



# NIGERIA

A Pathfinding Country



A Road Map for Ending  
Violence Against Children

The findings cited in this document are drawn from “National Population Commission of Nigeria, UNICEF Nigeria, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey: Findings from a National Survey, 2014. Abuja, Nigeria: UNICEF, 2016”

The findings and conclusions of this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Any policy recommendations contained within this document with regard to budget allocations or statutory changes are the recommendations of the Government of Nigeria and do not reflect an endorsement of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the U.S. Government.

Cover photo: UNICEF/Abraham T. Achirga/2015

Abuja, October 2016



US Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention



# Foreword

The Federal Government of Nigeria is committed to ending violence against children in all settings. The National Priority Agenda (NPA) for Vulnerable Children 2013-2020 sets as one of its six priorities that all children are safe from abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect.

As a demonstration of this commitment, His Excellency, President Buhari launched the Year of Action to End Violence Against Children on 15th September 2015, calling on all Ministries, Agencies, States, NGOs, religious and community leaders and the media, as well as every Nigerian to take action to ensure that no child has to suffer violence.

The Year of Action was launched in response to the shocking findings of the Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) in 2014 – a nationally representative survey, conducted by the National Population Commission, that covered every State in Nigeria, researching the prevalence, types, locations, perpetrators and impact of violence against children. The survey was supported technically and financially by UNICEF Nigeria, technically by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and financially by the US President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), with additional financial support from the European Union.

The Survey revealed a high prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional violence in Nigeria. It highlighted that most children do not tell anyone what happened to them and few children access the help that they need to recover. Violence has a negative impact on mental and physical health in both childhood and adulthood and perpetuates the cycle of violence, with victims more likely to become perpetrators themselves.

At the launch of the Year of Action, Priority Actions for Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children were also launched. This multi-sectoral plan, developed by the inter-agency Technical Working Group (TWG) on Violence against Children, convened and chaired by the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, highlighted that ending violence against children is not just an issue for the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. The Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) was clear that this is an issue that cuts across all sectors at Federal, State and Local Government level. It is also clear that the government cannot effectively tackle violence against children on its own. Therefore, civil society organisations, faith based organisations, religious and traditional leaders and media, included their own Priority Actions for ending violence against children.

Over the past year, significant steps have been made by key Ministries, Departments and Agencies - Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Health, Federal Ministry of Justice, Federal Ministry of Information, National Agency for the Control of Aids, National Human Rights Commission, National Orientation Agency, Nigeria Prisons Service, Nigeria Police Force, Attorney General of the Federation, Judiciary - State Ministries, as well as non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations. Their unwavering commitment, energy and enthusiasm for protecting children in Nigeria from violence is impressive. I would also like to recognize and warmly congratulate Lagos (February 2016), Cross River (June 2016), Benue (August 2016) and Plateau (September 2016) for heeding the President's call for States to launch their own campaigns and priority actions.

I would like to also thank UNICEF and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through USAID, for their ongoing support for the Year of Action, as well as for the launch of the End Violence Against Children by 2030 Campaign, and to UNICEF, with funding from USAID<sup>1</sup> and the EU<sup>2</sup>, for supporting the

---

<sup>1</sup>Support for the end violence against children campaign and the development of the model child protection system are supported under the USAID funded programme - From paper to practice – strengthening the child protection system in Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Under two EU funded programmes: Women, Peace and Security implemented by UN Women in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and UNICEF; and Support to Justice Sector Reform in Nigeria implemented by UNODC in partnership with UNICEF.

implementation of Priority Actions at National and State level. In particular, I would like to commend the ground breaking eight-State initiative by Benue, Cross River, Edo, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, Plateau, with FCT, who, under the auspices of my Federal Ministry, is developing and implementing a model for child protection system in order to translate the Child's Rights Act and Law into practice, to enhance protection of children from all forms of abuse and violence.

As was clearly stated at the beginning of the campaign, one year of action is not enough to tackle violence against children. The purpose of the campaign was to place violence against children centrally on the political agenda, to create commitment and momentum for action and create mass awareness on the silent suffering of millions of children in Nigeria. The Presidential Year of Action was just the start to end violence against children and there is much more that needs to be done. I am proud that the success of the Year of Action has led to the launch the Presidential End Violence Against Children by 2030 campaign in Nigeria launched on 25th October 2016, linked with the global Sustainable Development Goal of ending violence against children. I am also proud that Nigeria is to become a Pathfinding Country under the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

This document sets out the pathway that Nigeria will take over to achieve the goal of ending violence against children.

As the leading Ministry in Nigeria to coordinate the end violence against children campaign, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development renews its commitment to take action to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children.

I take this opportunity to call on all sectors at Federal, State and Local Government level, as well as civil society, faith based organisations and the media to maintain the momentum created by the Year of Action, to renew their commitment to the goal of ending violence against children by 2030, and urgently invest the resources required to ensure that Nigerian children grow up free from all forms of violence.

**It's time to take action**  
**Together, let's end violence against children by 2030**



Senator Aisha Jummai Alhassan  
Honourable Minister  
Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

# Violence Against Children in Nigeria - An Overview

Led by the National Population Commission (NPoPC) of the Federal Government of Nigeria, Nigeria is the first country in West Africa to undertake a national survey on violence against children. The Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) continues the successful partnership between United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEFPAR), as well as members of the Together for Girls Initiative to assist countries worldwide in conducting national surveys on violence against children. The Nigeria 2014 VACS follows and builds on the methodology of the surveys completed in Swaziland, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malawi.

NPoPC authored the Nigeria VACS report. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF provided technical support to NPoPC throughout the development and implementation of the survey.

The Nigeria VACS was commissioned between May and July 2014. The survey consisted of a cross-sectional household survey of females and males aged 13 to 24, designed to produce national-level estimates of experiences of violence.

## What is Violence against Children?

*For the purpose of the Nigeria 2014 VACS:*

**Emotional violence** was defined as being ridiculed or put down by a parent, adult caregiver, or adult relative, being told by them they were unloved or did not deserve to be loved, or that they wished they were dead or had never been born.

**Physical violence** was defined as physical acts of violence such as punching (hitting with a fist), kicking, whipping, beating with an object, choking, smothering, trying to drown, burning intentionally, or using or threatening to use a gun, knife or other weapon, regardless of whether or not it resulted in obvious physical or mental injury. It is not focused on acts of discipline, although many of those perpetrating the violence may be doing so in the name of 'discipline'.

**Sexual violence** was used to describe all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. This encompasses a range of acts, including unwanted completed sex acts (i.e., rape), attempted non-consensual sex acts, abusive sexual contact (i.e., unwanted touching), and pressured sex (such as through threats or tricks), by any person regardless of their relationship to the child experiencing the violence, in any setting, while some of the analyses focused on acts that may be narrowly defined as 'sexual abuse', the Summary Report of the VACS used the broad term 'sexual violence' throughout.

## There is a high prevalence of violence against children in Nigeria

Before the age of 18 years:

- Approximately 6 out of every 10 children experienced some form of violence
- Half of all children experienced physical violence
- One in four girls and one in ten boys experienced sexual violence
- One in six girls and one in five boys experienced emotional violence by a parent, caregiver, or adult relative

## **Violence is rarely an isolated incident**

- The majority of children who experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in childhood reported multiple incidents
- Girls were significantly more likely to experience both sexual violence and physical violence than other combinations of violence. Boys were significantly more likely to experience both physical and emotional violence, than other combinations of violence

## **Violence starts at a young age**

- Over half of children first experienced physical violence between the ages of 6 and 11. Approximately 1 in 10 children's first experience is under the age of 5
- A third of girls and nearly 1 in 6 boys experienced their first incident of sexual violence between 14 and 15, while almost a third of boys and approximately 1 in 5 girls experience their first incident of sexual violence at 13 years and younger
- Approximately half of children first experienced emotional violence before the age of 12

## **Perpetrators are overwhelmingly people whom children know**

- A parent or adult relative was the most common perpetrator of physical violence in childhood
- Amongst adults in the neighborhood who perpetrate physical violence, male teachers were the most frequent perpetrators of the first incident of physical violence
- Girls' first experience of sexual violence was most commonly by a romantic partner, followed by a friend, neighbor, classmate and stranger. Boys' first experience of sexual violence was most commonly by a classmate or a neighbor
- Children were most likely to experience sexual violence in the perpetrator's home, followed by their own home, at school, at someone else's home and on a road
- Amongst adult caregiver or relative perpetrators of emotional violence, parents/step parents, followed by uncles/aunts, were the most common perpetrators of first incident of emotional violence

## **Children are not speaking out, seeking or receiving services**

- Less than half of all respondents who experienced physical violence told someone about it. Respondents who experienced sexual violence had even lower rates of disclosure
- Children who told someone were much more likely to tell a friend or relative than a service provider or authority figure
- Children had a low awareness of people or services from which they can seek help. Boys have a significantly higher awareness than girls of where to seek help
- Of those who experienced sexual or physical violence, no more than 6% sought help and less than 5% receive help

## **Violence has serious impacts on girls' and boys' lives and future**

Compared to persons who have never experienced childhood violence:

- Physical violence is associated with higher rates of mental distress, thoughts of suicide, and symptoms or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) among females and with mental distress, thoughts of suicide, and substance use among males
- Sexual violence is associated with higher risk for symptoms or diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections, mental distress and thoughts of suicide among females and with mental distress among males. 15% of females reported getting pregnant as a result of unwanted completed sex.
- Emotional violence is associated with higher levels of mental distress and thoughts of suicide amongst females and higher levels of mental distress and drinking amongst males

# Ending Violence Against Children in Nigeria - the journey so far

In response to these findings, the Office of the President launched the Presidential Year of Action to End Violence Against Children on 15th September 2015, elevating ending violence against children to an issue of national importance and demonstrating the commitment of Nigeria. At this event, national Priority Actions were launched that not only set out the actions to be taken by each Ministry and Agency, but also NGOs, religious groups and the media, to more effectively prevent and respond to violence against children, recognising that ending violence against children must be a collective effort of all Nigerians (*Priority Actions: A multi-sectoral response to the 2014 Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey (September 2015)*).

The Priority Actions were developed over the course of one year by the Technical Working Group on Violence Against Children (TWG), with support from UNICEF and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, through CDC and USAID, to respond directly to the findings of the VACS. The TWG was convened and chaired by the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development and included government representatives from key MDAs - Education, Health, National Agency for the Control of AIDS, Social Welfare, Justice, Information, National Orientation Agency, National Human Rights Commission, National Bureau of Statistics, National Population Commission, National Emergency Management Agency, National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, National Prisons Service, Police, Attorney General and Judiciary. The TWG was also comprised of civil society, including legal aid providers, NGOs and religious groups. In addition, consultations were undertaken with Ministries and NGOs from 19 States and religious leaders representing 24 groups in Nigeria.

The TWG recognised significant steps had already been taken by many sectors and in many States in Nigeria to strengthen prevention and response mechanisms, but that those efforts needed to be enhanced and scaled up throughout Nigeria – in every State, Local Government Area, Ward and community.

The Priority Actions comprised comprehensive, holistic, and multi-sectoral steps to be taken by State and non State actors to:

- enhance and scale up efforts to prevent violence through
  - creating a protective environment for children,
  - changing perceptions of violence,
  - empowering children and young people;
- enhance the response to violence through
  - encouraging children to speak out and enhancing access to services,
  - improving quality of services and capacity of professionals working with children,
  - strengthening efforts to hold perpetrators accountable;
- implement laws and policies that prevent and respond to violence;
- increase budgetary allocation to child protection; and
- improve monitoring and evaluation on violence against children.

Specific priority actions were identified for each Ministry/Sector and for civil society and religious groups.

These Priority Actions were also designed to provide a framework for States to develop their own Priority Actions based on their State specific context, taking into consideration the progress that has already been made at State and local levels.

The President called upon all States in Nigeria to launch their own campaigns and their own state specific priority actions.

After one year, the Technical Working Group came together to review the progress made and identify the next steps required on the road to ending violence against children.

During the Year of Action to End Violence Against Children, significant steps were made across sectors and by State and non State actors, as documented in “Ending Violence Against Children in Nigeria - A Year of Action: Progress Report on the Implementation of Priority Actions to End Violence Against Children 2015-2016”. Highlights include:

- To demonstrate the impact of an operational child protection system that translates the Child's Rights Act into action, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has spearheaded a child protection modelling process in eight States - Benue, Cross River, Edo, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos and Plateau – and FCT, in partnership with the State Ministries responsible for child development and social welfare, with support from UNICEF, PEPFAR through USAID and CDC, and the European Union;
- State Governors in Lagos (February 2016), Cross River (June 2016), Benue (August 2016) and Plateau (September 2016) launched their State End VAC Campaigns and State specific Priority Actions;
- Bayelsa became the 23rd State in Nigeria to domesticate the Child's Rights Act in May 2016, enshrining the rights of children at State level and introducing a comprehensive framework for the child protection system to enhance the response and support for children who have experienced violence and abuse. Enugu State took a step closer to becoming the 24th State to domesticate the Act in August 2016 when the State Assembly passed the Child's Rights Law;
- Religious leaders from key Muslim and Christian blocs and Traditional Leaders gathered for a National Consultative Forum on VAC in Lagos in February 2016 to consider the role of religious leaders and groups in preventing and responding to violence against children, resulting in a communique committing the bodies represented to concrete action to end VAC.

In recognition of Nigeria's significant progress to end violence against children, the Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary General on Violence Against Children, Marta Santos Pais, undertook a mission in February 2016, during which she met with key Ministries and Agencies, as well as the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the heads of the Christian blocs under CAN and the Sultan of Sokoto, who renewed their commitments to implement the Priority Actions. She also attended the National Consultative Forum on VAC in Lagos with religious and traditional leaders, as well as the Lagos State Campaign Launch at which the National Population Commission published the full technical report of the Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey.

## Violence Against Children in Nigeria – a pathway for the future

When announcing the launch of the Year of Action, President Buhari emphasized that the campaign was just the beginning of Nigeria's sustained efforts to end violence against children.

Violence against children is not 'just' a child protection or child rights issue and a moral imperative. Failure to invest in tackling violence against children leads to substantial social and economic losses (estimated at 2-8% of Gross Domestic Product). There is also a growing evidence base to demonstrate that preventing violence can promote economic growth.

For the first time, in 2013, the prevention of and effective response to violence against children was linked to the sustainable development of Nigeria as a nation: “All children are safe from abuse, violence, exploitation, and neglect” is one of the six commitments of the National Priority Agenda for Vulnerable Children 2013–2020 (NPA). These six core commitments of Nigeria's government will, if fulfilled, contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives of Nigeria's Vision 20:2020. This elevated the importance of tackling violence against children, recognizing that reducing children's vulnerability to violence, and thereby improving their wellbeing, will positively and directly impact Nigeria's economic and social well-being and development.

The recognition by Nigeria that effectively addressing violence against children would contribute to sustainable development, pre dated the adoption of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in September 2015, which for the first time made this critical linkage at a global level. The Sustainable Development Goals called upon all States around the world to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children (Target 16.2).

President Buhari launched the End Violence Against Children by 2030 Campaign on 25th October 2016, reaffirming Nigeria's commitment to achieve Target 16.2 of the SDGs and revitalising its efforts to tackle violence against children. It was announced that a national plan of action would be developed, translating the Priority Actions into concrete, timebound activities and commitments for all relevant Ministries and Agencies, as well as non governmental bodies, religious and traditional leaders and the media, in order to achieve Target 16.2 by 2030.

## National Plan of Action to End VAC by 2030

It is envisaged that the National Plan of Action to End VAC by 2030 will be developed by the Technical Working Group, under the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in full consultation with key state and non state actors at national and state level, translating the Priority Actions into time bound costed activities.

The National Plan of Action to End VAC by 2030 will:

- Set specific targets for Nigeria for 2030 and key annual milestones;
- Set out the key actions that are required to reach the targets using the framework of the Priority Actions to:
  - enhance and scale up efforts to prevent violence through
    - creating a protective environment for children,
    - changing perceptions of violence,
    - empowering children and young people;
  - enhance the response to violence through
    - encouraging children to speak out and enhancing access to services,
    - improving quality of services and capacity of professionals working with children,
    - strengthening efforts to hold perpetrators accountable;
  - implement laws and policies that prevent and respond to violence;
  - increase budgetary allocation to child protection,
- Set out a timeline for implementation of key actions;
- Articulate the roles and responsibilities of state and non state actors;
- Provide a monitoring and evaluation framework, including means of verification, enabling Nigeria to report on progress towards achieving its National Plan of Action and SDG Target 16.2,

And:

- Be complemented by a National Social Norms Change Strategy that will be developed and implemented in partnership with national faith based organizations, key spiritual and traditional leaders, civil society and the media;

- Be complemented by a Costing of State Preventive and Response Services to address Violence Against Children;
- Be complemented by a study on the Cost of Inaction on VAC

It is envisaged that the National Plan of Action to End VAC by 2030 will be launched in early 2017.

## Modelling the Child Protection System

A core component of the National Plan of Action will be to scale up the model child protection system.

It was recognized that it was critical that the policy and regulatory framework established at Federal level was translated into action at State level. There was no clear vision as to how that could be accomplished at State level. To provide guidance and support to States and to demonstrate the impact of a child protection system which is implementing the components envisaged under the Child's Rights Act (CRA), the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development spearheaded a child protection modelling process in eight States - Benue, Cross River, Edo, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos and Plateau – and FCT, in partnership with the State Ministries responsible for child development and social welfare, with support from UNICEF, PEPFAR through USAID and CDC and the European Union. This process has also involved the education, health, justice and non traditional child protection sectors, as well as civil society, FBOs and the media at State level.

The group of nine States and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which comprise the Child Protection System Learning Group, was inaugurated in June 2015. Since then the group has developed a harmonized vision and model for the child protection system, with agreed essential and desirable components, and a monitoring and evaluation system to be able to track whether components of the system are in place and the effectiveness of these components.

Each State has selected between two and four Local Government Areas (LGA) to ensure implementation of all the essential components of the system and the desirable components that are applicable to their State and LGA context. State, ward and community level child protection mechanisms are being established/strengthened to prevent, identify, refer and respond to child protection concerns. The Child Protection Information Management System is being established to monitor the impact of the child protection model.

The purpose of this groundbreaking initiative is to produce minimum standards for child protection and a standard set of tools and guidance to support the operationalization of the child protection model nationwide (in both States that have and have not domesticated the CRA) based on the experience of implementing the model in a diverse range of states and local contexts. The purpose is not to insist on the same approach being taken in each State, but to have an agreed core child protection system that can be adjusted for the realities of each State and scaled up.

## Coordination

The Technical Working Group on Violence Against Children will continue to be the heart of coordination at national level. The TWG will continue to bring together key state actors - Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Information, National Orientation Agency, National Prisons Service, Nigeria Police Force, Judiciary, National AIDS Control Agency, National Agency for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, National Emergency Management Agency, National Population Commission, National Bureau of Statistics, and National Human Rights Commission – and non state actors including international and national NGOs, UN Agencies, development partners, religious and traditional leaders, FBOs, the media and other interested parties.

The TWG will continue to be chaired by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.

The TWG will convene every year to review progress on implementing the National Plan of Action, ensuring that the momentum for achieving Target 16.2 by 2030 is maintained.

At State level, coordination will either be through State Technical Working Groups on VAC or through the State Child Rights Implementation Committees (the structure envisaged under the Child's Rights Act 2003), as determined by the State. States will be encouraged to develop their own action plans and launch their own campaigns to end VAC by 2030.

## Leadership

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development will coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of the National Plan of Action to End VAC by 2030, in collaboration with the Technical Working Group.

## Nigeria – A Pathfinding Country for Ending VAC

To help contribute to the achievement of the shared goal of children living free from violence and exploitation, a Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was launched on 12th July 2016. This Partnership is supported by governments, civil society, foundations, private sector and UN agencies. It intends to accelerate real action for children in their homes, schools, and communities and strengthen collaboration among relevant actors. A group of countries stepped forward as 'Pathfinding' countries. These are the countries that have shown real commitment to ending violence against children and have made concrete steps to more effectively prevent and respond to violence e.g. through undertaking a national survey, launching a national campaign and launching priority actions. Pathfinding countries adhere to the Partnership principles, being: rights focused, child centred, universal, gender sensitive, inclusive, transparent, evidence-based and results focused. To date Indonesia, Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania have taken decisive action as Pathfinding Countries.

Given its significant progress in tackling violence against children, Nigeria's intention to become a Pathfinding Country was also announced during the launch of the End VAC by 2030 campaign, giving Nigeria global recognition for its progress in ending VAC and identifying Nigeria as a source of learning regionally and further afield.

With this global recognition comes responsibility. Achieving Target 16.2 SDG will only be possible with renewed commitment, momentum and sustained energy from every Government Sector, Ministry and Agency, by NGOs, FBOs, religious and traditional leaders, the media, the private sector and every Nigerian.

**Together, let's end violence against children by 2030.  
It's time to take action.**

#EndVACNgr



 NGEndviolenceagainstchildren

 @end\_VAC