



## Violence Against Women Nigeria Policy Brief

### Introduction

Before COVID-19 overtook the headlines, the year 2020 was set to be a critical moment for women's rights and gender equality –with an unprecedented number of political milestones and anniversaries– marking an era of accelerated progress for holistic gender equality and bolder action to deliver on commitments for all women, particularly those affected by conflict.<sup>1,2</sup>

On 9th March 2020 –what should have been the first day of the 64th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)– Women for Women International launched '**Unheard. Unseen. A Global Agenda for Action**'.<sup>3</sup> This advocacy agenda provided analysis on the key challenges that were halting progress for marginalized women in fragile and conflict-affected states and identifies five priority action areas and related recommendations where urgent action is needed by global leaders. One of these action areas focuses on ending violence against women (VAW) and calls for increased funding and delivery of a survivor-centered approach to all forms of violence against women affected by conflict.

Two days after the launch of 'Unheard. Unseen.', the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

As the world grappled with this new crisis, many of the priorities and recommendations set out within this Agenda for Action became even more critical, relevant, and urgent, especially as the secondary effects of the pandemic exacerbated gender-based violence around the world and threatened years of progress.<sup>4</sup>

Into 2021, violence against women continued to be one of the most pervasive human rights violations.<sup>5</sup> Globally, 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, and that rate is much higher in conflict and post-conflict settings.<sup>6</sup> In Nigeria, VAW is often rooted in widely accepted harmful social norms and practices that contribute to gender inequality more broadly; 21.4% of Nigerian women face physical and/or sexual violence in the hands of their partner or husband, and 1 in every 5 women endure female genital mutilation, notably in southern Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable women, including increased rates of VAW. In 2020 alone, 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 faced violence from an intimate partner.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to intimate partner violence (IPV), VAW can take many forms and includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, taking away someone's right to make decisions, and economic deprivation – both inside and outside of the home. These forms of violence are intimately linked with women's overall wellbeing, including physical health, mental health, financial security, and capacity to participate in their community and society.

Women for Women International gathered qualitative and quantitative data from 2019 to 2021 to learn about VAW in communities where we work in Nigeria, inform our programming and elevate relevant policy recommendations that will support actors across the development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding triple nexus to end violence for all women, everywhere, and especially in crises.



**Violence against women and its complex, long-lasting and multi-dimensional consequences undermine the achievement of women's rights and the successful delivery of the SDGs and WPS agenda.**

*(Cited from Women for Women International's "Unheard. Unseen. - A Global Agenda for Action")*

## Methodology

Since 2000, Women for Women International has reached over 76,000 women and over 11,500 male leaders, community members, and male family members of women in its core Stronger Women, Stronger Nations program and supplemental Male Engagement and Change Agents programs in Nigeria. These briefs were developed following multiple qualitative and quantitative survey activities including:

- In-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) 2019 with 12 male and female community leaders and 59 community members from Riyom and Pankshin local government areas (LGAs);
- Program data collected from a sample of participants between 2020-2021; and
- Key informant interviews with 20 participants across 10 states, and phone-based surveys with 722 current and former program participants in Plateau, Bauchi, and Kaduna States in 2020 to learn about the impacts of COVID-19.

There is substantial evidence showing that violence against women generally increases during conflict, economic crises, and increased militarization in communities. Women for Women International contributes to this body of evidence with context-specific data over a unique three-year period on the themes of:

- Acceptability and prevalence of:
  - Economic and financial control
  - Physical violence against women
  - Rape, including marital rape
  - Community intervention
- Compliance with laws versus traditional local customs
- Community resources and support available to women experiencing VAW

# Recommendations Summary

## 1) Humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sector stakeholders should increase and enhance coordination, localization, and partnerships to end GBV and support survivors in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

### Coordination

- A) Governments and international organizations must incorporate and prioritize funding for GBV risk mitigation across all the triple nexus' response strategies.
- B) International community should continue its support to the health system during and post-conflict, prioritizing women's health care and referral systems for GBV.
- C) Prioritize violence prevention and recovery, acknowledging the increased risk of many types of violence affecting women and vulnerable groups during times of crisis, by categorizing protection and response services as lifesaving, essential, and non-negotiable as part of aid and security responses.
- D) Governments and agencies strengthen the ability of non-specialist mental health and psycho-social support actors to deliver psychological first aid as part of the current humanitarian response.
- E) UN agencies, governments and international organizations ensure accountability to existing global frameworks of protection is a cross-sectoral mandate to support implementation of GBV prevention and social norms change strategies so that even the most marginalized communities are aware of their rights to protection and redress.

### Localization and Partnerships

- A) Prioritize partnerships with local women's rights organizations (WROs) providing services to survivors
- B) Services delivered should include context-adapted sexual and reproductive health services, access to justice, mental health and psychosocial support, the creation of safe spaces, economic empowerment, and community sensitization and mobilization to challenge stigma and discrimination.

## 2) Donors must invest in integrated, survivor-centered, and localized approaches that:

### A) Address root causes and community norms and support context-specific redress and support mechanisms:

An integrated and survivor-centered approach –which emphasizes women's economic power as well as norms change– is necessary to address root causes of violence against women and achieve tangible change in the daily lives of women.

This type of holistic graduation model is one we have developed and led over the past 26 years to support women to heal, thrive, and take ownership of their futures, even within the most challenging conflict settings. Weak redress structures must be reinforced or replaced to counter the pessimism that survivors experience when they seek support or justice in Nigeria.

### B) Emphasize partnerships for practically accessible support resources for women including:

Community-based protection mechanisms and strengthened referrals systems and direct services for GBV survivors.

**C) Support ongoing engagement with prospective allies and champions including:**

Men, family members, and community members. Funding should support women advocates, male champions, formal and non-formal groups to broker community-level agreements with government and traditional power holders.

**D) Grow and strengthen community-based organizations, networks, and groups to develop strategies and priorities for preventing VAW and supporting survivors.**

**3) Recommendations for Nigeria-specific policies, implementation of laws, and redress mechanisms to end VAW**

**A)** Decision-makers and powerholders at all levels and across all sectors in Nigeria must do more to better prevent and respond to violence, not only through the passing of laws, but through the implementation of simple and effective community-wide guidelines.

**B)** Government stakeholders should conduct regular meetings with civil society to prioritize VAW issues, look into and address harmful traditional practices that affect women in the community, and integrate civil society participation on both policy development and implementation.

**C)** Create a survivor database and psychosocial support groups for survivors of VAW in Nigeria where they can share experiences, assist, and support one another to get through it and speak against issues of VAW.

**D)** Community influencers such as traditional leaders and religious leaders –who mold societal opinions and narratives– must support women and begin to change the narrative and norms that perpetuate harmful cultural practices that are inimical to gender equality, equity, and justice. This could be supported through additional targeted awareness raising campaigns and community dialogue meetings as platforms for community leaders to champion an end to VAW.

## Context: Nigeria and Violence Against Women

Despite the passing of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in 2015, which prohibits violence against any persons in public or private life,<sup>9</sup> VAW remains pervasive across Nigeria.

The VAPP legislation includes provisions for and protections against physical offenses including those that disproportionately affect women such as “...female genital mutilation; forceful ejection from home; forced financial dependence or economic abuse; forced isolation; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; harmful widowhood practices; and spousal battery, among others.”<sup>10</sup> However, the Nigerian Constitution does not recognize marital rape as a crime, and includes a section which says that a man cannot be convicted of rape of his wife, as long as his wife has reached puberty.<sup>11</sup>

This leaves marital rape as an important loophole and oversight in the VAW protections framework between the VAPP and Constitution in Nigeria.

Though the government passed VAPP at the national level, and is now seeking to expand the legislative scope and language, only 18 out of Nigeria’s 36 states have adopted the VAPP legislation to make it binding law within that state.<sup>12</sup>

This sporadic and incomplete countrywide adoption may pose a challenge to the implementation of any comprehensive VAW legal framework within Nigeria and may create space for sociocultural norms and traditions to supersede legal permissibility when it comes to the acceptability of VAW.

## Findings

### ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Interviewers and facilitators in Nigeria focused their discussion with community members on attitudes about VAW, common forms of VAW (physical violence, marital rape and sexual violence, economic deprivation, and harmful traditional practices), ways to respond to incidents of violence, and resources available for survivors. While some of the community leaders and members interviewed acknowledged certain acts of VAW as unacceptable, there are persistent practices and attitudes that perpetuate VAW normalization in the community.

While many community leaders in the 2019 research findings stressed there have been some positive changes regarding VAW, their responses illustrated an overall trend of harmful community attitudes toward VAW that perpetuate its practice. This suggests that there is a gap between the perception of change and the actual transformation of attitudes and experiences of VAW.

Supplemental data collected from phone surveys in May 2020 and program data collected from 2020 to 2021 further illustrate how COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown and recovery have affected these pre-existing trends.

#### 1. Physical Violence

Among the community members and leaders who participated in the 2019 interviews and FGDs, there were mixed views on the acceptability and normalization of domestic physical abuse. Police officers, medical professionals, and male community leaders across Riyom and Pankshin expressed their view that men should not beat their wives.

They specifically cited the laws or Christian religious tenets that they felt explicitly prohibit such practice or described how modernization within the community has stigmatized the practice. Other community members and public servants cited drinking and 'wickedness' as the unique circumstances prompting men to beat women for no reason.

“**There is no law that said if a woman offends her husband, he should beat her.**”

*(Male Community Leader, Pankshin)*

However, other community leaders including medical professionals and community leaders in both Pankshin and Riyom cited what they perceived to be 'justifications' for beating a woman, such as stubbornness or coming home late. Additionally, it was women medical professionals and community leaders that stated that they would encourage women to "endure and be prayerful" in cases of domestic violence rather than seek intervention.

In the 2019 FGDs, men and women community members from both Riyom and Pankshin acknowledged the practice of men beating their wives as occurring within their community and expressed that women are to blame or that they should "be patient" and tolerate or endure the beatings. Men and women alike suggested that a woman might be the cause or reason for her husband beating her, or that she is committing a "repeat offense" or that a husband only beats her if he questions her character.

“**We don't allow a woman to be beaten but when she behaves stubborn you beat her a little, not to wound her but to remind her that she is under the influence of a man and for her to also know that she is wrong.**”

*(Male Community Leader, Riyom)*

Two women from Riyom countered that a husband beating his wife was not acceptable and that a woman could eventually seek divorce if the beatings did not stop.

“**If she is wrong, I will tell her to stop it because that might be what her husband doesn't like and why he is always beating her. Then she should start doing what pleases him so he will stop beating her.**”

*(Woman, Riyom)*

The phone surveys conducted in May 2020 following the onset of COVID-19 revealed that lockdown measures had mixed effects on the at-home family relationship. Of the 722 respondents interviewed, 73% reported that the pandemic and lockdown positively influenced their family relationship because they were spending more time together to dialogue, perform household tasks, and care for children. This group reported that they were more united with their spouses than before in the face of growing burdens and challenges of the pandemic, despite reporting overall deterioration of their financial stability and general wellbeing.

The 22% of respondents who reported a negative effect on their family relationship cited increased arguments and stress over money, food, and the ability to provide for their respective families. These responses are more aligned with conventional theory that financial insecurity increases IPV prevalence.<sup>14</sup> Considering that the aggregate national data from Nigeria during this time also indicated an increase in VAW, it is interesting that it was a minority of our rapid assessment respondents that felt the pandemic had a predominantly negative effect on household and partner relationships.<sup>15</sup>

Although the COVID-19 rapid assessment did not explicitly ask about incidents of violence or community attitudes, the volunteered self-reporting of improved relationships with spouses indicates that there was not an outsized increase in VAW incidence within the household.

## 2. Marital Rape

Based on their responses in 2019, community leaders offered mixed views on the prevalence of marital rape. One police officer cited that he had not heard of such cases being brought to the police station whereas another said that it “happened a lot in [this] community.” A religious leader noted that in the past husbands felt they could and should demand sex as their right, but that he felt Christianity had offered scripture on consent which “has settled this issue.”

“**Sometimes the woman will go to the farm and come home tired and hungry, yet the man will want to have sex with her. This happens but it is not fair.**”

*(Woman, Riyom)*

In contrast to the mixed views shared by male community leaders, all women leaders and women community members that we spoke with confirmed and lamented the prevalence of this practice.

One woman leader held the view that because the woman is his wife, she must have sex when he wants to. Another woman leader explained that if a wife refuses sex, some husbands will think this is because she is having sex with other men. Women in the community regarded the practice as unfair and described various coping strategies intended to support them in enduring rather than speaking out.

### 3. Rape

Though one police officer opined that there were not many rape cases in the community, most of the community members –men and women alike– described its prevalence and the attitudes toward rape that blamed the women victims for dressing "indecently" or not crying out when raped. Community members shared examples of the questions that people may ask women and examples of women's actions they described as "irresponsible" that the community might use to discredit or delegitimize a woman's rape claim.

“**People tend to think that she must have contributed in one way or the other. If it has happened, she will be called and if she dressed indecently, she will be told her dressing mode caused it. Yes, sometimes people blame the girl.**”

*(Police Officer, Pankshin)*

“**Our mode of dressing at times encourages that. When you are decent it will be difficult to experience rape, indecent dress can promote that hence some men cannot control their urge.**”

*(Woman, Pankshin)*

### 4. Economic Deprivation

Most community members described men's control over their wives' finances as normal and common. However, police officers in Riyom and Pankshin acknowledged that not all accept the practice and women in Riyom and Pankshin also described some of the growing negative stigma associated with a man "snatching" his wife's earnings.

“**People will meet him and talk to him; he will be told that what he is doing to his wife is wrong. How can his wife [be] struggling and he will be snatching her earnings? It will be seen on her so people will talk about it. So it is not accepted in the community.**”

*(Woman, Riyom)*

Men who were interviewed were in favor of maintaining knowledge or control of their wives' finances and cited a broader sense of ownership of their wives' earnings and their wives themselves as their property. A medical professional and a community leader described the ways in which women do not have the right to manage, nor even claim, her own earnings or agricultural yield.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown exacerbated incidences of economic deprivation across the population. In May 2020, 99% of our survey respondents in Nigeria indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their ability to earn income. Before the pandemic, 54% of the respondents reported that they were actively engaged in income-generating activities. However, the lockdown implemented by the Federal and State Governments in the effort to curb transmission contributed to 76% of respondents reporting that their weekly income had gone down and 24% no longer earning any income.

Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and periodic lockdowns that have been instituted have had harmful effects across the population and, based on the pre-existing community attitudes and normalization of the economic deprivation of women, have had a disproportionate impact on women in these fragile and conflict-affected communities.

## CUSTOMS VERSUS LAWS

Though many FCAS have laws, institutions and policies that seek to prevent GBV, protect women's rights, and foster their progress – these can be symbolic, lacking enforcement, and weakened by conflict. Further, marginalized women typically lack the means or information necessary to access such mechanisms, and their ability to do so is also mediated by their families or customary institutions.<sup>16</sup> At the global level, agendas and frameworks largely fail to prioritise needs of women in FCAS due to a systemic lack of representation from women's advocates and collectives.<sup>17</sup> Analysed via the 'Social Transformative' approach used by the Netherlands government, the intersecting exclusions faced by marginalized women in FCAS are rooted in patriarchal power asymmetries that favor men and oppress women.<sup>18</sup>

These gendered inequalities of power are held in place by formal mechanisms (laws, policies and resource allocations) and informal mechanisms (cultural norms and practices) that have a profound impact on women's individual and systemic access to opportunities, rights, and entitlements.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes articulated as gender norms (values, beliefs, customs), these informal mechanisms are entrenched in culture, operating at the systemic, community, and individual levels.<sup>15</sup>

The entrenchment of these harmful attitudes and norms often means that women are not aware of their rights and therefore do not speak up for them. For example, national statistics provided by the World Bank show that 24% of Nigerian men and 34% of Nigerian women believe it is acceptable to beat a wife in certain situations.<sup>19</sup>

The findings from FGDs and KIs in Riyom and Pankshin local government areas (LGAs), as outlined in this brief, align with the national level statistics, with many community members expressing their perceived justifications for a man beating his wife.

Whether or not a community member held positive or negative attitudes linked to a specific act of VAW, they often cited broader harmful attitudes about men having the right to control their family or being the head of a family with women as subordinate.

For example, a male community leader who viewed beating one's wife as unacceptable still felt that women should not "out-step their bound" while they protect their rights.



**National laws are better because traditions have it that everything belonging to a woman is her husband's property. They will ask if she had it before she got married to her husband, but national laws protect and guarantee women to own property.**

*(Woman, Riyom)*



**The traditional laws abuse the right of the women; in the tradition the women is not considered as anything in the house.**

*(Woman, Pankshin)*

Regarding property rights and related to economic deprivation, a community leader in Riyom specifically cited that the practice of sharing inheritance with women was still not accepted in the community, indicating additional tension between law and traditional practice.



Men held mixed preferences for traditions versus laws and where a male community leader or community member preferred local traditions, it was often explicitly to preserve control or rights over women and their family.

“**National law should be followed than that of the tradition, because we all follow the National law, if you break any law sanction will follow. That of the tradition is mainly to govern the affairs of a village while the National one encompasses both, so it is stronger.**”

*(Man, Pankshin)*

This cultural domain is particularly resistant to change and progress on formal policies or laws does not automatically shift it.<sup>20</sup> Positively, many male and female community leaders –including police, religious leaders, and traditional leaders– shared their perception that positive change is occurring. But, any attempts to reduce VAW must include a long-term commitment to catalyse and see through the necessary transformational change in the power relations, especially cultural norms and practices, that reinforce women’s unequal status and limited access to rights and resources.



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

In Nigeria, 88% of the population considers religion a driving force in their lives,<sup>21</sup> and research has often framed religious leaders as a pervasive influence on progressive societal views.<sup>22</sup> Some religious leaders continue to defend certain types of VAW, especially when the wife threatens the position of the husband as head of the household.

Religious leaders identified the church, social welfare, police, vigilante groups, village elders, and organizations such as Women for Women International and the Red Cross as resources for assisting women. However, religious leaders were more likely to recommend that women seek assistance within the home or through the church first, with a notable exception for land disputes which one religious leader felt was better settled by law enforcement. This discouragement by religious leaders of women seeking formal support outside the family or church for issues of VAW creates an environment where women may not seek support when facing domestic violence or are encouraged to endure rather than avail themselves of community resources.

“**Not to police, start at home if it cannot be resolved at home then you look elsewhere.**”

*(Male Community Leader)*

Medical professionals and police voiced their own intolerance towards most types of VAW. This places them as key potential actors in re-shaping attitudes among the community leaders and members. Police officers that were interviewed claim to uphold the law when it comes to judging violence against women; they often expressed their objection to husbands controlling their wives’ income and consider beatings unacceptable. While some continue to perceive rape and abuse within the household as problems of the past, many police officers indicated their willingness to partner with other community leaders and groups to address VAW.



**For example, during cases like this [beating] some of them run to the law enforcement agencies and then to the Ward Head and/or the District Heads. Although they always started with the ward heads and district heads.** ”

*(Police Officer)*

Police officers cited vigilante security groups, traditional leaders (Ward/District heads), religious leaders, police, village elders, human rights and development groups as specific examples of partners they may seek out when addressing VAW cases. Nevertheless, because of their low capacity and the disinclination of the community to turn to the police as a first resort, the impact of the police on preventing or addressing VAW is limited thus far.<sup>34</sup>

In general, medical professionals expressed that they do not condone beating women and that they hold the men accountable for VAW, yet they often recommend the women to be patient and endure the violence as a means of harm reduction. They assert that men hardly admit to perpetrating violence against a woman, and “may try to cover up that she fell or something else” (Medical Professional, Pankshin).

Woman leaders listed many people, resources, and agencies available to support women including a woman’s own family, law enforcement officers, the courts, social welfare offices, community & traditional leaders, church, women’s groups, Village Savings and Loan Associations, and the Berom Development Association. One woman community leader indicated that she would try to intervene in a case of domestic violence to reason directly with the couple, but if unsuccessful she would then escalate it further to a Ward or District Head.

Women from both communities described a community support network that included parents, elders, village leaders, religious leaders, vigilante groups, social welfare, court, and other women’s groups. Unfortunately, several women explained that although such support networks and resources exist, there is social stigma associated with using such resources and “taking the matter out” of the home.



**Some men will accuse you of having a relationship with [the] reverend [if you seek their help], if not why will you go there.** ”

*(Woman, Riyom)*

For their part, men stated that a woman could seek support from her parents or family elders as well as village leaders, religious leaders, police groups, social welfare, human rights offices, and court. However, in Riyom a few men shared that within their community there were no formal structures to support women beyond family, community leaders, and local vigilante groups as the police had left due to conflict and instability in the area.



**There is no structure on ground except her family intervenes but there is no structure to assist the woman.** ”

*(Man, Riyom)*

Many leaders and community members also cited insufficient resources and will to support women experiencing violence. For example, though both religious leaders identified resources and agencies that could assist women, one felt that the community was not taking “deliberate” actions to support women experiencing violence.

**“ The traditional institution tries to adjudicate such issue but there is no deliberate resource or step taken within the community to support women against violence. ”**

*(Religious Leader)*

Male community leaders stated that community leaders, religious leaders, police, Women Lawyers' group, and organizations like Women for Women International can provide support to women; however, leaders noted that resources are inadequate to meet the need. Interestingly, one male community member said he feels the community is not trying to create more resources for women because:

Another woman who mentioned the various resources and channels available also felt that “the community has not taken any measure in assisting women who suffer from abuse and neglect by their husbands” leading to the feeling among many women that their efforts to seek support will be in vain.

Further, even if a support center is available in the nearest urban area, women often lack financial resources to get to the urban areas where the few support centers are located or are unable to take the time for the long trip.

Finally, the low capacity of service providers and government agencies result in bottlenecks when delivering prompt and timely survivor-centered services which often discourages survivors who perceive that their time and meager resources are spent without commensurate results or justice.

**“ [in] the community, most of the activities are being control[ed] by men, and men don't see it as an issue because it did not directly affect them. Therefore, they are not willing to do anything because as far as they are concern[ed] it is not a major issue. ”**

*(Male Community Leader, Pankshin)*

## Hopes for the Future

**“ Yes, there is a small change, because we are always advising them there is a law and anyone who is doing these things to women, we will take the law against him and they know there is a program like this. So, most of them have adjusted. ”**

*(Police Officer)*

Though attitudes in the community have been slow to change and the implementation of VAW legal frameworks have been challenged by inconsistent adoption, insufficient resources, and community stigma, many community members and leaders felt optimistic about the perceived changes thus far and the potential for the future.

Some police officers felt that because local leaders –themselves included– are working to bring awareness and act on violence against women, men are changing their behaviors.

All women leaders attest there have been changes in their communities. Women leaders said they have seen a reduction in violence against women, as well as other positive changes such as women conducting business. Some women leaders explained that traditional community leaders have begun talking about women's issues and they feel that because those leaders are speaking out and acting, attitudes and behaviors are starting to change.

Likewise, women in the community named a variety of positive changes they had observed in their communities ranging from reductions in violence against women, changes in men's behaviors toward women, community leader involvement, and women engaging in business and saving activities.

**“Honestly, there is change. At least the problem and crises over beating of wife have reduced seriously. Women have begun to take shape in doing their business to help the family. At least a woman now has the right and has a say in the family not like before.”**  
(*Woman Leader, Riyom*)

**“Yes, there are changes that have taken place. Because now if a case of VAW is brought before the community leader they respond swiftly and seriously. And this has made the men to also adjust because they don't want their wives to report them to the community leaders.”**  
(*Woman Leader, Riyom*)

A couple of women in Riyom noted possible sources of change including the presence of vigilante groups, as well as awareness raising efforts through the community by leaders and graduates of the Women for Women International Nigeria programs.

**“A woman who didn't know how to do business is now into business.”**  
(*Woman, Riyom*)

Men across both LGAs also described observing positive changes in their communities such as increased knowledge about violence against women, human rights, healthy living and family planning. Additionally, one man felt relationships between Berom and Fulani women had improved, strengthening social cohesion and women's networks within the community and reducing conflict and violence between the two ethnic groups.<sup>23</sup> Some men also noted decreases in instances of physical abuse of a husband against his wife while drunk and hearing fewer stories of women leaving home to go to her parents. But a man in Riyom cautioned that "isolated cases of violence" still occur.

While many men did cite positive changes, others continued to caveat that any support for women should still emphasize women's obedience to "what the man says at home". These comments from male community members in Riyom and Pankshin indicate the importance of continued engagement with men in the community to ensure a shared commitment to positive gender norms and ending VAW.

To commemorate the Global 16 Days Campaign in November 2021, women spoke up in a public forum on issues of violence against women including forced marriage, rape, economic deprivation, and social isolation. Participants in the Women for Women International programs explained how community attitudes and related barriers lead to GBV cases being buried or dismissed, and called for a stop to violence and a commitment to the same from men and community stakeholders.

Women themselves are beginning to recognize and amplify their demand for a future without GBV and for stronger community allies, resources, and survivor-centered services.

VAW is a deep-rooted and complex threat to women in FCAS. Entrenched and intergenerational traditional and patriarchal beliefs in Nigerian society, alongside the influence that stigma and some traditional leaders hold on people's behavior, pose certain challenges for the promotion of women's safety and rights in Nigerian communities.

The recommendations set forth in this policy brief address the role for actors at all levels in ending VAW, and emphasize the need for coordinated, long-term, and holistic programming and context-specific, community-driven protection and support services.

As Nigeria plans a COVID-19 recovery plan and continues to roll out its national level VAW legal framework, it will be critical to include women and prioritize the implementation of national protection and rights-based frameworks that address the harmful social norms that perpetuate violence against women.

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# Get in touch

**For our Global Policy and Advocacy Team,  
please contact:**

[advocacy@womenforwomen.org](mailto:advocacy@womenforwomen.org)

**US Office:**

[www.womenforwomen.org](http://www.womenforwomen.org)

**UK Office:**

[www.womenforwomen.org.uk](http://www.womenforwomen.org.uk)

**Germany Office:**

[www.womenforwomeninternational.de](http://www.womenforwomeninternational.de)



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