



SAFE GIRLS PROJECT REPORT



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The United Nations defines violence against women and girls as “any act that results in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threatens of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. Adolescent girls are more vulnerable to violence because they have limited knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health rights, they do not know how to report and they are often dependent on their abusers. According to UNICEF (2014), 1 IN 4 girls experience gender-based violence before the age of 18 in Nigeria, and there has been a three times increase in the rate of gender-based violence since the Federal Government of Nigeria declared the lockdown in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria¹. The lockdown has brought girls closer to their abusers and has made it extremely difficult for girls to seek and get help.

About 20 million children may not return to school after the pandemic², because a lot of girls have been married out in exchange for money and foodstuff, some girls have sexually abused by their fathers, relatives, and neighbors and while others have been forced to engage in transactional sex because the pandemic has worsened period poverty. Gender-based violence has physical, social, and psychological effects on girls. The physical effects of gender-based violence on girls are; unwanted pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases, injuries while the social and psychological effects include; Shame, guilt, depression, stigmatization, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are the leading reasons girls may not return to school after the pandemic.

Also, in the absence of schooling, 70% of girls in the rural communities of the Federal Capital Territory now hawk Monday to Friday without adequate protection from COVID-19. Girls are made to pick up menial jobs as a source of livelihood for their families, they go to the market and look after their younger ones, leaving them with little or no time to participate in online schooling programs.

Adolescent girls are the most impacted group of people by the pandemic. The pandemic has meant more child labor, more sexual and gender-based violence, increased period poverty, and exposure to COVID-19. Everyone deserves to be safe and free from violence, therefore, the needs of adolescent girls must be prioritized.

According to the United Nations (2018), 1 in 5 out-of-school children in the world resides in Nigeria, having more girls drop out of school after the pandemic will result in a national crisis and impede the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, hence the reason for the ‘SAFE GIRLS PROJECT’.

The Safe Girls project was designed to reduce girls’ vulnerability to gender-based violence and to COVID -19. Teenage Network with support from The Pollination Grant implemented a day sensitization program in five rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria to

¹ National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons

²Save the Children, 2020

educate girls on their sexual and reproductive health rights, provide them with gender-based violence helplines and sanitary materials (such as pads, soap and reusable Facemask) that would last for two months. The aim of distributing sanitary materials was to ensure that girls are able to protect themselves from COVID-19 through frequent hand washing with soap and wearing of Facemask and to ensure girls are able to menstruate with dignity. We provided gender-based violence helplines to enable victims or girls who at risk seek and get help despite the lockdown. The program also provided girls with information on COVID-19 and the management of menstruation.

The project sensitized community heads on the effects of harmful cultural practices on girls and the community at large and provided gender-based violence helplines. This is to ensure girls' rights are respected and victims of gender-based violence are able to access care and get justice.

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The project was aimed at the following objectives:

- To educate girls on their sexual and reproductive health rights
- To sensitize girls on the warning signs of Gender-Based Violence
- To ensure girls are aware of COVID-19 preventive measures
- To educate girls on the menstrual cycle and management of menstruation
- To provide girls with WASH materials and helplines
- To document gender-based violence experiences of girls



Safe Girls Project team with the Chief of Jikwoyi community

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The Teenage Network held a day sensitization program across five (5) communities in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Ahead of meeting with the girls, Teenage Network held Stakeholders meetings with the community chiefs to seek their buy-in, to advocate for safe spaces for girls, and to ensure prompt reporting of cases of gender-based violence.

The outreaches received a warm reception from all the chiefs and all the sensitization programs took place in the chiefs' palaces with priority given to girls with disabilities. In each of the community outreaches, the Teenage Network held three sessions with the selected participants. The first sessions were on COVID-19 prevention; the second sessions were on Management of Menstruation and the third session on Gender-based violence sensitization.

The list of participants and communities are provided below:

S/N	Date	Community	Local Government Area (LGA).	Number of Participants
1.	August 18 2020.	Jikwoyi Village, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.	Abuja Municipal	34
2.	August 18 2020.	Nyanya Community Federal Capital territory (FCT), Abuja.	Abuja Municipal	29
3.	August 18, 2020.	Karu community, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.	Abuja Municipal	30
4.	August 20, 2020.	Dutse-Alhaji village, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja	Bwari	32
5.	August 20, 2020.	Sokale Village, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja	Bwari	27
	Total number of Girls reached			152

First Sessions

The first sessions were facilitated by Juliet Onoja, Program Officer for the Teenage Network. During the session, girls received orientation on the COVID-19 guidelines, the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, the modes of transmission, and the preventive measures while debunking myths. **Girls generally believe that COVID-19 affects only the rich and white people**, these myths were corrected. The Girls were encouraged to maintain physical distance during the programs, made to wear a facemask, and they were given alcohol-based hand sanitizer to prevent cross-infection.



Second Sessions

The Second Sessions educated girls on menstruation. The session was also facilitated by Juliet Onoja who educated girls on the menstrual cycle, management of menstruation, and debunked menstrual myths that have had negative effects on girls.

Some of such myths debunked during the sessions are;

Menstruation is dirty

Once a girl starts menstruating she is ready to marry

The use of analgesics in managing menstrual cramps results in Infertility.

Not all girls menstruate through the vagina, some menstruate through the finger



Cross section of girls during sensitization at Karu community

Third Sessions

The third sessions educated girls on their sexual and reproductive health rights and gender-based violence. Topics discussed include the forms of gender-based violence, the penalties attached to each form of violence under to the Violence against Persons Prohibition Acts (VAPP Act 2015), and the child rights Acts (2015), warning signs of abuse, the why, when,

and how to report an abuse. These sessions were facilitated by Olanike Timipa-Uge, the Executive Director of Teenage Network.

The warning signs of abuse shared with the girls include inappropriate touch, use of endearing words, unexplainable bullying, unsolicited gifts, and the invitation to lonely and dark places. The dangers of not reporting abuse are; lack of access to medical care, continuous abuse to them, and other girls in the neighborhood.

The facilitator developed scenarios that formed the basis of discussion during these sessions. The scenarios include:

If 25-year-old Kazeem has sex with 14-year-old Mulikat, is it abuse?

What would be your response if your father was to give you up for early-marriage?

If you find a 5-year-old child crying and coming out of a male neighbor's room, stained with blood and walking in pain, what would you do?

It was discovered during the sessions that sixty-five percent of girls believed the first scenario is not an abuse because they believed the age of consent to be between ages 10-13 years. 60% of the girls also believed that 'victims of sexual abuse are most times to be blamed because they visit guys often and wear seductive dresses'. The facilitators corrected these notions by educating the girls about consent and stated that the age of consent is 18 years, hence girls under the age of 18 cannot give consent. She also cited examples of babies who were raped and why victims must never be blamed for the abuse. About Eight (8) girls shared their experiences to buttress the point. One of the participants at Dutse-Alhaji also buttressed the point by sharing how her sister who had a cognitive disability was raped. Girls were encouraged to speak up against abuse by reporting to trusted adults when they notice the warning signs and through the Teenage Network helplines or other gender-based violence service provider helplines regardless of who the perpetrators are. The importance of reporting within 48 hours of sexual abuse was emphasized to ensure the effectiveness of Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and emergency contraceptives as well as to establish evidence in support of their cases. The girls were made to see the negative effect of gender-based violence on their well-being and the community at large, they were encouraged to be their sister's keeper.



Distribution of Palliatives

Teenage Network with support from The Pollination Project (TPP) provided 152 girls with 2 sanitary pads, a toilet soap, a branded reusable facemask, and helplines of gender-based violence service providers such as; Teenage Network, National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and the FCT Police Gender Desk. This is to reduce the likelihood of girls engaging in transactional sex in exchange for sanitary pads, to ensure girls are able to seek and get help despite the lockdown, and to reduce girls' vulnerability to COVID-19 by enabling frequent hand washing with soap and water and the use of facemasks.



Group photograph of participants at Sokale Village

Interactive Sessions

In all the outreaches, interactive sessions were held with the girls. During these sessions, girls were encouraged to verbalize their issues of concerns, whether or not it is related to the topics of discussions. They were encouraged to ask questions and answers were provided immediately. Some of the questions asked are:

On Menstruation

- What are the causes of menstrual pain?
- Is it proper to use tissue paper for menstruation?
- What is the best method of disposing of sanitary pads?

On Gender-Based Violence

How can an orphan who works as a house help get help when the perpetrator is the one paying her school fees?



Interactive Session at Karu Village

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Key Outcomes

152 girls are able to identify the warning signs of abuse and are able to report promptly.
152 girls have WASH Materials (sanitary pads, soap, and face masks). They are able to menstruate with dignity, less dependent on potential abusers, and less vulnerable to COVID-19.

Challenges

Mobilization Challenge: it was a bit challenging to gather girls for the program because a lot of them are working/hawking.

Lessons Learned

There is a need to educate more girls about the age of consent.
There are no opportunities for girls to speak and learn about sexual and reproductive health issues. The Safe Girls outreach was the first time 90% of the girls had the opportunity to listen to people speak to them on such topics. Hence, there is a need to build safe spaces for girls to interact in the communities.
A lot of girls have never heard about the VAPP Act 2015 and the Child right Act. Girls need to know more about their rights, that way they are able to speak against oppressions.
The custom of shaming victims of sexual abuse is rampant among adolescent girls, this is why they find it difficult to report abuse, there is a need for re-orientation.

