

Restoring the dignity of women and girls with disabilities in the Plateau State of Nigeria

→ Implemented by the Inclusive Friends Association (IFA), Plateau State, Nigeria

Background

Inclusive Friends Association (IFA) is an organization led by women with disabilities operating in the Plateau State, a region of Nigeria prone to conflict. With more than 60 ethnic groups and complex religious tensions, violent conflicts often break out. In this context, women with disabilities are at particular risk of violence, compounded by the fact that it is more difficult for them to flee and seek help. Although several Gender-Based Violence (GBV) components are included in the second National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on “Women Peace and Security”,ⁱ women with disabilities are not specifically mentioned.

IFA became aware that the organizations implementing actions against GBV at times of conflicts or peace are rarely inclusive of women and girls with disabilities. Yet, these women and girls are more exposed to violence and its impact on them is aggravated by the lack of access to humanitarian, medical and legal services.

What happened?

IFA launched a study in three Local Government Authorities (LGAs), in the Plateau State, experiencing recurrent conflict. The organization conducted qualitative research which involved

collecting testimony, focus group discussions and a questionnaire which was widely distributed. The approach used was intended to be emancipatory to ensure “reciprocity, shared disclosure between researcher and researched, and empowerment or emancipation of people with disabilities.”ⁱⁱ The study “What Violence Means to Us: Women with Disabilities Speak,”ⁱⁱⁱ was mainly conducted by women with disabilities, and focused on women with physical and sensory disabilities over the age of 17 years, in times of relative peace as well as during conflict.

It provided an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to survivors and collect specific data. It was also a starting point for survivors taking action. IFA facilitated survivors’ access to relevant services. In addition, IFA, in partnership with Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigerian Society (CWEENS) provided trauma counselling sessions and helped with the prosecution of perpetrators. The report documented the experiences of women and girls with disabilities before, during and after conflict. For example, it demonstrated that the mechanisms used by the authorities or communities to raise the alarm and tell the population to flee do not reach women with disabilities, especially women with hearing impairments. It highlighted high rates of sexual abuse, notably from persons involved in the conflicts. It also showed that women with disabilities are not included in the community peace forums after the conflict.

Once the report was published in 2015, IFA held a conference to disseminate the findings to key stakeholders: security agencies, the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights activists, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Disabled Persons’

Organizations (DPOs), traditional and religious leaders. IFA made recommendations and focused on the importance of involving women with disabilities in governance.



“IFA have fought for my rights, and I will fight for the rights of other women with disabilities too. In the very near future, I hope to see a world where there is equity, equality, and justice for the community of persons with disabilities”.

Esther Danjuma, member of IFA

What changed?

IFA provided evidence-based recommendations that opened up new perspectives for protecting and empowering women with disabilities and formed the basis for advocacy work. As a result, two of the women with disabilities working with IFA were appointed by the Plateau State government to the Disability Rights Commission, thereby introducing leadership from women with disabilities into the Commission’s decision-making body.

The study and its approach improved women with disabilities’ self-esteem and provided a unique opportunity to share on the severe violence they had faced. In many cases, the perpetrators were care givers or family members and the victims were afraid they would be abandoned if they were to speak out. The practice brought survivors to the point where they were able to report their ordeals and seek help. Several cases of sexual and economic violence were successfully addressed by women with disabilities

through collaborations between IFA and their partners.

After the consultations for the study, IFA members witnessed that the participants were empowered to advocate for their rights. Some specifically engaged in peace building forums and their contributions were valued. The consultations organized in the communities created an enabling environment and helped raise awareness: it led to a new acceptance of women and girls with disabilities among local authorities and community members.

What worked?

This research was conducted at a key time, when there was a significant increase in the number of reported cases of GBV against women and girls with disabilities. In this respect, it addressed an increasingly important issue in the State and provided explanations about what happened before, during and after the conflicts.

The fact that women with disabilities were involved in conducting this research using an emancipatory approach was essential to the quality of the study and brought about change for the women who took part as researchers or participants. Beyond the research process, survivors who shared their stories were also offered counselling, referral and new opportunities. IFA used this study as a way of forging groups and a sense of ownership. An effective multi-stakeholder approach was used, which saw IFA partnering with organizations like CWEENS to refer survivors of violence and target law enforcement authorities, policy makers, CSOs and DPOs, with evidence-based advocacy.

For more information, please visit:
<https://www.inclusivefriends.org> or
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ⁱ UN Security Council Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security, S/RES/1325 adopted on October 30th, 2000

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution> and <http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/NAPNigeria.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Inclusive Friends Association, What Violence Means To Us: Women With Disabilities Speak (2015), page 9

<http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/What-Violence-Means-to-us-Women-with-Disabilities-Speak.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.