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## A Mother's Resilience: Juliet's Journey to Reunite With Her Children

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*Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria, affecting countless women and girls across the country. Despite ongoing efforts to combat this scourge, many continue to suffer in silence, enduring physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. The effects of GBV on victims are profound, often leading to long-term trauma, health complications, and a pervasive sense of fear and helplessness. In addition to the immediate harm inflicted, victims frequently face societal stigmatization, further isolating them and complicating their paths to recovery and justice.*

*In the face of such adversity, the story of Juliet Ngene stands out as a poignant example of resilience and the transformative power of dedicated support systems. Juliet, a mother of five, endured relentless abuse and unfounded accusations from her husband. Her journey, marked by separation from her children and prolonged suffering, highlights the critical role that organizations like the South Saharan Social*

*Through their efforts, Juliet was ultimately reunited with her children, showcasing a powerful narrative of hope and recovery amidst the pervasive issue of gender-based violence in Nigeria.*

Juliet Ngene is a devoted mother of five and a tailor. Her husband who is supposed to be the family's breadwinner is a bricklayer, whose job is seasonal. To make ends meet and support her family, she travels to Onitsha to buy materials which she resells in Enugu. From her proceeds, she caters to feeding and also pays the house rent. Sometimes, she also loans her husband money to help him sort out other bills.

Things took a harrowing turn when Juliet's husband's attitude changed towards her. He became abusive and leveled unfounded accusations against her.

Due to the nature of her job, she had to make several trips to purchase materials. And as a result on some occasions won't be able to make it back home. On those occasions, she'd stay with her sister in Onitsha.

"He kept accusing me of sleeping with other people. And he knows I have to make those trips to support the family. I will explain myself to him and that in itself will be a precursor for slaps and heavy beatings,"

"I have told him that anytime I can't make it home I'd stay at my sister's, then come to Enugu the next day. That didn't seem to help. If I come home late due to the distance, he would insult me that I have gone out with my lovers. I couldn't do anything right in his eyes,"

"No matter what I said, he never believed me. Going home after work became a nightmare," she shared. His accusations were a pretext for driving Juliet out of their home in Enugu.

The husband reported the case to the kinsmen who summoned the wife and her sister to the meeting. She gave her side of the story which the elders fact-checked with the sister. Despite her honest explanations and the corroboration from her sister, who confirmed she stayed with her during late returns from business trips, her husband remained unyielding.

Desperate to sever ties, Juliet's husband took drastic measures. He seized control of the properties, most of which Juliet had purchased, and took their children away. He dispersed the children among his relatives, sending three to Abuja and the two girls, Blessing, 16, and Divine, 11, to his sister in Ngwo, Enugu. For months, Juliet was cut off from her children, unable to contact them or ensure their well-being.

Lost and confused, she decided to visit her husband's village to complain about his actions. And to also make inquiries and find out where are kids are But this yielded no results.

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were malnourished and poorly cared for. When she attempted to take them with her, her husband threatened her, stating, "If I ever see you close to this place, I will deal with you."

To worsen matters, she realized that her husband's sister who had custody of the girls sent one to go and live with someone else in Anambra. SSDO's Gender Officer discovered this while interviewing the older girl Blessing, "I would have run away from my aunt's house, but I couldn't because I didn't know where my sister was taken to. I was scared and worried for her."

Despite the threats, Juliet persisted. Her search for assistance led her to SSDO. The Gender Protection Lead at SSDO connected her with NAPTIP, and together they began the arduous process of reuniting Juliet with her children. By May 23, their relentless efforts bore fruit, and custody of her children was restored to Juliet.

Juliet's prolonged struggle was exacerbated by her health issues, which left her bedridden and unable to search for her children sooner. "I was very ill and couldn't move for days. It was only after my recovery that I could start looking for my children," she explained.

After two grueling years of separation, malnourishment, and emotional pain, Juliet was finally reunited with her daughters, thanks to the unwavering support of SSDO and NAPTIP. Overwhelmed with gratitude, Juliet expressed, "I cannot appreciate SSDO enough for their efforts. Only God can repay you back. I am very happy and grateful."

Juliet Ngene's story underscores the critical role of organizations like SSDO in combating gender-based violence and advocating for the rights and well-being of vulnerable individuals. Her journey from despair to reunion is a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact of compassion and advocacy in transforming lives.

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Sincerely,  
South Saharan Social Development Organization Team.

South Saharan Social Development Organization is a nonprofit based in Enugu State, Nigeria.



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