

# **LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE FORMATION OF AN EFFECTIVE SRHR MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

## ***Introduction***

Lawyers Alert on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 organised a one-day sensitization session for selected Civil Society Groups in North Central Nigeria with the aim of fostering law, human rights and effective Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Movement in Nigeria.

The North Central sensitization session was held in Makurdi, Benue State and was targeted at Small and Medium Civil Society Organisations and Lawyers in the North Central of the Federation. A total of 10 Organisations were mobilized for the meeting with a total of 22 participants in attendance.

## ***Objectives of the meeting:***

- Creating a movement on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Nigeria.
- Documentation of human rights violations towards data creation for evidence-based advocacy on law and policy reform.
- To create a link between the organisations and lawyers that will help in securing justice for victims.

## ***The Proceedings:***

The Session started at about 10:00am with Participants Registration and introduction. All mobilized Organisations were well represented by their various groups. In order to achieve a fruitful and quality meeting, participants were asked to write down what they expect to achieve/gain from the meeting or what they expect the meeting to address or accomplish. The introduction, expectation and ground rules session was facilitated by Jerome Uneje. Different expectations and fears were thrown up by the participants. Some of them include the following:

- Deeper Understanding of SRHR at the end of the meeting,
- A developed roadmap on SRHR movement in Nigeria
- Increased bonding and partnership amongst participants

*Some of the fears included the following:*

- Fear that time may not be enough to adequately learn about SRHR

- Some were afraid that there may be a loss of follow up on the proposed action plan
- Others were afraid that external realities might hamper the progress of the SRHR movement in Nigeria.

The President of Lawyers Alert, Rommy Mom gave the welcome address. He welcomed all the participants to Benue State and to the event of the day. In his remarks, he highlighted the relevance of SRHR and its challenges in Nigeria particularly in Benue State where reports have indicated that there is a high prevalence rate of SRHR violations in comparison to other States in Nigeria like Enugu and Lagos States. Proper introduction of the workshop was done by stating the background, the reason for the meeting and what the meeting hoped to achieve.

He explained that the vision of Lawyers Alert is to see that key populations and vulnerable groups have access to justice, services and resources in a manner that is unhindered by anything. KAP's are those persons more susceptible to contract HIV/AIDS including Female Sex Workers, LGBTI, MSM, PWID, women and children. He informed the house that Lawyers Alert will partner with the Coalition of Lawyers for Human Rights (COLaHR), which is present in about 17-21 states in Nigeria and has a nationwide coverage in the provision of free legal representation to key populations and vulnerable groups.

A lecture on key populations and the challenges of accessing justice was delivered by Dorothy Akenova. She linked our behaviour towards KAP's with the holy bible and the Koran. She emphasised on the fact that we label these people in our minds, therefore, judging them instead of protecting their rights as humans. She stated that human rights apply to different people in different ways. She gave examples of how KAP's are been violated even on suspicion basis and that some of the major challenges are stigmatization, discrimination, discriminatory laws, cultural and social norms, and lastly religion. She concluded by saying that we need to move beyond our comfort zones to be able to learn, connect the dots and advance the rights of KAPs.

Post the lecture, Lawyers Alert presented the reporting template which is a web-based tool developed LADOCKT used in documenting human rights violations.

### **Way Forward**

The structure, mode of communication and complaints, feedback etc. was discussed and the below agreed;

- Mapping, identification/mobilization of small and medium-sized CSOs
- Capacity assessment of small and medium-sized CSOs.
- A minimum of 10 Small and medium-sized CSOs to be developed in the Northcentral zone.
- Free legal representation for Key populations.
- Identification of areas where to make an incremental gain.
- Mapping of key influencers in Benue, Plateau, Niger and Abuja.
  - Niger: 7
  - Plateau: 30
  - Benue: 4
  - Abuja: 5
- Mapping of Anti-SRHR laws and policies in Benue, Plateau, Niger and Abuja.
- Documentation of SRHR violations in Abuja, Benue, Plateau and Niger.
- WhatsApp group to be created
- Continuous reportage of SRHR movement activities.

**Conclusion:**

At the end of the session, participants expectations were fully met and their fears largely unjustified. Participants were excited and looked forward to the full implementation agreed next steps and the replication of the same across other zones in Nigeria. The meeting came to a close with a vote of thanks, closing remarks and prayers. They all departed looking forward to the next meeting.

