The Nigerian Feminist Forum’s Response to the Impact of COVID19 Pandemic on VAWG in Nigeria

BACKGROUND

The last few days has seen an increase in numbers of the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria and a global health pandemic which has infected hundreds of thousands of people across the world, and created a range of primary and secondary effects on different individuals and communities. While the pandemic poses threats to people in Nigeria, there is a risk of the rapid erosion of human rights, including those of women and girls in the name of curtailting the virus as the epidemics affects able-bodied, girls, women, boys and men differently. In this immensely difficult time for all persons living in Nigeria, it is imperative that we ensure that gender-sensitive responses are implemented, so that the cumulative effect of the current crises are not paid by women, girls and, the most marginalized in IDP camps, rural and urban shanty towns, disabled, etc.

JUSTIFICATION

As Feminists, we understand that women and girls will bear the burden of this situation, and need to ensure that there is immediate recognition for this throughout the Nigerian government and donor intervention responses which must not leave any girl or woman, man or boy behind.

We recognize that the UN-EU SPOTLIGHT initiative, is available, but the current crises needs to be addressed now, and in addressing this, women’s rights NGOs need additional support in ensuring that the application and resourcing of special measures are targeted at women and girls who are exposed to heightened situations of vulnerability in this current pandemic; such as communities and families that may be isolated having limited access to delivery of essential services due to the current pandemic, which will have many women and girls exposed to male violence. Victims of intimate partner violence will be confined at home with their abusers, with less possibilities of seeking help without further putting their lives at risk, school closure will likely have a differential impact on women who we know take principal responsibility for children, even health resources normally dedicated to reproductive health will go towards emergency response, which would likely lead to higher maternal mortality rate.

The Nigerian Centre for Diseases Control have started recording an increase in COVID19 cases in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Government have acted on firmer controls however, the aim remains to ensure women and girl’s safety at the time of this pandemic, as they are the most vulnerable.

- Women who continue to care and provide for their own families;
• Women who are the sole caretakers of their households and those of others in situations of isolation and economic insecurity;
• Women who are at risk or currently experiencing poverty, social exclusion or homelessness;
• Women who are at risk of male violence at home, or are victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking;
• Women with disabilities and older women who have limited or no access to ongoing and quality service;
• Women with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

INTERVENTIONS

As we prepare to reach the peak of the pandemic in Nigeria, we are demanding from the international donor community working with partners in Nigeria, the following:

• That now is the time for resources and support for ongoing efforts by providing immediate and flexible funding to ensure that existing development and humanitarian work particularly for frontline healthcare workers, Civil Society and community-based organizations working with women and girls on GBV, Maternal and Child health, SRHR, Nutrition and Peace and Security are not sidelined.

• That efforts are made to ensure disaggregated data (by sex, age, disability and other relevant vulnerable factors) is collected from their partners to better understand the gendered impact of COVID19 in Nigeria;

• Provide support with regards to technical resources that highlight the gender implications on COVID19 in local languages (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Pidgin) to be shared online and offline as well as using technology to effect change;

• That efforts are made to strengthen the leadership skills for women and girls to take part in a meaningful way in all decision-making processes in relation to the COVID19 outbreak;

• Strongly advocate and support the Federal and State governments to handle COVID19 epidemic from with a feminist lens.

• That critical efforts are made to understand which women are at heightened risk of different forms of VAWG and understand how these may vary across settings. For example, urban/ rural /IDP.

Who we are:

The Nigerian Feminist Forum, (NFF) is a public policy forum that brings together self-identified feminists, who ultimately focus on creating and addressing the politics of naming, of ending violence against women and girls through feminist principles, by challenging the system of power, promoting the learning and teaching of feminist principles and universality of women’s rights. The Nigerian Feminist Forum is in a unique position and at the cutting edge of a movement that demands courage, commitment, strength
and analytical skills in order to make the needed critical analysis that will become a key element in a new politics for Nigeria. Members sign on to the African Charter of Feminist Principles.

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