

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE BY THE WOMEN COMMUNITY IN AFRICA (WCA) ON #BREAKTHESILENCE: CURBING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN NIGERIA, WHICH HELD ON 10TH OCTOBER 2018 AT SHARON ULTIMATE HOTEL, AREA 3, GARKI FCT.**

**PREAMBLE**

Sexual Violence against women and children is a pervasive violation of human rights that persists in every country in the world and cuts across all socioeconomic groups and cultures. “Rooted in historically unequal power relations between women and men is gender-based discrimination. Available data reveals that as many as 7 in 10 women in the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, most of them at the hand of intimate partners, or even close family members/relations”. [UN Women]

The psychological and sociological impact of this abuse cannot be over emphasized. Despite ongoing efforts to protect children and women against abuse, there is still much to be done to protect survivors of sexual abuse and to further inform and educate the population about this menace.

To address this problem in Nigeria, The Women Community in Africa (the advocacy arm of **Beyond Mentors Community Care Initiative (BMCCI)**) in collaboration with Search Inwards Magazine Limited, KAS Prints ,Peaches Confectioneries, P31 Consulting and Advocacy Limited, and WE FM organized a conference themed: “*#BreaktheSilence: A Road to Curbing Sexual Violence Against Women and Children in Nigeria*”. The conference held on 10th October 2018 at the Sharon Ultimate Hotels, Area 3, Garki, FCT, and was anchored by Dr. Ezi Beedie, Executive Director, BMCCI. Participants were welcomed by Mr. Kasumu Ademola, the chairman of BMCCI, and Hajiya Khadijah Abdullahi-Iya, an Executive Director at BMCCI chronicled WCA’s journey so far.

Participants included Directors and Representatives from the Gender Department of FCT Education Secretariat, FCT Sexual and Gender Based Violence Response Team (**SGBVRT**), National Emergency Management Agency (**NEMA**), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (**NAPTIP**), member organizations at the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (**CSACEFA**), Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation (**WOTCLEF**), Jose Foundation, Society To Heighten Awareness of Women And Children Abuse (**SOTHAWACA**), FINPACT Development Foundation, Jade Olise Foundation, Media, and other interested individuals and organizations.

The highlight of the conference was that two prominent survivors(a man and a woman) who were not hampered by their experience broke the silence of over 30 years.

There were two main paper presentations on:

1. Categorization of Child Sexual Abuse- Adaora Onyechere, Social Innovation, Policy Development Advocate.
2. Response, Mechanisms and Access- Mrs. Agnes Utah Hart, Director, FCT Gender Department and Coordinator of the FCT SGBVRT.

Following the presentations was a panel discussion on:

1. “*Addressing Innovative Preventions, Interventions and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse*”,
2. “*Lasting Solutions, Sanctions and Prosecuting Offenders of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children*”.

The panel was moderated by Adaora Onyechere and had the following members:

- Mrs. Patricia Odukwu, Acting Director, Counseling and Rehabilitation Dept, NAP TIP.
- Asmau Leo, Head, Gender and Vulnerable Group Care Unit, NEMA.
- Abanka Musa, Focal Person, CSACEFA.
- Adetoun Dally, Executive Director, Children Impact Development Initiative.

Lastly, there was a brainstorming session on strategies for the school campaign/sensitization as the next point of action. The participants were divided into 4 groups and their **recommendations were summarized under four headings:**

**1. Awareness:**

- Develop curriculum for sex education
- Sensitize Parents, Teachers and Students using PTA Meetings, debate sessions etc.
- Recognizing dates/days that resonates with the purpose for instance The Day of the African Child
- Use of questionnaires.
- The use of info graphics.

**2. Club and Societies :**

- Having a head teacher assigned to the club.
- Training the trainers.
- Employing trained Counselors.

**3. Participation by stakeholders**

- Government implementation of relevant policies about gender such as Child Protective Policy.
- Sensitization and advocacy.
- Involving more NGOs.

**4. Social Media in schools:**

- School website and social media sites
- Creating animations and games to push advocacy
- Pictorials and video presentation

At the end of the discussions, participants agreed that sexual violence has moved beyond its conventional categorizations and now includes emotional and customary sexual abuse, and highlighted the following as **factors that hinder survivors of sexual violence from speaking out:**

- Stigma/ stereotype.
- Lack of shelter and welfare for survivors.
- Delayed justice system.
- Fear and empathy.

They recommended the following **solutions:**

**A. Preventive measures:**

1. Create awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence through media and school campaign-advocacy and sensitization.
2. Widen the scope of sensitization to include sexual violence against boys.
3. Take the sensitization to the grassroot and involve traditional leaders.
4. Educate parents on vulnerability and red flag signs of abuse.
5. Teach children to speak out.
6. Educate children on boundaries in physical relations with people, i.e. safe and unsafe touches.
7. Train and retrain the police.

8. Create forensic units in police stations.
9. Media awareness: engage the Ministry of Information and National Orientation Agency.
10. Enact stricter penalties for offenders.

B. Interventions and treatment for victims:

1. Counselling.
2. Building a support system: support from NGOs for more shelter and welfare.
3. Rehabilitation.

C. Interventions for offenders:

1. Counselling.
2. Psychosocial support.

D. Sanctions:

1. Jailing offenders.
2. Publicizing offenders.

**Adopted**

The action plan for:

1. A link where survivors can anonymously #breakthesilence .
2. School campaigns/outreaches.
3. Advocacy for legislations with more stringent penalties for perpetrators.