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To: Relevant Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), National Assembly, Judiciary, Law Enforcement Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, and Development Partners

Ending Femicide and Other Harmful Discriminatory Practices Against Women and Girls in Nigeria

Executive Summary

Femicide and other harmful discriminatory practices against women and girls remain a grave human rights crisis in Nigeria, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, weak legal enforcement, and societal acceptance of gender-based violence. While Nigeria has ratified key international conventions and enacted some progressive legislation like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), the prevalence of these abuses, including intimate partner femicide, female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and discriminatory customary laws, continues unabated.

This brief highlights the urgency of the situation and offers actionable recommendations for a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to prevent, protect, and prosecute these violations, ultimately fostering a society where women and girls can live free from violence and discrimination. Crucially, the full domestication of the Maputo Protocol is presented as a vital step in strengthening Nigeria's legal framework and ensuring comprehensive protection for women and girls.

Baobab for Women's Human Rights, a non-profit, non-governmental, and non-religious women's human rights organization committed to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls in Nigeria, advocates for the immediate domestication of the Maputo Protocol as a foundational step towards achieving genuine gender equality and ensuring the success of the Special Seats Bill.

The Challenge: A Silent War Against Women and Girls

Nigeria, with its diverse cultural and legal landscape, presents a complex environment for women's human rights.

Despite constitutional guarantees against discrimination, many women and girls are subjected to systemic violence and harmful practices that deny them their fundamental rights and often lead to their deaths.

1. Femicide: The Ultimate Form of Gender-Based Violence

Femicide, defined as the gender-related killing of women and girls, is alarmingly prevalent. In 2022 alone, 401 women reportedly died as a result of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in

Nigeria. Data for 2024 indicates 135 femicide incidents resulting in 149 deaths, with 17 incidents and 19 deaths already recorded in 2025 (as of April 2025).

These statistics are likely an underestimation due to significant underreporting, normalization, and dismissal of such cases. Femicide often stems from escalating domestic violence, honor killings, and other forms of gender-based aggression, highlighting a societal crisis rooted in misogyny and impunity.

2. Harmful Discriminatory Practices:

Beyond femicide, a myriad of harmful practices perpetuate the subjugation of women and girls:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Nigeria has the highest absolute number of FGM cases globally, with approximately one-quarter of the estimated 115-130 million circumcised women worldwide residing in the country. This practice, deeply ingrained in some cultures, inflicts severe physical and psychological harm.

Child Marriage: The practice of marrying off young girls, often before they reach maturity, denies them education, exposes them to health risks associated with early pregnancies, and traps them in cycles of poverty and violence.

Discriminatory Customary and Religious Laws: Despite the 1999 Constitution prohibiting gender discrimination, customary and religious laws often supersede statutory provisions, particularly in matters of inheritance, property ownership, and marital rights. Women are often treated as chattel, denied inheritance, and in some cases, can even be inherited as property. Spousal battery is sometimes condoned under certain interpretations of religious laws, provided it does not inflict "serious injury."

Lack of Property and Inheritance Rights: Many customary laws deny women the right to own property, making them economically vulnerable and dependent, which further exacerbates their susceptibility to violence.

3. Weak Enforcement and Impunity:

While Nigeria has ratified international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and has enacted the VAPP Act (2015), implementation and enforcement remain significant challenges. Nigeria ratified the Maputo Protocol on December 16, 2004, and deposited its articles of ratification on February 18, 2005. However, it has unfortunately not yet domesticated the Protocol.

Underreporting and Lack of Data: Many cases of gender-based violence are not reported due to fear of stigmatization, lack of trust in the justice system, and societal pressure. Comprehensive national data collection on femicide and other harmful practices is inadequate, hindering effective policy responses.

Ineffective Justice System: The criminal justice system often fails to adequately investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators. This impunity emboldens offenders and perpetuates the cycle of violence. Challenges include insufficient resources for law enforcement, limited capacity of judicial officers in handling SGBV cases, and corruption.

Societal Norms and Attitudes: Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, harmful cultural beliefs, and misogynistic attitudes continue to normalize violence against women and girls, making it difficult to challenge and change these practices.

The Promise of the Maputo Protocol: A Comprehensive Framework

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), adopted in 2003, is a groundbreaking instrument that provides comprehensive rights for women and girls across the continent. Its domestication in Nigeria would offer significant benefits:

Comprehensive Legal Framework: The Maputo Protocol offers a holistic and legally binding framework covering a wide spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights for women. This includes explicit provisions on the right to life, dignity, integrity, and security, directly addressing the root causes of femicide and other forms of violence.

Prohibition of Harmful Practices: The Protocol explicitly calls for the legal prohibition of all forms of harmful practices, including FGM, child marriage, widow inheritance, and all forms of violence against women. Domestication would strengthen the legal basis for combating these practices more effectively.

-Reproductive Health Rights: It recognizes women's right to control their reproductive health and decisions, including access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, and in some cases, authorizes abortion under specific circumstances (e.g., sexual assault, rape, incest, or threat to mental/physical health or life of mother/foetus).

Political and Economic Empowerment: The Protocol mandates states to promote women's equal participation in political and decision-making processes, as well as their right to own and control property, access credit, and participate in economic activities on an equal footing with men. This is crucial for addressing economic vulnerabilities that often heighten susceptibility to violence.

Accountability and Justice: It emphasizes accountability for violent offenders and promotes justice for survivors, providing a stronger legal basis for holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring redress for victims.

Gender-Sensitive Governance: The Protocol pushes for the integration of gender equality into government administration and policies, mandating state actors to address gender biases that promote inequality.

Policy Recommendations

Baobab for Women's Human Rights advocates for a multi-pronged, comprehensive, and gender-responsive approach to ending femicide and other harmful discriminatory practices in Nigeria.

1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks: Domestication of the Maputo Protocol: Expedite the domestication of the Maputo Protocol through legislative action, such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill, to fully integrate its comprehensive

provisions into Nigerian domestic law. This will provide a stronger legal basis for protecting women's rights and holding the government accountable.

Harmonize Laws: Advocate for the harmonization of statutory, customary, and religious laws to ensure consistency with the VAPP Act, CEDAW, and the domesticated Maputo Protocol, particularly concerning women's property rights, inheritance, and marriageable age.

Full Implementation of VAPP Act: Ensure full and effective implementation of the VAPP Act across all states of the federation, including dedicated funding for its enforcement and awareness campaigns.

Amend Discriminatory Provisions: Review and amend any remaining discriminatory provisions in national and sub-national laws, including those in the Criminal Code and Penal Code, to ensure equal protection for women and girls.

National Action Plan on Femicide: Develop and adequately fund a National Action Plan specifically targeting femicide, with clear prevention, protection, and prosecution strategies, and mechanisms for comprehensive data collection and analysis.

2. Enhance Justice System Response:

Capacity Building: Provide specialized training for law enforcement officers (police, NAPTIP, civil defence), judicial officers, and prosecutors on gender-sensitive investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of femicide and other SGBV cases.

Dedicated SGBV Units: Establish and adequately resource specialized SGBV units within law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, with a focus on women and girls' cases.

Sexual Offender Register: Strengthen the national sexual offender register and ensure its accessibility to the public, as mandated

by the VAPP Act, to prevent repeat offenses.

Legal Aid and Support Services: Increase access to free and quality legal aid, psychosocial support, and shelters for survivors of SGBV, including those at risk of femicide.

3. Promote Prevention and Social Norms Change:

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch sustained, nationwide public awareness and educational campaigns, leveraging traditional and social media, to challenge harmful gender stereotypes, promote gender equality, and sensitize communities on the criminality of femicide and other harmful practices.

Community Engagement: Engage traditional and religious leaders, community gatekeepers, men, and boys as allies in challenging harmful norms and advocating for women's human rights.

Curriculum Integration: Integrate human rights education, gender equality, and SGBV prevention into school curricula at all levels.

Economic Empowerment: Implement programs that economically empower women and girls, reducing their vulnerability and dependence, thereby increasing their agency to escape abusive situations.

4. Improve Data Collection and Research:

Centralized Database: Establish a robust and centralized national database for collecting disaggregated data on all forms of gender-based violence, including femicide, FGM, and child marriage. This data is crucial for evidence-based policymaking and resource allocation.

Research and Analysis: Support research into the root causes, patterns, and consequences of femicide and other harmful practices to inform targeted interventions.

5. Strengthen Collaboration CSO

Engagement: Provide consistent and adequate funding and support to women's rights organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) that are at the forefront of advocacy, service provision, and community mobilization.

International Cooperation: Leverage international partnerships and conventions to access technical expertise, financial resources, and best practices in combating gender-based violence.

Inter-Agency Collaboration: Foster stronger collaboration among government MDAs (e.g., Ministries of Women Affairs, Justice, Health, Information, Education, Police, NAPTIP) to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response.

Conclusion

Ending femicide and other harmful discriminatory practices against women and girls in Nigeria is not merely a legal or social issue; it is a fundamental human rights imperative. The full domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol, alongside the other recommendations outlined above, will significantly bolster Nigeria's ability to create a safer, more equitable society where every woman and girl can thrive free from the threat of violence and discrimination.

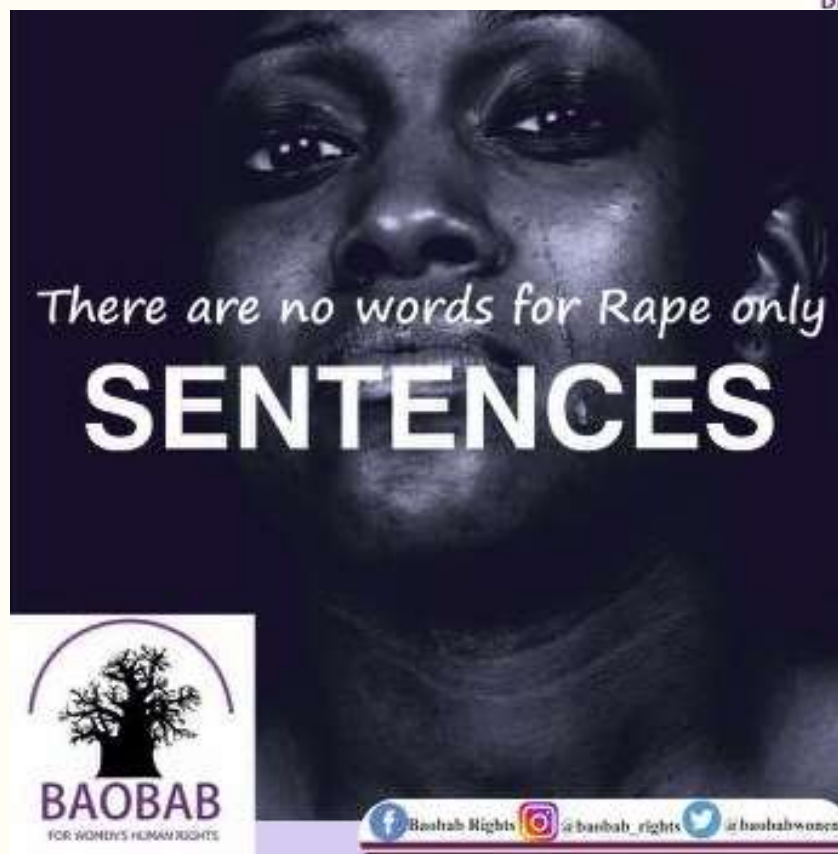
Baobab for Women's Human Rights remains committed to working tirelessly towards this vision in partnership with state actors, non-state actors and relevant stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond.

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