

Recommendations and Action Points from the Virtual Roundtable on “Making COVID19 Response in Nigeria Gender-Sensitive”

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Nigeria, on 24th April 2020, held a virtual roundtable on **“Making COVID-19 Responses in Nigeria more Gender-sensitive”**. The roundtable was inspired by a policy paper compiled by various Nigerian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and individuals titled *“Integrating Gender into Nigeria’s COVID-19 Response”*. This paper exposes various gender-specific vulnerabilities during this pandemic including restriction of movements. It further proposes a set of gender-sensitive interventions.

The roundtable brought active experts from CSOs, International Organisations/Donors, Academics, Informal sector organisations, the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19, Nigeria Police Force and youth-led organizations together on the subject.

The 90-minute virtual roundtable featured three key speakers and a keynote listener from the PTF. They include:

- **Olabukunola Williams**, Education as Vaccine
- **Abiola Akiyode**, Women Advocacy, Research and Documentation Centre
- **Mr. Frank Mba**, Public Relations Officer, Nigeria Police Force
- Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (Keynote Listener)

As agreed during the roundtable, below are the recommendations that emerged from the discussion. They will be distributed accordingly to target stakeholder groups and/or organisations.

For the Nigeria Police Force (NPF):

1. Develop a code of conduct booklet for officers in the frontline of response as guidelines stating their responsibilities and highlighting expectations and relationships with members of the public. This booklet should be accessible to the public through online and offline channels.
2. Demand the establishment of a three-digit dedicated toll-free helpline for response to gender-based violence. This line should remain active and in use after the pandemic and staffed with trained police and social welfare officers. This should be done in partnership with state level response teams and the Ministry of Women Affairs.
3. Disseminate hotlines including phone numbers of Zonal Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIGs), Public Relations Officer (PRO), Strategy Commanders such as head of Gender Unit, to grassroot level in states that are yet to implement such. The Police Complaint Response Unit (CRU) should establish guidelines on how to deal with police who refuse to help or try to deal with cases as a family matter instead of a crime.

4. Ensure coordination at the national and state level and work with other law enforcement agencies and ministries such as Ministry of Women Affairs, to ensure synergy in preventing and reducing violence against women and girls and other human rights violations.
5. Incorporate the efforts of the Police, on the subject matter above, from national to state level.
6. Deliver a public statement at national and state level (press conference specifically on gender integration) to authorise and publicise the availability and accessibility of police patrol vehicles, free-of-charge, for emergency services like health and domestic violence evacuation as well as how such help can be requested.
7. Circulate memos to Divisional Police Officers (DPOs), Area Commanders & Division Officers to show compassion and avail their patrol vehicles to women in labour and those in need of ante-natal care.
8. Urgently increase deployments to the Police Gender Unit, allocation of funds to the juvenile and women centres in all states across Nigeria.
9. Impose public disciplinary actions against offending staff members of the NPF.
10. Ensure inclusive messaging from the Police on the wellbeing of vulnerable groups especially women and young people on a practical level, and to refer rather than arrest and maltreat groups such as persons who use drugs and sex workers.

For the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19:

1. Include the Ministry of Women Affairs as part of the COVID-19 Presidential Task Force.
2. Mainstream National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 into government responses in order to identify the essential needs of women and girls especially the aged, those living with disabilities, and the internally displaced.
3. Encourage the inauguration of COVID-19 technical committees at the local government level of states, inclusive of civil society organisations, women organisations, private sector, unions etc.
4. Enforce a gender balanced COVID-19 task force at federal, state and community level to ensure inclusiveness at decision-making e.g. include the Ministry of Women Affairs.
5. Ensure responsive information sharing that would include gender-based violence/domestic violence prevention messaging and helplines in local languages to enable more reach and better understanding of impacts and prevention of COVID-19.

6. Collaborate with telecommunication companies to support the establishment of a three-digit dedicated toll-free national helpline, that would include state referral pathways for responding to gender-based violence. This line can assist the police to deal with cases of gender-based violence and should remain active and in use after the pandemic.
7. Provide passes, safety kits and transportation support for first responders to gender-based violence to ensure easy reach to victims.
8. Support provision of shelters for women who are homeless victims of domestic violence especially in States that have no such shelters and support NGOs already providing such support.
9. Ensure a gender-inclusive budget that addresses the fight against COVID-19 as well as palliative measures.
10. Make clear and transparent the criteria for selection and support for palliative schemes and ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups. Ensure women's representation on selection committees and mechanisms for sharing and in decision-making.
11. Expand communication on preventive measures to become more grassroots oriented and incorporate traditional methods including traditional rulers, town-criers and radio to reach people in rural areas. This will allow people who do not have access to modern and social media understand the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and curb misinformation.
12. Address issues relating to Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH), particularly access to clean water which is a basic need for handwashing as a preventive measure of COVID-19 and upscale measures for good hygiene.
13. Ensure access for CSOs in monitoring the government expenditure in its response to COVID-19.
14. Proactively involve CSOs in the implementation government intervention plans.
15. Provide crucial personal protective equipment to the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies.
16. Ensure continuity of essential health services especially in areas of HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, malaria, tuberculosis and immunization services, leveraging technology and community health workers.

For Civil Society Organisations:

1. Collaborate to raise funds in providing temporary shelter for women exposed to domestic violence to complement government efforts.
2. Recreate the government's messages in local languages to make it easily accessible to the public.
3. Amplify voices and strengthen advocacy, as a call to action, for the government to include the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and more women in the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 committee as a proponent for more inclusive responses.
4. Collate data of recorded gender-based violence cases and make weekly announcements to serve as a database in tackling the scourge during post COVID-19.
5. Mobilize to provide sanitary pads, family planning information and products and other essentials to vulnerable women.
6. Adjust requirements for accessing palliative care to include more women (e.g. Central Bank Nigeria (CBN) palliatives).
7. Work across sectors to coordinate and mitigate the impact of the lockdown on poor and vulnerable households, especially those headed by women.

For International Organisations and Donor Agencies:

1. Support Non-Governmental Organisations and the Federal Government in the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at state and community level, especially to vulnerable groups including people living with disabilities, women and young people.
2. Collaborate to fund access to mobility for gender-based violence responders and the provision of temporary shelters for women and children exposed to domestic violence.
3. Support the continuation of girl-child education through schemes and initiatives post-pandemic.
4. Fund women's rights organizations to build the capacity of relevant agencies and CSOs on best practices of how to set up gender-sensitive response mechanisms.

5. Support the Nigerian Police Force to develop a code of conduct booklet, with comprehensive gender integration, in response to COVID-19.
6. Donate PPEs to the Nigerian Police Force and other agencies as it is now crucial for their work.
7. Provide flexible funding for partners to ensure their real-time response to the needs of communities.