively address the identified vulnerabilities.
- **Design and implement citizen-focused communication campaigns.** There is ample opportunity for the police to better showcase their good stewardship on VAW at the local level. Our research showed that survivors, their families, and community leaders often are not aware of VAW initiatives implemented by the police. In Nigeria's Enugu State, for example, only 50 percent of research participants felt that they were informed about police activities on VAW. Police can provide citizens with



Examples of Awareness-Raising Tools to Shift Gender Norms

- Communication campaigns using television, newspapers, radio, and websites
- Social media campaigns with interactive surveys
- Community-based initiatives such as public debates, town hall meetings, and street theater, concerts, festivals, and soccer games
- Static and traveling exhibitions and displays
- Printed materials such as brochures, billboards, cartoons, comics, pamphlets, posters, printed, and audiovisual resources
- Political advocacy and lobbying

information about law enforcement efforts to address VAW. For example, police can post flyers in public locations or broadcast key VAW messages at community town halls, on radio or television, or in schools. Their messages could aim to sensitize communities about VAW, show in accessible ways (for example, with visuals) how VAW cases will be processed through the justice system, update citizens on the number of cases reported and processed, and provide useful contact information and resources for survivors. It is particularly important to raise awareness about VAW, including relevant laws, among boys starting at primary school age. Such efforts will contribute to engendering trust among local communities.

12. *Increase Public Awareness About VAW to Shift Social Norms*

Awareness raising is crucial to change social norms that reinforce inequalities between men and women to reduce VAW. If families, communities, and societies can be convinced of the advantages of gender equality, they will slowly shift attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that justify violence against women. VAW awareness campaigns should particularly engage men and primary school-age boys.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DONORS

International donors – official development assistance (ODA) organizations and philanthropists – are leading and shaping efforts to eliminate VAW, including the response of national security agencies. Donors can most usefully protect women from violence by setting the following strategic priorities:

1. *Increase Funding to Support Police Forces to End VAW*

Major bilateral donors reported a decrease in spending on “ending violence against women and girls” worldwide in 2020–2021 (USD 458 million per year on average, compared to 531 million per year on average during 2018–19), although overall ODA increased during that period.⁴⁹ The support to end VAW only constituted 0.3 percent of total ODA.⁵⁰ Philanthropic contributions are relatively modest when compared to ODA.⁵¹

⁴⁹ OECD, “Official Development Assistance for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Snapshot”, 2023, p.5, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/snapshot-oda-gender-2023.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Foundations included in the OECD survey of “Private Philanthropy for Development” (2018) provided a total of USD 3.7 billion for ending VAW from 2013 to 2015, whereas ODA provided USD 97.4 billion. See OECD, “Philanthropy and Gender Equality - Insights on Philanthropy for Gender Equality”, OECD Development Centre, Paris. (2019) p.14, https://www.oecd.org/development/networks/Book-NetFWD_PolicyNoteOnGENDER_web.pdf.

More funding is necessary from all sources to support police forces to promote the well-being of survivors and prevent and end VAW.

2. *Invest in Adequate VAW Data Monitoring Systems*

In recent years, governments have made significant commitments to monitor and analyze data relating to VAW to better understand prevalence and patterns of abuses and measure change. However, the national databases are often limited in the data that is tracked. For example, data collectors may only measure certain types of VAW or will not track data for certain demographic groups, such as persons with disabilities or other vulnerable populations. Moreover, such databases may be updated infrequently or not at all, given the significant coordination required among various agencies, not to mention internet access and electricity. Donors can support data monitoring efforts by:

- Conducting advocacy with senior levels of governments and de facto authorities on VAW data management
- Insisting on inclusion of all types of VAW and vulnerable populations in data collection efforts
- Encouraging frequent updating and support of digital data management systems

that function on low bandwidth and are powered by independent and alternative energy sources with long-term maintenance contracts

3. *Include the Most Vulnerable Groups*

Most donors currently target their VAW funding towards women and girls in general. Sometimes they also emphasize marginalized groups, such as conflict-affected individuals, refugees, IDPs, and migrants. LGBTQI+ individuals and persons with disabilities have consistently received less attention, though both populations experience high levels of systemic violence. Donors have a special duty to protect these groups and ensure that lawmakers, police, informal justice actors, services providers, and communities are sensitized to their needs.

4. *Broaden the Stakeholder Groups Across Countries and the Region*

Ending VAW requires coordination among a large group of actors. Police and other justice actors such as courts, prosecutors, and legal defense organizations must work together, ideally across borders, to ensure proper and swift case processing and follow-up, and to mutually reinforce best practices for addressing VAW. Donors can encourage the development of local-level multi-stakeholder platforms that facilitate dialogue among formal and informal justice mechanisms, multi-sectoral service providers, and survivors and their families. Such dialogues can sensitize all sides about the needs of survivors and enable them to design shared pathways for

reporting, redress, and recovery. Multi-country initiatives that improve coordination among justice agencies in cross-border areas to ensure proper transfer of cases and prevent perpetrators from absconding should also be encouraged.

5. *Prioritize Funding and Accompaniment of Women-Led Local CSOs*

Most donor spending to end VAW is channeled to multi-lateral organizations or international NGOs – at the expense of local CSOs. In 2019, bilateral donors reported a total of USD 439.2 million spent on ending VAW, with 47 percent going through multi-lateral organizations such as UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or the World Bank, with 31 percent allocated to NGOs.⁵² Several recent studies reveal the predominance of international recipients of funding to end VAW across the globe and in specific countries.⁵³ Almost all philanthropic giving for gender equality

⁵² OECD, “Development Finance Towards the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence,” Gender Equality Perspectives Series, OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, Paris 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/development-finance-elimination-gender-based-violence.pdf>.

⁵³ Ibid.; Clarisa Bencomo, Emily Battistini, and Terry McGovern, “Gender-Based Violence is a Human Rights Violation: Are Donors Responding Adequately? What a Decade of Donor Interventions in Colombia, Kenya, and Uganda Reveals,” in *Health and Human Rights Journal* 22 (December 2022), No. 2, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2469/2022/12/mcgovern.pdf>; International Rescue Committee, “Where is the Money? How the Humanitarian System is Failing to Fund an End of Violence Against Women and Girls,” 2019, <https://www.rescue.org/report/wheres-money-how-humanitarian-system-failing-fund-end-violence-against-women-and-girls>.

(99 percent) in 2013-2015 was allocated to intermediary institutions.⁵⁴ Some multilaterals or international NGOs decide to sub-contract to local CSOs, but their role and decision-making power in initiatives to end VAW are usually limited. Local CSOs, especially those that are women-led, have direct knowledge of VAW issues in their communities, maintain unique access to law makers, police and service providers, and possess a deeper understanding of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm issues than do international project implementers. Indeed, such locally led organizations are best placed to achieve the transformations in social norms that are essential to ending VAW, because they have greater credibility and trust among citizens and their communities than international NGOs. Direct donor funding is necessary to expand and sustain the work of local women-led CSOs, but funds alone are insufficient. Women CSO leaders also need accompaniment and coaching to strengthen their resilience. This accompaniment should not be a one-fits-all solution, but must be tailored to the unique needs of each organization, taking into account the conflict and security dynamics in which the leaders operate. Donors have a responsibility to ensure that women-led CSOs receive the resources necessary for them to exercise a meaningful leadership role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs to end VAW.

6. Utilize More Flexible and Longer-Term Funding Mechanisms to Support Initiatives to Transform Social Norms in Demonstrable Ways

Local organizations can best play their crucial role in transforming the social norms and attitudes that perpetuate VAW when they can count on a sustainable and flexible funding base that allows them to thrive over the long term. The current short-term project-based cycles leave local CSOs vulnerable to unexpected challenges and prevent them from leveraging opportunities that can significantly expand their impact. Multi-year funding that allows local organizations to choose the areas they want to prioritize and how they sustain and measure their performance over the long-term will result in the broader societal changes that are necessary to end discrimination and violence.

⁵⁴ OECD, *Insights on Philanthropy and Gender Equality*, 2019, p. 23.

CONCLUSION

More than one-third of women across West Africa today have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes. Although many countries in the region have made progress to address the crisis of violence against women, from passing progressive laws to hiring more female police officers, there is much more that can, and must, be done.

Law enforcement can play a major role in preventing and reducing VAW. This study was an initial attempt to fill the current gap in understanding how survivor-centered and community-based policing can prevent and reduce VAW. While additional regional and country-specific studies based on more rigorous research methodologies are needed to further evaluate these approaches to VAW, our findings show that the most effective police response is community-based and centers on the needs of survivors. Recommendations for improvement include revising and harmonizing key VAW legislation within countries and regionally; standardizing the police response to VAW within institutions; and building capacity to enable police to respond more effectively and to better support survivors. New institutional guidelines must include connecting survivors to psychosocial, medical, legal, and economic support and engaging more meaningfully with local

communities. Police can build partnerships with local CSOs to take advantage of their capacities and networks to help survivors and their communities. Regional organizations can support these efforts by developing effective regional policies and guidelines and promoting meaningful coordination. International donors and implementers can direct more flexible, and longer-term funding to women-led local CSOs to ensure that survivors receive the support they need from law enforcement.

While the police will continue to fulfill key roles in preventing and reducing VAW, it is essential to engage other justice actors, including prosecuting agencies, defense counsel, judges, and court staff, to improve investigations, case management, and the delivery of justice. Correctional agencies can provide better treatment to inmates who have experienced VAW and work to reduce recidivism rates among perpetrators. Larger criminal justice reforms that aim to reduce corruption, and that focus on the physical and mental well-being of victims are critical to ensuring legal accountability of perpetrators and providing support to survivors.

Any initiatives designed to enhance the police response to VAW will benefit from wider efforts to transform the entrenched



sociocultural norms regarding men and women in West Africa, which are the ultimate driver of violence against women. But changing attitudes that have prevailed in the region for centuries cannot be a short-term goal and comes with significant risks. Policies and programs to change gender norms require longer-term programming and careful consideration of context-specific Do No Harm principles, best gauged by local actors. Otherwise, women could be at risk for further violence or experience other forms of backlash. While advocating for the protection of women, international donors, policymakers, and practitioners must trust local actors to take the lead in designing appropriate initiatives that bring incremental transformations and enable survivors of VAW to lead safer, better lives.

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ANNEX: TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS DEFINED BY UN WOMEN⁵⁵

Domestic violence - Domestic violence, also called domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, is any pattern of behavior that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It encompasses all physical, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women globally.

Femicide - Femicide refers to the intentional murder of women because they are women, but may be defined more broadly to include any killings of women or girls. Femicide differs from male homicide in specific ways. For example, most cases of femicide are committed by partners or ex-partners, and involve ongoing abuse in the home, threats or intimidation, sexual violence or situations where women have less power or fewer resources than their partner.

Sexual violence - Sexual violence is any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs. Sexual violence can include sexual harassment, rape, corrective rape, or rape culture; i.e. a social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalized and justified.

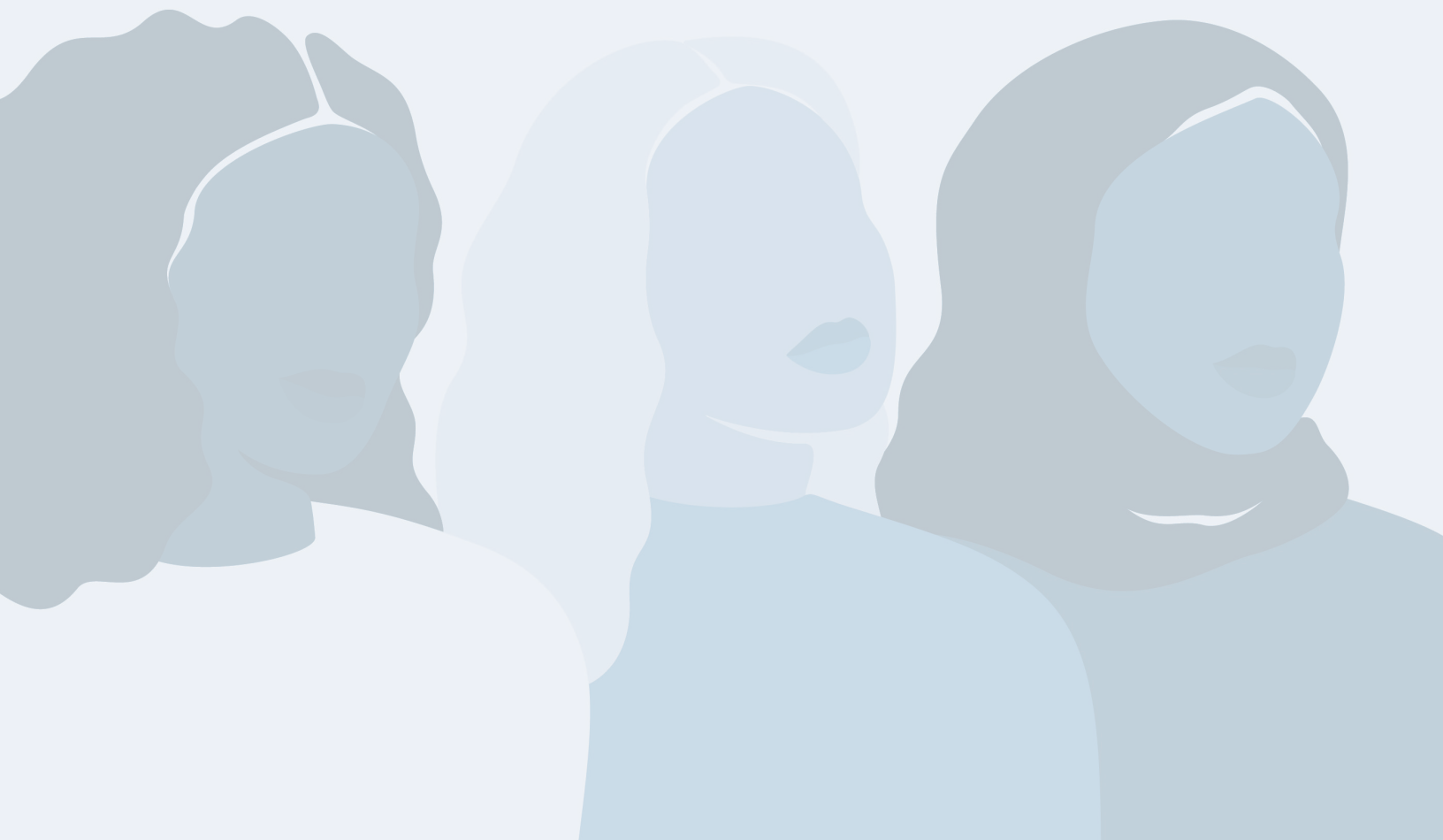
Human trafficking - Human trafficking is the acquisition and exploitation of people, through means such as force, fraud, coercion, or deception. This heinous crime ensnares millions of women and girls worldwide, many of whom are sexually exploited.

Female genital mutilation - Female genital mutilation (FGM) includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for nonmedical reasons. It is classified into four major types, and both the practice and the motivations behind it vary from place to place. FGM is a social norm, often considered a necessary step in preparing girls for adulthood and marriage and typically driven by beliefs about gender and its relation to appropriate sexual expression. It was first classified as violence in 1997 via a joint statement issued by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA.

⁵⁵ UN Women, *Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence against Women and Girls*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>.

Child marriage- Child marriage refers to any marriage where one or both of the spouses are below the age of 18. It is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.” Girls are more likely to be child brides, and consequently drop out of school and experience other forms of violence.

Online or digital violence- Online or digital violence against women refers to any act of violence that is committed, assisted or aggravated by the use of information and communication technology (mobile phones, the Internet, social media, computer games, text messaging, email, etc) against a woman because she is a woman.



Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative aka
Partners West Africa Nigeria
No. 46B Mike Akhigbe way, Jabi, Abuja
Tel. +234 809 125 7245
www.partnersnigeria.org

PartnersGlobal
1800 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1218
United States
Tel. + 1 202-942-2116
www.partnersglobal.org

Partners West Africa - Senegal
Liberté 6 Nord - Villa #8
25887 Dakar-Fann
Sénégal
Tel : + (221) 33 867 70 98
www.partnerswestafrica.org



This report was supported by

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