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South Saharan Social Development Organization  
Enugu: 13 Link Road Independence Layout Enugu  
Tel: +234 8170534914, +234 9091925323. +234 8051774677  
Abuja: House No 1. 212 Road, Global Estate Mborah 11  
Off Thames Str, Alvan Ikoku Way, Maitama Abuja

## **THE AWAKENING POLICY BRIEF SERIES**

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### **COMBATTING RAPE AND RAPE CULTURE IN ENUGU STATE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigerian youths make up 50% of the population [1] yet their involvement in the political process is limited. Research and findings showed that this limited political participation is a threat to the country's democracy and development. Most young men and women are unaware of their constitutional rights and responsibilities and are unfamiliar with how to hold their elected and appointed officials accountable. In both rural and urban areas youths' participation in governance remains poor with little or no communication between young people and decision makers resulting in poorly designed and targeted projects, lack of accountability and financial mismanagement in government and the private sector.

To address this identified problem, South Saharan Social Development Organisation [2] initiated the Awakening Program [3], with funding from OSIWA/DFID [4] [5]. The Awakening is a citizen's enlightenment and action programme that is building the capacity of youth in the South East of Nigeria on citizens' rights and responsibility, democracy, good governance and public accountability through a weekly radio programme aired across the entire South East states of Nigeria complimented by social media engagement and capacity building training of key youth groups; with the aim of consolidating Nigeria's democracy and political governance through greater citizen's awareness and engagement on governance issues, improved voter education and guidance, representation of women in the political space and service delivery.

## **SCOPE OF PROBLEM**

The occurrence of rape and sexual assault has become quite endemic in Enugu state. Between 2014 and 2019, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Enugu (supported by the Rule of law and anti-corruption (RoLAC) programme), recorded 971 cases of sexual violence in Enugu, Nigeria out of which 96% were perpetrated on females. The rape of one woman is a degradation, terror, and limitation to all women. Most women and girls live in this fear and are constantly advised to limit their behaviour because of the existence of rape.

Rape culture is an environment, or a society, where rape is prevalent and where sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Behaviours commonly associated with rape culture include victim blaming, slut-shaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by sexual violence, or a combination of these. Rape culture also focuses on teaching women how to avoid getting raped, rather than putting measures in place to ensure that rapists are discouraged and punished suitably for their crimes. Women are tasked with always being conscious of what they wear, where they go, how they talk, what time they move around, who they associate with, how they react to advances from men, and how their words and actions may be interpreted. All with the aim of avoiding rape. However, not enough measures are put in place to discourage and punish rapists.

## **APPROACH**

The Awakening phone in radio programme featured a topic on *'Combatting Rape and Dismantling Rape Culture: The Role of the Government'* where citizens raised their concerns on the issue of rape and society's attitude towards it. The programme was aired on Coal City FM 92.9, Heartland FM 100.5 Owerri, Pacesetter FM 103.5 Umuahia, Purity FM 102.5 Awka, Unity FM 101.5 Abakaliki, between 4:30pm-5:30pm.

Key issues and questions raised include :

- What steps can the Ministry of Gender Affairs take to deter rape and other sexual offences?
- Is there a way for members of society to be properly sensitized on issues surrounding rape and rape culture?
- Are there convenient reporting channels for victims and are the members of the public aware of these channels?

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

With respect to the issues raised by the audience during the radio engagement process, the following policy recommendations have been suggested to help put a stop to the issue of rape in Enugu State:

- Commence public enlightenment programmes to sensitize communities on the negative effects of blaming and stereotyping rape victims, and the importance of consent in sexual relations.
- Create a structure that makes it easy for likely victims of Rape or Sexual Abuse to report cases to Ministry of Gender Affairs and the police force.
- Create a public register of sexual offenders to deter potential offenders and alert the public of predators in their midst.
- Create safe spaces programmes for women and children to empower them on their rights and the need to stop the culture of silence on issues affecting them

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