

REPORT ON MEETING WITH THE GU & PDSS ON GBV IN NIGERIA.

Date: 17th September, 2020

Time: 09.30am – 01:40pm daily

Location: Dogon Koli Hotel, Western Bye Pass, Bosso, Minna, Niger State.

Host: Gender Unit Force CIID(Nigerian Police)/Lawyers Alert.

Introduction

The meeting is convened to understand the challenges being faced by the Gender Unit (GU) of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the Police Duty Solicitors Scheme (PDSS) of the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria and to develop a road map on addressing these challenges.

A two-man team of Lawyers Alert left Abuja for Minna, Niger state on the 16th September 2020 for a meeting scheduled for the following day at Dogon Koli Hotel.

The Discussion

The Arrival and Registration of participants started at about 9:30am at Dogon Koli Hotel Conference Hall. Though the Programme started a little bit late, it started with an opening prayer said by a volunteer named Solomon Washima from the Gender Unit. This was followed by introduction and giving of expectations by all participants.



Representative of the Gender Unit giving the welcome address and setting the agenda.

At 10:15am, the representative of the Head of Gender Unit, Mr Bartholomew Ali gave his key-note address to formally declare the meeting open. He apologised for the absence of Head of Gender Unit at the meeting and further expressed her appreciation of Lawyers Alert efforts at putting the meeting together. He spoke passionately about issues surrounding Gender Base Violence (GBV) and hinted that GBV has become a world-wide phenomenon as cases of sexual violence such as rape, sexual harassment and other related offences had become the order of the day not only in Nigeria but also in the world at large. According to the representative, it is the treason that a lot of organisations have seen issue as a challenge that must be urgently addressed. He also used the opportunity offered him to appreciate the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria for working tirelessly in seeing that such issues are been tackled as much as possible.



Director, PDSS giving his Goodwill Message.

In similar vein, the Director of the PDSS, Mr Bamidele Ibinkunle gave the Goodwill message of the organisation. He started by welcoming everyone present in the meeting and expressing his profound gratitude to Lawyers Alert in having these meetings that have brought together the two organisations. He informed the gathering that PDSS began in 2006 in some states such as Ondo, Sokoto, Imo and Kaduna. He said the scheme was later extended to other states. The Director further revealed that the idea behind the police PDSS is to render *pro bono* services to indigent survivors of GBV and to ensure that the due processes of law are followed in the prosecutions of perpetrators. Other advantages of the scheme, according to the Director, include:

- I. Enhancing the image of the police thereby making the society to have more confidence in the institution.
- II. Reducing the number of petitions by the people complaining about the police.

He concluded by hoping that the meeting would create a synergy between the GU and the PDSS.



Director, Legal Lawyers Alert giving the keynote remarks.

A representative of Lawyers Alert took the keynote Remarks/Objectives of the meeting on behalf of the organisation. In his speech, he disclosed that the meeting was put together to bring both the GU and the PDSS together to discuss the challenges each faced in the discharge of its duties and to collectively explore the ways to tackle same. He highlighted the objectives of the meeting to include the following;

- I. Understanding the challenges being faced by the GU and PDSS in terms of resource and technical know-how in attending to Gender Based Violence issues.
- II. Developing a road-map of addressing these challenges.
- III. Enhancing participants' skills in understanding their roles and the best ways to address issues of SRHR and GBV in a Human-Rights satisfactory Manner.
- IV. Designing modes for monitoring, documenting and working together.

The representative declared that the meeting in particular is not a training per se but an interaction between the GU and PDSS to share experience on the things individuals have encountered in the course of discharging their duties. The meeting later went into tea-break.

Training Session



Participants having a training session

This is only session that featured a training. It was tagged: Understanding Gender Based Violence and our roles in addressing issues of GBV.

The session was taken by the representative of Lawyers Alert. He started by giving a working definition to GBV before proceeding to highlighting the various ways GBV can manifest itself. He ended the session by discussing the evil effects of GBV on survivors and the society at large. The session was interactive as members of the audience had the opportunity of contributing to the discussion.

Identification of Challenges



Identification of Challenges by Participants.

This session was facilitated by a Representative of the GU. It involved every member of the audience as any one could take the floor to discuss their experience on the field. Focus was given to the challenges being faced by the officers in the course of discharging their duties.

In the end the following challenges were identified.

1. Wrong assignment of cases.
2. Dearth of Finance to carry out investigations.
3. Political influence and interventions.
4. Ignorance.
5. Compromise from investigating officers.
6. Stigmatization and cultural practices.
7. Poverty is also a challenge concerning GBV issues in addressing it.
8. Privacy for complainants (Having a separate officer for these issues) mainly for Gender Cases. (in division of Nigerian Police Force)
9. Culture of silence
10. Lack of awareness (what is expected of the survivor)
11. Lack of proper implementation
12. Wrong, non-challant and unprofessional attitude of some law enforcement officers

Suggestions for Further Actions

1. A participant from the NPF expressed displeasure over the assignment of GBV cases to other units in the police stations rather than the Gender Unit. According to her, this does not argue well for the proper handling of such cases.
2. It is also observed that serious sensitization needs to be carried out among the senior officers of the NPF in order to have a Gender Unit in all police stations in Niger State as the current situation was far from that. The representative of the GU assured the participants that he will convey their

message to the Head of Gender Unit at the Headquarters for necessary actions.

Roadmap to Reversing the challenges

Roadmap towards reversing the challenges identified at the meeting was also discussed by participants. Some of the issues include:

1. GBV cases to be assigned to the Gender Units of the different levels of various formations of NPF.
2. Funding/Finance: There is a clamour for a separate budget head for the GU in the general police budget as such will improve the funding situation of the unit.
3. Political Influence: This requires insisting on the right thing to be done.
4. Ignorance: There is a serious call for public sensitization the need for timeous reports of cases and on the dangers of harmful practices.
5. Proper counselling of survivors should be done.
6. It is important to penalize erring officers in cases of compromise from such officers to deter others.
7. Stigmatization and cultural practices.
8. Better economic policies & environment in order to reduce poverty.
9. Conducive environment that ensures survivors enjoy some level of privacy during interview.
10. Training & Re-training for officers on how to handle cases.
11. Trainings should be organized for all stakeholders including judicial officers, Lawyers, police on the proper implementation of existing laws.

Development of Women Satisfactory Index (WSI)

As the meeting drew to a close, Lawyers Alert took time out to introduce participants to a Women Satisfaction Index (WSI) which helps supply feedback

on the work that both the GU and PDSS do. With the WSI, organizations know how many cases they have had, or handled and make changes from time to time. The index provides feedbacks as to how one has done well or badly thereby making necessary adjustments as may be required. The WSI forms were later distributed to all participants and thereafter subjected to a serious critique and later adopted.

Conclusion



Group Photograph.

The meeting came to an end at about 4pm with a participant from PDSS giving the vote of thanks on behalf of her organization. She thanked Lawyers Alert for organising such a meeting that has enabled them learn a lot. She promised that they are going to put all what they have learnt into use. She further urged the NPF to carry them along in the things they do.

The representative of Lawyers Alert gave the closing speech that signaled the end of the meeting. He thanked all participants who were in attendance for their massive participation and interaction during the meeting. He also appreciated the Head of GU and the Director of PDSS for the mobilization of the officers in attendance at the meeting. After this, a group photograph was taken with all the participants.

Recommendation

The need to have adequate trainings for officers of the GU in Niger State was emphasised. According to the head of the unit in Niger state command, there has never been any formal training for the officers of the unit since inception. She believed a training for members of her team will enhance the performance of the officers.

