



## **LANDMARK LEGISLATION ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: HOW CSOS MADE THE DIFFERENCE**

WRAPA is a non-governmental organisation registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria. Founded in March 1999, it is a membership organization of men, women, and youth with over 32,000 registered members. WRAPA has intervened and touched the lives of abused women in Nigeria, is a leading voice in the advocacy and campaign against Violence Against Women (VAW) in all its ramifications and serves as host and member of a Coalition; LACVAW. In 2004, WRAPA advocacy and public education on international law contributed to Nigeria's ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa. In partnership with the

Gender Ministry, the Legislature and other NGO platforms, WRAPA is working towards Nigeria's domestication of CEDAW and the domestication of the AU Women's Protocol. WRAPA leveraged an existing platform, LACVAW coordinated by one of its projects, the Raising Her Voice project, which brings together a total of 18 organisations.

About 70% of women worldwide experience some form of violence in their lifetime, but in Nigeria, that number rises to one in three for women aged between 15 and 24. In nearly half of all cases the perpetrator is the woman's partner or husband, and shockingly, nearly half of all cases are unreported. Impunity and, worse still, gender based violence within the police and security forces are part of the problem.

Over a decade ago, Nigerian organisations realized that more action was needed to address violence against women in the country. As a result, in 2001, the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW)--a network of civil society groups, religious organizations, international human rights groups and other stakeholders working on various aspects of women's rights-- was formed. WRAPA was designated as the secretariat of the Coalition.

In May 2002, the LACVAW, with support from the International Human Rights Law Group, now LAWGROUP, articulated and submitted to the National Assembly, a Bill titled the "Violence Against Women (Prohibition) Bill, 2003". However, the Bill was not passed during that legislative session. Despite LACVAW's efforts, the Bill did not make much progress until 2008. Concerned about the consistent failure to realize a legal framework to address the increasing prevalence of violence in Nigeria, and with support from the DFID now defunct Security, Justice and Growth Programme, the Coalition coordinated by WRAPA and International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria undertook an audit of Bills submitted to the National Assembly to extract and harmonize

those that bore particular relevance to the issues of violence against women into one bill that could be promoted for passage by all stakeholders.

This audit was followed by intensive advocacy and campaign activities, which were hyped during the 2009 international commemoration of 16 Days activism on Violence Against Women. The campaign was sustained by the media support it generated and the Bill's wide endorsement by the citizens of Nigeria, most critically by key actors in the National Assembly, government, the judiciary, leaders of faith based and traditional institutions. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2012, a motion to reintroduce the Bill was raised and approved in the House of Representatives and the VAPP bill was committed to the Committees Women Affairs, Rules and Business, Human Rights and Justice for consideration. This fast-tracking was on account of the milestones achieved during the tenure of 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly 2010/2011 which included a public hearing and completion of report towards the 3<sup>rd</sup> reading which could not be taken due to the 2011 elections.

Then, in an historic move, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, the 360 member House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria – on its third reading - passed the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) 2011 (VAPP) Bill! The key gains in the new law – subject to approval by the Senate – include a more comprehensive definition of rape, harsher sentences for convicted rapists and other sexual offences, compensation for rape victims, institutional support for protection from further abuse through protection orders and a new Agency and Trust Fund to support the rehabilitation of victims of violence. Covering a tragic spectrum of violence, including female circumcision, domestic violence, early forced marriage, rape (including marital) and harmful widowhood practices, the Legislation aims to recognise the rights of all to safety at the workplace and in the home. The Bill also expressly recognises the right to physical and psychological integrity in times of peace and in areas of conflict. Fundamentally, the law aims to eliminate, or reduce to a minimum the cases of gender based violence.

The Bill in most parts reflects the spirit and provisions of the AU Protocol on Women's rights. It identifies and defines all forms of violence in line with the reality and experiences in Nigeria and the country's obligations under international and regional treaties especially CEDAW, the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women, and the Rome Statute. In line with key provisions of the Protocol (Articles 2; 4; 5 (c) and (d); as well as 13) on State Parties responsibilities, the legislation clearly allots specialized roles for line institutions such as social welfare departments, hospitals, religious institutions, the police, and other law enforcement agencies. However, one key loss for the Bill was the removal of the provision on medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus. This provision aimed to fulfil the aspiration of Article 5 (2) (c) of the Protocol.



So, who and what made the difference between the rejection of the Bill in 2003 and its approval in 2008, with only minor modifications? WRAPA contends that civil society organisations (CSOs) played a key role in this process.

WRAPA has firsthand experience of the consequences of violent crime, providing legal aid and counselling services since 1999. As a result, the organisation was deemed by LACVAW members as an appropriate choice for the Secretariat.

As Secretariat for LACVAW, WRAPA has tirelessly built up pressure on parliamentarians to vote in the VAPP Bill, powered by national and pan-African advocacy and policy connections and the critical mass of seventeen civil society, faith and community groups galvanising support from across Nigeria's

ethnic groups and states.

In 2008, WRAPA joined several other members of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights coalition in a new partnership with the Oxfam Great Britain Raising Her Voice Programme (RHV). Thanks to this partnership, beginning in 2009, LACVAW was coordinated by WRAPA under the RHV project, whose activities were implemented from 2009 to 2012. Under RHV, a total of eighteen non-governmental, community based and faith based institutions joined forces to promote and protect women's rights in Nigeria. These organisations include Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), Baobab for Women's Human Rights, Alliances for Africa (AfA), Gender Awareness Trust (GAT), League of Democratic Women (LEADS), Women Aid Collective (WACOL), Civil Research Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC), International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria, National Council of Catholic Women Organization (NCCWO), Federation of Muslim Women Associations (FOMWAN) Nigeria, COCIN Community Development Programme (CCDP), Project Agape, Project Alert, Gender and Development Action (GADA), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Alubu for Peoples Rights (APRI) and Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON).

RHV added new momentum to the push for poor women's participation and the domestication of the African Union Women's Protocol and breathed new life into WRAPA's campaigning and advocacy around the VAPP bill. Working simultaneously at regional, national, state and grassroots level, skilfully drawing on the coalition members' strengths and connections, WRAPA has developed a suite of interconnected actions that inexorably and relentlessly drove the Bill forward.

There have been awareness raising and public information campaigns to increase the demand for rights, mock tribunals staged to showcase abuses of women's rights, Vox

Pop in schools and market places, parliamentarians bombarded by “vote for DV Bill or we won’t vote for you” texts, a former MP hired to navigate and fast track the Bill’s parliamentary passage, songs, slogans and always, simple, harmonised messaging.

Within the RHV framework promoting women’s political participation, more women in decision making positions in community Development Associations means gender based violence is often on the agenda. Increased confidence means more women have been able to collaborate with religious and traditional leaders. Training of journalists around their coverage of violent crimes, and work with law enforcement agents are also contributing to the slow institutional sea change.

*‘The issues I have gone through have made me realise my rights...I now know that this ignorance of a thing is what is killing women. I have decided to help other women and teach them about their rights because this is what is helping me get back on my feet’, a tribunal testimony*

The VAPP Bill’s approval is a powerful example of the power of collective action and the need for a toolkit of skills: legislative advocacy, public campaigning, grassroots activism,

**“Thank you and keep it up.  
Through your SMS, we know what is happening in the country. This is a good initiative and we support the (VAPP) Bill.”**  
*Member, Federal House of House of Representatives, Nigeria - Dec.2012*

coalition building, communications and networking. A bulging address book is also essential.

Pending the Bill’s approval by the Senate before passing into law, this short snippet of WRAPA and the LACVAW coalition members’ work can

leave us in no doubt of their energy to sustain the momentum for promote women’s rights that working towards the VAPP Bill has generated.