Alliances for Africa’s (AfA) submission: COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women

1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.

Yes; since the inception of the Lockdown measures in a bid to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 spread, Violence against women and girls has increased and is currently escalated. However reporting has been very low due to the dominating culture of silence associated with the South Eastern Nigeria. Regardless, AfA has documented over 30 cases in Imo State Nigeria, 90% of which are sexual and domestic violence, and all victims recorded are women and girls majority being minors.

1. Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, there are helplines run by the Government through her ministries and Civil Society Organizations and calls have and are increasing on a daily basis. AfA also runs a referral helpline to ensure that survivors access the responsive agencies who are addressing these issues.

1. Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence?

No, women victims of domestic violence are not exempted from restrictive measures; they are stuck with their abusers at home as there are no shelters or safe homes in the state. However AfA has been advocating for the domestication of Laws that provide for the structures needed by survivors including medical, legal and psychosocial support for reintegration into the society.

1. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

No, shelters are unavailable and there are no alternative facilities for survivors.

1. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Protection orders are accessible however the process is slow because courts are not fully open and most aides and officials are at home.

1. What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

Women’s access to justice is currently limited as courts are not fully open and investigations linger because law enforcements agencies are deployed to enforce the stringent Lockdown measures therefore, very minimal attention is paid to Women’s issues. However cases are reported on a daily basis and therefore are not litigated.

1. What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.

The Lockdown has greatly impacted women’s access to healthcare; the already limited reproductive healthcare facilities became even more inadequate and unsustainable. Most private service providers are closed down, those open could not sufficiently provide for the rising demand. Supplies were delayed due to restriction and products are not efficiently circulated across geopolitical zones. Thus, women cannot access family planning service and other reproductive care services.

1. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The obstacles include;

* + The culture of silence which subjects women to the acceptance of violence as a norm.
  + The issue of dependency as a result of disenfranchisements which put women at a position of vulnerability.
  + The absence of Laws and policies that specifically addresses women’s issues against the resistance of harmful traditional practices.
  + The absence of a safe home where survivors can be kept temporarily away from their abusers reach.
  + The slow response of law enforcement agencies to investigating and apprehending perpetrators amongst others.

1. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments.

Bearing in mind the upscale of violence as a result of the Lockdown, the following are our recommendations;

* + Violence is fueled by poverty, patriarchy and harmful traditional practices; the government should provide palliatives and virtual jobs to empower families who have been disenfranchised as a result of the pandemic. Also there’s need to domesticate laws such as the Violence against Person’s Prohibition Law which protects persons against all forms of violence.
  + Whilst enforcing measures to curb the spread of the virus, there’s need for the Government (both state and federal) to enforce the protection of women through the provision of a safe home (shelter), the creation of an active agency charged with the mandate of prosecuting perpetrators of violence as well as provision of sexual assault referral centers.
  + Women should be included in decision making processes to better communicate issues as it regard to their welfare.

1. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies.

NGOs and NHRIs should increase sensitization of the public on their rights and the need to report and seek justice. They should also continually make demands on the government as it regards the protection of the fundamental human rights through increased reports and publications of documented offences against persons. In addition, the technical support needed by survivors should be provided to ensure that they get justice. NGOs should implement projects focused on empowering women in various spheres.

1. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.