

## **BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATION AND THE MITIGATION OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

**MARGARET APINE (PhD),**  
**Department of Political Science,**  
**Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State**  
**Nigeria: Email margeretapine@yahoo.co.uk; Phone: +2348039786929**

### **Abstract**

*Gender-based violence, which is a pervasive issue today, is described by the United Nations as a harmful act perpetrated against a person's will, whereby ending it can increase economic activity and assist in achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Several administrations in Nigeria had attempted to mitigate and possibly eliminate this challenge to no avail. This paper therefore examine the efforts of the Buhari administration and in particular those new strategies to combat the shadow pandemic. It argues that the hallmarks of president Buhari's legacy in combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria lies in the multi-dimensional and multi-sectorial approaches adapted to mitigating the menace in its entire ramification. This approaches that is comparable only to the holistic effort to combat the HIV/AIDs pandemic; was aimed at addressing the root causes of the menace such as the perversive social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence to thrive. The approach harmonizes the efforts of both national, international none governmental organizations to provide treatment and cancelling for victims. While referral centers that have been established will not only reduce the issue of stigma and perverse social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence to thrive but will promote the persecution of culprits. More fundamentally, the administration's lunch of the National strategy to end child marriage in the country was kind of its own and has the capacity to reduce intimate partner violence in the Northern part of the country. The paper recommends that the Tinibu administration not abandon such initiatives that can drastically reduce sexual and gender-based violence in the country.*

### **Introduction**

One of the hallmarks of president Buhari's legacy in combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria is the multi-dimensional and multi- sectorial approaches adapted to mitigating the menace in its entire ramification. As at November 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, president Buhari listed what his administration had done to address the menace of SGBV in the country. He stated that his government had set up the National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management among other things to checkmate its spread in the country. (Premium Times , 2020)

In his speech earlier that year on June 12, 2020, Democracy Day , the former president had highlighted the government's determination to fight GBV using the law and awareness creation. He noted that it was important to go beyond just legislation in fixing the problem of GBV, but rather, interrogate the deeply dysfunctional cultures, systemic flaws in institutions, and the perverse social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence. <https://humanglemedia.com/nigeria-struggling-to-combat-gender-based-violence-despite-laws-govt-promises/> Accessed 7th Janaury 2023

Such holistic strategy was a great departure from the legalistic approach in the past that was largely ineffective because the issue gender inequality was not incorporated in the plans. Some of those efforts by the former administration that were found at both governments at Federal and State levels to include the following:

1. Establishment of a National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management
2. Committee on eradication of sexual, gender-based violence
3. Development of Gender-Based Policy Guidelines in Emergency Response
4. Improving the economic status of women
5. Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom. Premium Times, (2020)

Other major achievements made before the handover in May 2023 were the passage of the anti-sexual harassment bill to curb issues of violence in the country as well as the setting up of the Inter-Ministerial panel on rape and gender-based violence, the setting of Data Based Management Centers as well as referral centers.

But at the outset of this paper, it is logical to conceptualize SGBV, also used interchangeably with Gender based Violence ( GBV) a term that describes any harmful act that is carried out against a person's will. In the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the United Nations (UN) defined gender-based violence as any action that causes physical sexual or psychological injuries or suffering to women with the inclusion of acts of coercion. This human rights violation unfortunately, is firmly rooted in gender inequality experienced by women and girls. Globally, one in three women experience physical, sexual or intimate-partner violence, are victims of trafficking, or are subject to violent social norms. It is therefore logical that when we talk about SGBV we are referring to the plight of women mostly.

SGBV is manifested through a multitude of actions, including the forced marriage of young girls, human trafficking, genital mutilation, rape and attempted rape, purdah, violence directed at individuals with different sexual orientation, sexual violence, verbal abuse and laws and regulations that limit women's and girls' rights and access to services in relation to men's. About 30% of Nigerian women aged 15-29 have experienced some form of physical violence ranging from female genital mutilation to early forced marriage. (NDHS, 2013) In another survey conducted by the Nigerian Demographic and Health survey in 2018 found that 9% of women aged 15-49 had suffered sexual assault at least once in their lifetime and 31% had experienced physical violence.

Given this high percentage of girls and women victims, one would expect lots of legal actions or reports of cases of SGBV, but families of these persons are usually too scared to seek recourse from law. Worse still, more are ignorant of the various laws put in place by the Judiciary to govern and check the actions of predators in the country. Furthermore, some survivors of domestic violence tend to stay in the marriage because of their children and other cultural and religious reasons.

Lending credence to the above, is the culture of silence that has become engraved in the society, as no one is ready to speak out and seek help so the violence could be stopped, many of them chose be quite for as long as no one else noticed what they are going through. This silence empowers their abusers. The silence is a recipe for an unending circle of abuse and violence. Unfortunately, the society also frowns at separation and divorce. Many women are therefore, forced to endure various forms of abuse and violence in the name of marriage. Besides these reason is the issue of stigmatization. The stigmatization of that the victim and their family pass through have made the perpetrators of this crime to be bolder in their actions.

But as the surge in the number of domestic violence incidents continued unabated, increased efforts to enhance the protection and promotion of women's rights through the enactment of laws and policies internationally, regionally and nationally were put in place. One of such efforts before the Buhari's administration was the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015 and the Protection Against Domestic Violence Laws.

However, 6 years after the VAPP Act was adopted, in May 2020, the loss of Vera Uwalla "Uwa", a 22 year old student at the university of Benin and other cases generated public outcry to the extent that protesters took to the streets in cities across Nigeria to demand urgent action to combat rape and sexual violence against women.(CNN,2020) This protest, led to the rise of big time advocacy programs and the adoption of several policies and initiatives by the Buhari's Administration aimed at eliminated the menace.

Such advocacy programs, by NGOs motivated the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) to declare a state of emergency against GBV on June 10, 2020, While President Muhamadu Buhari supported the calls for urgent action through the establishment of an inter-ministerial Presidential Task Force on Sexual and Gender Based Violence, as well as the inauguration of the Gender-Based Violence Management Committee.

Lending credence to the above initiatives was the fact that most state in the federation under the Buhari' administration passed into law the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law whose sole purpose is to ensure that violence against persons by reason of gender or other circumstances are being tackled. The Minister of Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen in an address, noted that at least 34 States and the FCT have domesticated

the (VAPP) Act 2015 to curb the incessant cases of violence across states. But such success story however, only came after the declaration of the state of emergency by the federal government on 10th of June, 2021, following the rising and unabated cases of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

Consequently, what made the approach under Buhari administration a unique strategy, was the combination of law, increased sensitization on mainstreaming gender sensitivity and equality, and advocacy that were geared towards addressing the fundamental issue of Stigmatization. This method took into consideration the fact that survivors of domestic violence may not want to seek justice. It is an approach which had been successful in clamping down the HIV and AIDs pandemics and is most likely to be useful in tackling the menace which has once been referred to as a shadow pandemic.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Gender-based violence, which is a pervasive issue today, is described by the United Nations' as a harmful act perpetrated against a person's will, whereby ending it can increase economic activity and assist in achieving inclusive and sustainable development. It is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in the world.

One in three women experience physical, sexual or intimate-partner violence; are victims of trafficking, or are subject to violent social norms. In Nigeria the effects of gender based violence cannot be under emphasized. This is because the attendant consequences of gender based violence in the family, community and even the country as a whole, is devastating. Women and girls may experience severe physical injuries, genital mutilation unwanted pregnancies and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases( STDs)

Many times than not, the families of victims are too scared to seek recourse for cultural and religious reasons. Worse still, more are ignorant of the various laws put in place by the Judiciary to govern and check the actions of predators. They are left to go unpunished and to continue with their acts of violence. Such action have therefore persisted in spite efforts made over two decades by both local and international NGOS as well as other international bodies, violence against women and girls in the country has continued to escalate to pandemic proportions as a result of the existing culture of silence and stigma. Lack of awareness of the human rights has reduced the insights and urgency needed to combating the persuasive nature of Gender based violence and to achieve the desirable change.

Aside the lack of awareness, most victims of domestic abuse still shy away from reporting cases of domestic violence in Nigeria either due to cultural reasons or fear of stigmatization. The major reason why most SGBV go unreported is the fear of stigmatization as it exacerbates its physical and mental health impacts as well as the chances of experiencing additional violence.

This makes interventions difficult as policies targeted at mitigating the menace are not being utilized. It also explains why the enactment of VAPP law in President Jonathan's administration 2015 was not able to reduce the prevalence of the incidences which has assumed the status of impunity. This paper therefor investigates those strategies adopted by the President Buhari's administration to tackles the menace. Will they be better than those tried before?

### **Objectives of the chapter**

The main goal of the study is to unravel the unique strategies adopted by the Buhari administration particularly the combination of law and the increased sensitization on mainstreaming gender sensitivity and equality in ministries and other government agencies The objective include:

1. To show new areas adopted by the Buhari's administration in the Enactment and Implementation of the Violence against Persons Prohibition [VAPP] Act.
2. To show that policies adopted by the administration are in line with some positive issue HIV/AIDs policies, which seek to increase information about sexual and Gender based violence and greater advocacy in the support of legal reforms to discourage GBV.
3. To show that plans to increased sensitization on mainstreaming gender sensitivity and equality in ministries and other government agencies as well as inter-ministerial Presidential Task Force on Sexual and Gender Based Violence is prioritize by this administration
- 4 to examine if Inclusion of gender responsive budgeting in appropriation laws and Establishment and funding of Sexual Assault Referral Centres across the Federation is put in place

## **Research Questions**

1. Does the strategies adopted by the Buhai administration includes new issues in the Enactment and Implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition [VAPP] Act.
2. What are those policies adopted by the administration that sought to increase in information about sexual and Gender based violence and greater advocacy in the support of legal reforms to discourage GBV.
3. What are the plans to increased sensitization on mainstreaming gender sensitivity and equality in ministries and other government agencies inter-ministerial Presidential Task Force on Sexual and Gender Based Violence is prioritize by this administration
- 4 Are there plans for the Inclusion of gender responsive budgeting in appropriation laws and Establishment and funding of Sexual Assault Referral Centers across the Federation

## **Theoretical Framework**

Feminist theory on gender-based violence sees power inequality in opposite-sex relationships as a result of Patriarchy to be at the root of the challenge. Kate Millett in her book, *Sexual Politics* noted that gender inequality is the paradigm of all forms of all inegalitarianism and the resultant violence in society; as men are usually given the birth right priority to rule women.

According to Millett(1970), “Sex is deep at the heart of our troubles ....” “and unless we eliminate the most pernicious of our systems of oppression, unless we go down to the very center of sexual politics and its sick delirium of power and violence, all our efforts at liberation will only land us again in the same primordial stews”

This suggest that a theory on violence which is gender blind and without a feminist lens inevitably results in the presentation of the dominant patriarchal perspective which view women as unequal to men and assigns power and dominance to the male gender while women are given subordinate positions.

A feminist perspective on the other hand advances our understanding of violence by analyzing how it is connected to, and embedded in, patriarchal structures of power. This theory explores and exposes how societal messages that sanction a male’s use of violence and aggression throughout life, and the proscribed gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave in their intimate partner and other relationships (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Feminist theory thus help us to understand why for instance many men in Nigeria still beat their wives whenever an argument ensued, instead of setting their intellectual capabilities in motion, they use physical force to quell the argument because of their masculine orientation. It argues that such actions takes place because Nigeria is a patriarchal state where dominant social norms values and believes supports male dominance and condoles SGBV and impunity.

Women in the country on the other hand are basically socialized to be submissive and to occupy subordinate positions in marital relationships while men assume the dominant positions. Such orientation may therefore explain why unfortunately, women themselves believe that wife-beating is justified. One of the excuses given by wife beaters is women’s propensity to go out of control if their behavior is not checked. This is a sad tale of women in Nigeria. When someone said women are sometimes the problem of women, he’s not far from the truth.

When men prone to violence against women see that they have a modicum of support in the women’s circle, they are encouraged to continue to display their masculine behavior even in the society as a whole. With the above, the feminist theorist is justified to state that violence is inherently linked to power and there is arguably no act of violence that does not intersect with gender.

But feminist theories while examining gender specific violence unfortunately, tend to focus more on male female relationships, while neglecting or giving little room for other forms of violence (Heyes, 2013). This brings into question the possibility of feminist lens to offer a more complete understanding of violence on the international point of view. However, proponents of feminist theory acknowledge that women can also

be violent in their relationships with men; but they simply do not see the issue of women abusing men as a serious social problem, and therefore, does not deserve the same amount of attention or support as violence against women (Kurz, 1997). This is partly true because men in most cultures are socialized to be aggressive and reports internationally lend credence to the feminist stand on this **matter** as men are more likely to be involved in violence than women

Consequently, as Millet rightly stated, “Unless we eliminate the most pernicious of our systems of oppression ....” and unless those patriarchal ideologies of domination, control and subordination of women and girls, are eliminated, SGBV will continue in our societies. This translates to mean that SGBV prevention from a feminist perspective requires community-wide interventions, bringing into play myriad social and cultural factors. Sustained reduction in violence against women and girls in Nigeria will only occur through processes of significant change in attitude of both men and women.

### **Contextualizing Gender Based Violence within Patriarchy in Nigeria**

The World Health Organization (WHO)’s report in 2013, showed that 35% of women in the world have experienced either sexual intimate partner violence, or non-partner sexual violence and or physical violence. While Gender Based Violence affects women of all socio-political economic backgrounds as well as educational levels, women are more likely than others to experience violence.

In most instances, the social-economic categories of women experiencing GBV include; minority groups, refugee women, women migrants, women migrant workers. Poor women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women, displaced women and repatriated females also belongs to that group (Mshelia, 2021)

Violence against women is entrenched in the strong patriarchal ideologies of domination, control and subordination of women and girls. In these societies, it is men that rule over the affairs of women and children, they are the decision makers both at the family level and the public sphere. Societies particularly in third world countries give men enormous control over women that many times the latter is seen as a mere property to be acquired by the former. It is that feeling of control that men believe they have over women which actually fuel some of their acts of violence.

The literature is rife with how men in Nigeria resolve to violence when dealing with their wives and children because patriarchy tolerates domination and control. For instance in their paper title ‘Patriarchy, Cultural Prejudices and Spousal Violence in the Ancient City of Benin of Southern Nigeria’, Osezua, &Agholor, (2019) notes that the persistence of patriarchy and traditional cultural practices do have adverse effects on women’s rights, their health as well as the growing incidence of spousal violence in Benin City.

In Nigeria generally, Gender-Based Violence is deeply rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality and can be in the form of rape, physical assault, female genital mutilation, emotional assault, etc. There’s always an eerie silence surrounding gender-based violence. This silence is because In Nigeria, there’s an eerie silence surrounding gender-based violence. This silence is basically because, cultures, customs, and religions encourage the normalization of gender-based violence and subjugation of women in the society.

Related to the culture of silence, is the contribution that women make towards entrenching patriarchy. Just as Nigerian men collectively protect the patriarchal institution and the privileges they enjoy, Uchendu,(2022) found in his research that Nigerian women also contribute either knowingly or not, to reinforcing the institutions that oppress them and undermine gender equality. Nigerian women, like men, perpetuate patriarchy in various ways in several ways. One is by consenting to institutionalized patriarchy by philosophically reasoning: “it has always been so ... why should we raise any objections?”.Uchendu,( 2022) This timid acceptance of male domination pervades the minds of many Nigerian women and determines how they see their world and their experiences. Thus being socialized and conditioned with such mind set, it becomes difficult for most them to fight patriarchal bondage or to assert themselves. Uchendu,( 2022)

The institution of marriage in Nigeria on the other hand, has helped ‘normalize’ Gender-based violence; we see situations where a woman gets physically assaulted by her husband and is being told by the police to solve it within her family, as it is a private matter. She goes to the church for help and they offer ‘thoughts and prayers’ and send her back to her abuser, believing that her abuser is going to change. Even existing laws in some part of the country justifies wife battering for instance, Section 55(1) of the Penal Code

(applicable in Northern Nigeria) under which the beating of a wife for the purpose of correction is deemed legal.

Her family members and in-laws see it as a corrective measure, they believe that since her husband paid her bride price, he has the right to beat her and as such, they will send her back to her abuser either for religious or cultural reasons. Others yet encourage her to stay and take care of her child in spite of the fact that her life may be in danger. (<https://dahveedah.medium.com/the-nigerian-woman-and-gender-based-violence-eda3e70f4845>) accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023

In cases of rape, we see the victims while seeking help from the police being asked demeaning questions like “what were you doing there?” “What did you wear?” “Why did you wear it?” and hearing statements like “she probably asked for it”, shows once again how the Nigerian justice system has failed survivors of Gender-Based Violence. In the case of marital rape, it is overlooked because the Nigerian criminal justice system believes that a woman after getting married has given consent to all future sexual activities with her husband, so in a situation where a woman goes to report a case such as marital rape, there is literally no case. Nigerian cultures and traditions back this up by stating that if a husband pays his wife’s bride price, he has every right over your body and can have sex with her whenever he pleases. The financial dependence of wives on their husbands poses a challenge for women for who may want to escape life-threatening conjugal relationships for fear of the withdrawal of such support. Men take advantage of such dependency to provoke situations of threatened divorce or abandonment of their spouses to command loyalty and faithfulness. Poverty of women in Nigeria is also connected to high illiteracy rates which is also a manifestation of the low status of women and girls.. **Aina, (1998)**

### **Prevention mechanism and some achievements in mitigating SGBV under the Buhari Administration**

The hallmarks of President Buhari’s legacy in combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria lies in the multi-dimensional and multi-sectorial approaches adapted to mitigating the menace in its entire ramification. This approach that is comparable only to the holistic effort to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, was aimed at addressing the root cause of the menace such as the perverse social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence to thrive. The approach harmonizes the efforts of both national and international non-governmental organizations to provide treatment and counselling for victims.

In his Democracy Day speech on June 12, 2020, President Muhammadu Buhari, highlighted the government’s determination to fight SGBV using the law and awareness creation. He noted that it was important to go beyond just legislation in fixing the problem of SGBV, but rather, interrogate the deeply entrenched cultural and systemic flaws in institutions, and the perverse social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence. <https://humanglemedia.com/nigeria-struggling-to-combat-gender-based-violence-despite-laws-govt-promises/> Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023

By November 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year, President Buhari listed what his administration had done to address the menace of SGBV in the country. He stated that his government has set up the National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management among other things to checkmate its spread in the country. This holistic strategy is a great departure from the legalistic approach in the past that was largely ineffective because the issue of gender was not incorporated in the plans. Such efforts by the present administration are found at both government levels at Federal and State levels.

Although the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) was initiated under President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, but it was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari in May 2015. Premium Times (2020) The VAPP Act is the single law in place that transcends the criminal and penal code in ensuring justice and protecting the rights and properties of victims of sexual and gender-based violence across the country.

The Act was necessitated as a result of agitations by activist and NGOs alike, for protection of persons against different forms of violence which had been a recurring challenge in Nigeria. Daily killing or the maiming of spouse as well as someone being forcefully taken away from their family and loved ones was rampant. It was the need to protect Nigerians from violence such that had become a menace that led to the enactment of the VAPP Act in 2015.

The Act is meant to strengthen advocacy partner battery, against rape, female Genital Mutilation, stalking as well as the shameful widowhood practice. The Act furthermore is to prohibit all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, domestic, harmful traditional practices; discrimination against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders. <https://www.evanigeria.org/violence-against-persons-prohibition-act-vapp/> Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2023

Signing of the (VAPP) Act, raised the hope that gender-based violence in Nigeria would finally be addressed structurally within the country's legal system. Unfortunately, this hope was dashed away as states were reluctant to domesticate the act, the major step that is required to make the law operative in the different parts in the country.

However as at 2022 there has been some progress, speaking at She said, "The journey towards equality and the empowerment of women remains a significant one. Nigeria has already made great strides – most notably in the passage of legislation such as the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act which has now been domesticated in 34 states.

As of November, of this year, 34 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have domesticated the (VAPP) Act and 32 states have domesticated the Child Rights Act. Leadership 25<sup>th</sup> November(2022)

However, in spite of the Act and the increasing advocacy and protection of human rights in the country, SGBV, is one phenomenon that has refused to go away in Nigeria. Women are yet to be seen as having the same dignity as men in Nigeria because of patriarchal ideology, but the 2018 Demography and Health Survey found that there has been a miniscule of improvement in how women are now treated in Nigeria.

Several factors must have been responsible for the improvement in how women are now treated in Nigeria. The 2018 factsheet of president Buhari three years in office showed that, the administration had set up Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response Teams. The Presidency had provided technical support to the following States for the establishment of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response Team (SGBVRT): FCT: SGBVRT launched February 2017 Kano and Anambra States; February 2018 Delta State; March 2018. Channels, (2018)

Other scholars attribute this improvement in how women are now treated in Nigeria to their economic and political advancements. As far back as 2009, research had indicated that there are some slow but steady changes with regards to socio-cultural constraint to women political participation. Ibeanu (2009) identify four socio-economic and cultural changes with potentials to transform women political participation (cited in Orji et al., 2018).

The first change that is taking place and still is the growing voices and raising profile of women in the economic sector, community development and public engagement. Secondly, the consistent withering of cultural restrictions on the perception of women in politics as more female roles are emerging as political actors, this changes public view of women as professionals who are capable of performing any task assigned to them.

Thirdly, there is a lot of activism in support of women political participation in the country. Both local and international NGOs are training women on the political processes and even lobbying for females to be mainstreamed into politics. Finally, women started taking up economic roles in the family which was previously reserved for men

Also one can take into account other development which may have contributed as well. For instance, in 2018 up to eleven states including the FCT had domesticated the VAPP Act, coupled with economic empowerment programs by the Buhari government, impacted positively on women. These suggest that there is an improvement in how women are now treated.

To further buttress the achievements of this administration has done to combat SGBV, there is the need to throw more light on what the president listed as the things of his administration had done to address the menace in the country. In his speech to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the United Nations "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence" that his

government has set up the National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management among other things to checkmate its spread in the country and to address these developments; governments at Federal and State levels have made the following responses:

#### 1. The Establishment of a National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management

The president noted that the Ministry of Women Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Development Program (UNDP) under the Joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative and other stakeholders developed the National Tool for Gender-based Violence Data Management in the country. The tool is expected to serve as a uniform database to record and assess the occurrence of SGBV during the COVID-19 period and beyond. It is also to record all forms of violence against women in Nigeria using a single, harmonized data collection tool.

An evaluation of activities since its implementation in 2019 shows that the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative has exerted enormous effort with positive outcomes. In spite of obstacles like COVID-19, which made worse an already bad situation, still a noteworthy success has been the establishment of a National Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Data Situation Room and dashboard for prevention and response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria. <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/news/harnessing-power-data-gender-based-violence-prevention-and-response-nigeria> Accessed 7th January, 2023

#### 2. Committee on eradication of sexual, gender-based violence

On 23 July 2020, an inter-ministerial committee was inaugurated by the Buhari administration to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence in response to worsening cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the country. Such increase was as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures that were imposed to curb the spread of the virus. As part of its mandate, the Committee is expected to conduct a review of all the existing laws and policy instruments touching on offences of rape, child defilement and gender-based violence and develop for adoption, national prevention of sexual abuse/violence strategy for the period of 2021- 2025, “that identifies and encapsulates measures to enhance response to rape and gender-based violence, set new targets for prevention, intervention and treatment.”

#### 3. Development of Gender-Based Policy Guidelines in Emergency Response

The president stated that clear indications were made of an absence of gender-focused responses during emergencies such as the COVID-19. This gap has been addressed through the development of Policy Guidelines for Emergency Response, facilitated under the Joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative by the UN Women and Implementing Partners in the Spotlight States particularly the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Sokoto and Ebonyi States. These policies when implemented will ensure that vulnerable persons, particularly women and children are not left behind in emergencies such as COVID-19.

It is imperative to state that in addition to the president's statement, as far back as 2013, Sexual Assault Referral Centers were established to address some of the gaps in preventing SGBV, by providing confidential, free of charge and client-focused services across a variety of areas, including: immediate emergency medical treatment; forensic medical examination services by specially trained doctors and nurses; immediate and on-going counseling support from specialized experts; support in contacting the LEAs, social welfare department or CSOs where appropriate; and advice and on-going support throughout any investigation and prosecution.

Under the Buhari administration, there are now 30 centers which provide support across 17 states. Between July 2013 and September 2020, the SARCs assisted over 19,000 victims of sexual assault, over 70% of whom are under the age of 18 years old. This aspect of prevention is crucial as it helps to reduce the issue of stigma which poses a major challenge to the mitigation of SGBV. <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/events/sgbv-challenge-nigeria-in> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022

#### 4. Improving the economic status of women

On the fourth item listed in his speech, President Buhari noted that in order to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, the government has prioritized vulnerable groups, including women, in the provision of medical and social assistance. Our administration remains committed to eradicating poverty and enhancing growth and development for women and girls.

He noted that, over one million Nigerians have been enrolled into the National Social Register of poor and vulnerable households to enable them to access needed social assistance. Under the National Social



Investment Programme, we have commenced cash transfers and distribution of food items to individuals and families across all States in Nigeria as palliatives to cushion the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic.

That his administration remains committed to eradicating poverty and enhancing growth and development for women and girls and in order to address gender-based poverty, they have initiated programmes such as: Tradermoni, Marketmoni and Farmersmoni under the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme. "We have developed additional strategies to improve the quality of life for women and girls, redoubling our efforts to improve access to productive resources for women and girls as well as continue to ensure the protection of fundamental rights". Premium Times (24 November 2020 )

#### 5. Fundamental Human Rights and Freedom

President Buhari stated that his administration believes that the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms are critical to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. It is for this reason that he urge the international community to support the Human Rights Council in its quest to strengthen institutions in relation to gender equality and empowerment, as well as the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. He noted that his administration have developed additional strategies to improve the quality of life for women and girls, redoubling their efforts to improve access to productive resources for women and girls as well as continue to ensure the protection of fundamental rights. We are very mindful of the necessity to empower women and girls for the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the African Union Agenda 2063; as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

Like the multi-dimensional and multi- sectorial approaches adopted during the HIV/AIDs pandemic effort to combat the SGBV is not just limited at the federal level. The wife of the President Aisha Buhari and Governors Join Forces Against Gender-Based Violence

Similarly, The Nigerian Government is putting machinery in motion to combat the growing rate of , SGBV in the country as the Ministries of Justice and education are working together to develop standard operating procedures to create a legal pathway for the prosecution of school-related Gender-based violence. At a three-day Capacity Building Workshop for Investigators and Prosecutors on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Abuja, Attorney General and Minister of Justice Abubakar Malami informed development partners that, President Mohammed Buhari's administration has provided all enabling support structures, legal, and the financial requirement to eliminate the social ill of sexual violence against women.

One of such laudable efforts under the Buhari Administration is the establishment and institutionalization of more sexual assault referral centers and SDVRT Response Teams across the country including the FCT SDVRT response Team which brings together a team of agencies and civil society organizations that are in the forefront of providing holistic support to survivors of SGBV in the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja. This training therefore is apt and coming at an auspicious time to build capacities to address and respond better to incidences of SGBV. <https://cleen.org/2018/05/24/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-the-imperative-of-an-effective-and-coordinated-response-mechanism-in-nigeria/>

#### **Conclusion**

President Buhari's has set the pace to combat Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria. His point of departure lies in the multi-dimensional and multi-sectorial approaches adapted to mitigating the menace in its entire ramification. This approach takes a leave from previous attempts but focuses on eradicating the root cause of SGBV in its entirety. Such efforts can only be compared to the holistic strategies used to combat the HIV/AIDs. Referral centers will not only reduce the issue of stigma and perverse social norms which enable sexual and gender-based violence to thrive but will promote the persecution of culprits. The approach harmonizes the efforts of both national and international none governmental organizations to provide treatment and cancelling for victims.

## Recommendation

The paper recommends that other administrations should continue with this initiatives. Since such holistic approach was able to drastically reduce the spread of AIDs, the same result can be obtained.

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