

RULE OF LAW AND ANTI-CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

The Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC) Programme is working to strengthen the application of law and curb corruption in Nigeria.

RoLAC focuses on:

- reforming the criminal justice system
- ensuring women, children and people with disabilities have access to justice
- improving the performance of anti-corruption agencies and how they work together
- enhancing the voice of Nigerians in curbing corruption.

We work at the federal level and in five focal states: Adamawa, Anambra, Edo, Kano and Lagos.

The five-year programme (2017–22) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.

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TACKLING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN GRASSROOTS COMMUNITIES



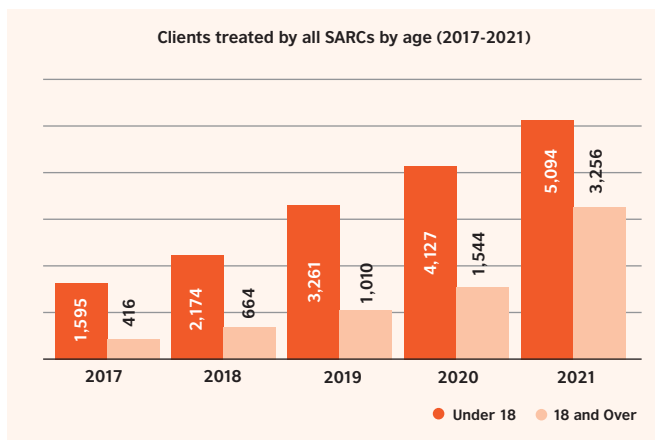
WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

This case study illustrates the impact that can be achieved when community members come together to address a serious problem. It shows what a community can do to protect the rights and wellbeing of children, and how to scale up from weak to strong community child protection systems.

BACKGROUND

According to the UNICEF, one in four girls and 10 per cent of boys have been victims of sexual violence in Nigeria. Of the children who reported violence, fewer than five out of 100 received any form of support.¹ Also, data gathered by RoLAC from 32 Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Nigeria shows that over 75 percent of victims are children.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-protection>



Source: RoLAC SARC client data

Attempts have been made by the government, non-governmental bodies and international agencies to respond to rising cases of child sexual abuse. In July 2019, the Senate President directed the Judiciary, Police Affairs and Women Affairs committees to work with stakeholders to review the legislation and policies aimed at protecting minors from rapists. This included encouraging stiffer penalties for perpetrators of sexual abuse of minors.

When such government directives are implemented, the children in rural, low-income communities, often hardest hit by sexual abuse, are also the hardest to reach and the hardest to help. This makes it imperative that communities themselves should have mechanisms to protect children against sexual abuse.

Despite the damaging impact of child sexual abuse, many rural communities often do not take decisive steps to protect children or prevent it from happening again. Some community members may have very little awareness about what to do to protect children who have been abused or are at risk of abuse.



APPROACH

With support from the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC) Programme, the Sexual Offences Awareness and Response (SOAR) Initiative - a civil society organisation - identified an opportunity to work with rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory to address the problem of child sexual abuse.

Identify and select communities most in need

In consultation with officials from the Abuja Municipal Area Council, Kuje and Gwagwalada Area Councils, SOAR identified four rural communities: Wukara, Tasha 1, Wuna and Kayarda. These communities recorded high numbers of out-of-school children and rates of child sexual abuse.

Establish oversight committees and train dedicated officers

In each of the four selected communities, SOAR helped establish Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) comprised of community leaders and community members who acknowledged the problem and were committed to doing something about it. Community Child Protection Officers were identified and trained to lead the initiative.

Advocacy to traditional and religious leaders

SOAR's repeated advocacy visits to the traditional and religious leaders in the four communities eventually secured their buy-in. This became the critical entry point to facilitate SOAR's door-to-door advocacy with over 110 community members and clan representatives across the three Area Councils.

These community members received training in how to identify and respond to child sexual abuse, and how their roles within the community could enhance the work of justice service providers. The community members also received support to engage help desks and service delivery channels within the police, the Area Council and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

A total of 1,194 children were also trained as peer educators across the four communities.

“

I now know the different forms of sexual and child abuses, and the different techniques used by the perpetrators.”

Samuel Daniel, 13-year-old peer educator and mentor, Kayarda village, Kuje Area Council

Feedback through town hall meetings

Regular town hall discussions and feedback sessions chaired by traditional leaders were held in the communities with officials from the police, NAPTIP and the Area Councils present. These forums enabled all stakeholders to raise and resolve challenges, as well as openly address the biases and negative attitudes that had allowed child sexual abuse to thrive.

The project took account of the context of the community, recognising that information had to be set out in simple terms and delivered in the local language for it to be easily understood and valuable to community members.

RESULTS

More cases handled

Since the intervention, 13 child sexual and physical abuse cases have been handled by the CCPCs with arrests made in two cases reported to the CCPCs. Prosecutions are ongoing in collaboration with NAPTIP and the Area Councils.

Increased awareness and understanding

There is now increased awareness and understanding across the four communities about the impact of child sexual abuse and the steps to take when an incident has been identified. This came about through the training and sensitisation for CCPCs and community members.

Breaking the culture of silence

Families and communities have been known to cover up rape because of the impact it could have on the survivor's marriage prospects. And men are often warned against marrying a woman who has been raped. The intervention is now helping to break this

culture in the communities. People are more willing to report and talk about child sexual abuse. And children are now encouraged to report incidents to mentors and peer educators.

“

Some of the victims that have been dying in silence have opened up during the classes. One child was being abused by her uncle. She told us how he lures her to his house only to abuse her. We are currently following up with the case. ”

Blessing Azaki, mentor

Less cases of child sexual abuse

There is now a reduction in the cases of child sexual abuse in the four communities.

“

Before the intervention, it was common to find girls who have been sexually abused being married off to the perpetrators. Since the intervention, this practice has stopped in Wuna. ”

Mallam Isah Yusuf, Chief, Wuna community

“

Before SOAR came, we faced challenges with child abuse. We didn't know how to pursue it from this village because it is too much. We called people, we called the elders, we called the youth, but it did not work. But as this programme came, everything just stopped. ”

Mallam Isah Yusuf, Chief, Wuna community



CHALLENGES

- Community members were initially suspicious and distrustful of justice service providers and government officials, especially around such a sensitive issue as child sexual abuse. SOAR's presence helped to bridge the gap and build trust with the community.
- Many community members were resistant to the change that the intervention wanted to bring about. SOAR anticipated this and ensured that they first gained the acceptance and endorsement of traditional and religious leaders. SOAR encouraged community members to share their thoughts and concerns at the townhalls and gently addressed these issues without judging any of those present.

LESSONS LEARNED

Target new communities to increase buy-in

The intervention was successful because it targeted rural communities who had not previously been exposed to similar interventions and who were enthusiastic about being part of something progressive in their communities.

Engage stakeholders as partners

The intervention engaged Area Council officials, community leaders and community members as partners rather than beneficiaries or bystanders. This approach ensured that parents had their knowledge built alongside their children.

Consider the local context

The approach took account of the context of the community members recognising that information had to be easy to understand and delivered in the local language for it to be useful to the community members.



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Find out more

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