

## Focus Group Discussions in Kaduna and Plateau States

### Introduction

Haki Mkononi is a legal empowerment programme focused on working at a regional level with the African Union, its organs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and women's rights organisations in 6 priority countries. The project is managed by Oxfam and the 44 member strong Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition (SOAWR).

The overall goal of the Haki Mkononi project is to increase and amplify the demand for the domestication of the Women's Protocol using the instruments of the GEO Bill and the VAPP Act in Plateau and Kaduna States.

The Haki Mkononi project focuses on three major rights (I) the right to land (ii) the right to free and consensual marriage and (iii) sexual and reproductive rights. Contextually, the proposed intervention areas are those where gender discrimination and women's rights violations are particularly evident. The pervasive culture of discrimination in these three areas have grave consequences that limit women's productivity and enjoyment of full reproductive rights while also limiting their ability to lift themselves out of poverty.

### Objective

- ✓ Engage household heads, community and religious leaders as actors in championing sensitization and advocacy on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), against Child Marriage and Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- ✓ Train and equip leaders on strategies of communicating issues and information of Child Marriage, SRHR and GBV to sensitize their communities and congregations.
- ✓ Foster partnership to build ownership and sustainability of the advocacy process on Child Marriage, SRHR and GBV.

### Justification

- 43% of girls in Nigeria are married off before they are 18 years old, out of the 43%, 17% are married off before they are 15 years old<sup>3</sup>. Considering regional differences, reports state that in the North 76% of under-aged girls are married (this includes Haki project states of Kaduna and Plateau); in the South, it is 10%.
- Over 200,000 girls in Nigeria<sup>4</sup> are affected by the complications of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) often as an aftermath of early marriage/childbirth.
- 1 in every 3 women will be physically or psychologically assaulted, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during their lifetime.
- Nigeria rates high on the chart of countries with the challenge of women dying while giving life (Maternal Mortality)

### The Issues

#### Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is a crime and constitutes actions and inactions that abuse, deny or assault the human dignity of others. Its effects are usually life long even after help is extended and justice is awarded. Its forms include physical or verbal injury, emotional stress, sexual assault, economic deprivation and other acts such as isolation and controlling behaviour of the strong over the weak person. GBV is not usually reported because of the stigma associated with it, especially in instances of rape. Help is available however, the weaknesses in access and administration of legal redress limits the extent of support GBV survivors get. The culture of silence also increases the prevalence of GBV in many communities.

#### Child/Early Marriage

This is a situation in which female children of an age range of 10-14 are married sometimes before or immediately they complete primary school education. They are neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. They end up exposed to domestic violence, economically dependent on their husbands and deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and safety. They are at a great risk of life threatening complications in pregnancy and childbirth.

*Promoting factors of child/early marriage include:*

- The assumption that the girl-child is an economic burden
- Some parents erroneously see early marriage as a security for the girl child
- Peer pressure on parents who live in societies where early marriage is prevalent
- Traditional and religious presumptions that under-aged marriage is socially and religiously acceptable.

*Consequences of early marriage include:*

- High population of uneducated women, this translates to lack of economic power and poverty which also affects the home
- Health challenges, dangers of maternal mortality and VVF

#### Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR)

These refer to the right of a girl or woman to protection of her body, the safety of child spacing and access to facilities, services as well as information to guide the mutual decisions on when and how many children her health can support. Most women and girls are un-able to negotiate these matters and in some cases go on having babies until complications including death arise. Access to pre and postnatal care may be denied a pregnant woman with dire consequences. Economic challenges affecting nutrition during pregnancy, cost of hospital fees, and special needs to care for mother or child are also included in these rights. Family heads need to understand these and provision for them as well as support women's empowerment to look after themselves for their health that of their children.

Supported by