

# 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.

Find out more:

[www.justice-security.ng](http://www.justice-security.ng)

## INCREASING ACCESS TO SARC SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT



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## WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

The volume of sexual assault cases and the continuing upward trend of cases demonstrates that sexual violence is at epidemic levels in Nigeria, especially as it is widely believed that less than 10 per cent of cases are reported<sup>1</sup>. However, support services are very limited. This case study illustrates how Sexual Assault and Referral Centres (SARCs) are helping to address the justice needs of survivors. It also shows how sustained advocacy and partnerships with stakeholders can lead to the establishment of more SARCs, improve the services of existing centres, and provide more access to justice for victims.

<sup>1</sup> Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018)



## BACKGROUND

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), one in four Nigerian women are sexually abused before they turn 18<sup>2</sup>. Recent reports show that the number of cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Nigeria is rising. Conflict in some parts of the country has made women more likely to be subjected to violence<sup>3</sup>. And COVID-19 restrictions introduced to curb the spread of the virus increased the risks to SGBV, while reducing survivors' access to services.

SARCs play a key role in providing justice to victims of sexual assault in Nigeria. The centres offer a safe environment and crucial help to survivors of sexual assault. Emergency medical treatment, trauma counselling, and forensic services are available for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted. Survivors are also given support in contacting the police and other justice and social support services.

“

The SARCs go a long way in curbing the menace of rape... ”

Vice President of Nigeria: Professor Yemi Osinbajo (SAN) GCON

The centres' services are provided free of charge and fully accessible to everyone. This is a major benefit to poor and disadvantaged people (especially women, children and persons with disabilities) who are often the most vulnerable to sexual assault.

“

I didn't know I could find a place in the state where they will accept and treat me... and they didn't even collect money. They gave me drugs and clothes... and they even talked to my husband for me. ”

SARC survivor

SARC personnel are specialists who have been trained to treat survivors with dignity, respect, and confidentiality. They carry out medical examinations and document findings in medical reports that can support the prosecution of SGBV cases in court. SARCs are client-focused and provide a safe space where the client is believed and not judged or blamed for what has happened to them.

### Data from Sexual Assault Referral Centres tell a worrying story

April 2021

#### 1. The number of females visiting SARCs increased by 150% from 2017 to 2020

The number of females reporting to SARCs increased by over 150% to nearly 5,000 in total in 2020. Women are at far greater risk of sexual violence than men.



#### 2. Whilst the majority of SARC Clients have been female, the number of male victims increased by over 400% between 2017 and 2020



@HerStoryOSNG  
#HerStoryOurStoryNG



## APPROACH

In response to the rising incidences of sexual assault in Nigeria and the overwhelming gap in response services for victims, the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC) Programme identified the need to replicate the SARCs more widely.

At the onset of the programme, there were nine SARCs (in eight out of the 36 states in Nigeria). RoLAC worked to expand the SARCs to more locations within and across states. The aim was to increase access to critical services - such as emergency medical care, psychosocial support, and justice - for thousands of SGBV survivors who would otherwise not be able to afford them.

### Peer learning

RoLAC started its engagement by disseminating the successes and lessons learned from existing SARCs (in states where they were first introduced) to other states and government agencies through the Network of SARCs – a platform for all SARCs nationwide to share

knowledge, lessons and best practice – and the Network of Justice Sector Reform Teams – comprised of teams in 31 states responsible for promoting the replication of successful justice initiatives. The aim was to galvanise government commitment for SARCs to be sustained and replicated across more locations.

RoLAC supported the annual meeting of the Network of SARCs for five consecutive years. The aim was to facilitate an exchange of ideas, share lessons learned, and promote dialogue among SARCs, government institutions, and other stakeholders to strengthen support services provided to survivors of sexual violence. The annual forum also provided the opportunity for states without a SARC (“observer” states) but interested in having one to learn about the approach and receive technical support.

### Advocacy

The programme embarked on advocacy and public awareness campaigns with targeted messages about the importance of SARCs and the role of government and citizens working together to ensure their sustainability.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-protection>

<sup>3</sup> Gender Assessment of Northeast Nigeria (MCN, 2017)

“

The state of affairs is quite dire... we need to look beyond legislation and focus on the deep systemic norms that allow gender-based violence to continue to thrive. We must all take part in providing safe spaces for survivors... support services need to be available not only during a crisis but in the days, weeks, months and years that follow.”

Professor Yemi Osibanjo, Vice President, Federal Republic of Nigeria

Gender-focused civil society representatives were supported to draw the attention of key government influencers – the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, the Nigerian Governors Forum, and the Governors Wives Forum – to the increasing cases of gender-based violence. The aim was to highlight the enormity of the problem and to recommend concrete actions that could be taken in response.

The programme also worked to change perceptions and remove the stigma associated with SGBV more widely with Nigerian citizens via innovative platforms such as social media campaigns, comedy and films created by the RoLAC-supported #HerStoryOurStory campaign. The aim was to highlight the systemic, attitudinal and behavioural factors that sustain an ineffective response to SGBV, raise awareness about SARC services, and highlight how government and civil society can contribute to positive change.

“

For survivors of SGBV to get justice, the culture of silence must be dealt with.”

Bukola Afeni, reporter, Newsday Online



## RESULTS

### More SARCs established across Nigeria

By the end of 2021, the number of SARCs in Nigeria has increased from nine to 32. SARCs now operate in 19 states (before they existed only in eight). Technical and/or funding support was provided by RoLAC to 15 state ministries of health, justice and women's affairs to establish SARCs. Twenty-eight out of 32 SARCs are located within premises provided by state governments with personnel seconded from state government ministries.

“

Alimosho is not only one of the largest local government areas, it has the highest sexual and gender-based violence crime rates in the state. It is comforting that the SARC is being strategically and intentionally located there.”

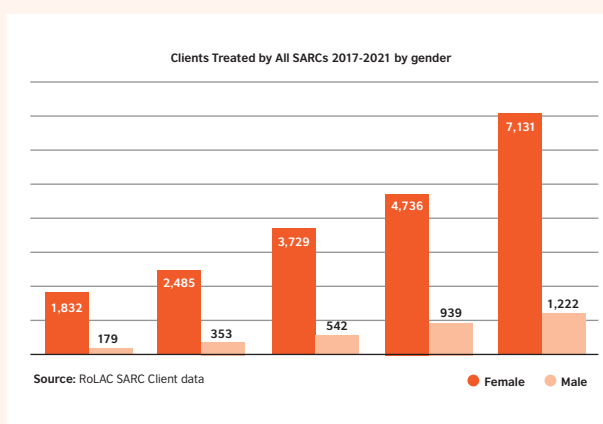
Dr Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, First Lady, Lagos state

### More specialists benefitted from capacity building

To ensure that effective services were delivered at the SARCs, training and mentoring was coordinated by the SARC Network and provided to over 200 state medical personnel, social workers and centre managers across 19 states. Key areas of focus included forensic medical examinations; counselling; and the effective management of the centres.

### More survivors accessing SARC services

More SARCs have led to a corresponding increase in the number of survivors of sexual assault accessing SARC services. A total of 23,148 survivors have received assistance from the SARCs (between 2017 and 2021). The majority of SARC clients (86 per cent) are female. However, the number of male clients increased by over 600 per cent from 2017-21.



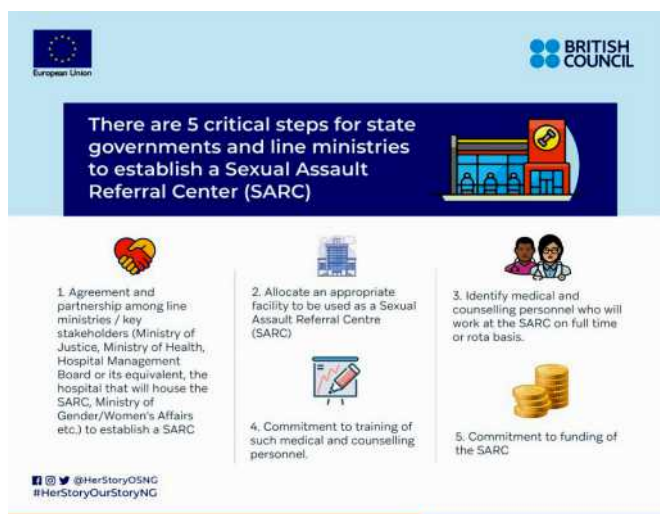
## SARC: A trusted model

The SARC approach has been accepted as an effective model for supporting victims of sexual violence and coordinating inter-agency response to SGBV. The approach has gained recognition and placed SARCs on the agenda of the Nigeria Governors Forum with more states adopting the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law, a comprehensive legislation against SGBV and other harmful practices; the Presidential Inter-Ministerial Management Committee for the Eradication of GBV; and the Federal Ministry for Humanitarian Affairs, which is planning to establish a SARC in each of the six geopolitical zones.



We must take the issue of getting justice for SGBV victims very seriously. Each one of us ought to be an ambassador in the fight against SGBV.”

Dr Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, First Lady, Lagos state



## LESSONS LEARNED

### SARC start-up can build gradually.

In an ideal situation, a formal agreement amongst all critical stakeholder ministries in the state provides the critical foundation for the set-up and sustainability of the SARCs. Each ministry would outline their responsibilities, budgetary and resource commitments in a memorandum of understanding, which is then agreed and signed by all the stakeholder ministries.

In reality, there are varying social and political context across states and securing the commitment and agreement of all critical ministries at the same time may not always be possible. In most states, SARCs developed

by starting small, driven by the advocacy and effort of a few passionate individuals within at least one key ministry, built on the basis of loose agreements, and sustained by the gradual expansion of commitments, partnerships and ownership among the critical stakeholder institutions.

### Maintaining quality services in existing SARCs is critical to expansion.

The programme's engagement did not solely focus on the replication and establishment of new SARCs. It also focused on ensuring that the existing SARCs remained afloat through the availability of resources and a continuous improvement in the quality of services. This was achieved through mentoring and peer learning. The absence of these key pillars could discourage victims from using the SARCs. Furthermore, poor patronage and poor perception could also discourage states from investing resources to replicate SARCs.

### Sustained advocacy is required for SARCs to be prioritised.

SARCs have become an established part of the health, justice and social support landscape. To reach this stage involved sustained advocacy to raise awareness and advocate for more SARCs using important platforms, such as the Network of SARCs and the #HerStoryOurStory campaign. Continued advocacy will be important moving forward, as 17 states still do not have SARCs and less than 10 per cent of SGBV cases are reported.

### Partnerships between governments, CSOs and donors encourage new SARCs.

Due to competing demands on government funds, some states may be hesitant to commit to the initial investment required to set up SARCs. One way to address this is to encourage partnerships between government, donors and CSOs to provide technical support and funding for the set-up costs.



Building partnerships with key stakeholders and non-state actors, including the private sector, is imperative for expanding and sustaining the work of the SARCs by the government.”

Professor Joy Ezeilo, Chairperson, Network of SARCs



If we want the country to grow, we must address SGBV holistically. We must work together and collaborate.”

Dame Pauline Tallen, Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

### Find out more

Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption (RoLAC) Programme  
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www.justice-security.ng