



© Hana Sugiyama/ CARE 2021

Passage of a Law on Violence Against Women in Yobe State

Martawa Zuromaye Advocacy Brief



“Sexual violence is becoming rampant not just in Yobe state and Nigeria as a country, but the entire world. As policy makers in Yobe state, we feel it is necessary to do all we can to curtail the menace.”

Hon. Buba Kalallawa, Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, Yobe State House of Assembly

In April 2022, CARE helped pass the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in Yobe State, Nigeria through intensive advocacy and collaboration with partners working to address gender-based violence (GBV). Based on rates of GBV and the population of Yobe State, CARE estimates that approximately 867,509 women and girls will be protected by this bill: 25% adolescents (216,877), and 75% adults over age 18 (650,632). In February 2023, Martawa Zuromaye also helped secure a commitment from the Government of Yobe State to move forward on a key action item from the implementation plan, to establish safe girls’ secondary schools.

Currently there are no secondary schools in Yobe past grade 9; only private schools, which most families cannot afford. This means that girls’ education is curtailed at approximately 14 years of age, and child marriage often follows. The Yobe Governor included funds in the annual budget to construct 6 secondary schools this year, and The Nigerian Ministry of Women Affairs has expressed their excitement about this accomplishment.

This advocacy win was part of a CARE project called Martawa Zuromaye (“Dignity and Security”), in partnership with the Nigerian organization WOYEIN, funded by the Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI) at the US Department of State in Northern Nigeria and neighboring Niger.¹

Background

Protracted, violent conflict with the militant group Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria has increased violence against women and girls and reduced survivors’ access to services. The region has some of the highest rates of GBV in the country, particularly sexual violence; intimate partner violence; female genital mutilation/cutting; and child, early and forced marriage. In Yobe State in 2018, 65% of women reported they could not refuse sex with their husband, and 12% of women experienced violence during pregnancy, the highest in the country.²

Apart from rape, most people in Yobe did not consider other forms of GBV to be a crime. And although Yobe has been recording a high number of GBV cases, there was no law to protect survivors from GBV. The absence of this law contributed to an environment where many perpetrators of GBV go unpunished.

¹ The four-year project Martawa Zuromaye focuses on GBV prevention and advocacy, and is implemented in partnership with local, women-led organizations. The CSOs lead efforts to address the root causes of GBV through building individuals’ capacity to address GBV, mobilizing community action to challenge negative gender norms that perpetuate violence, and work at the state level to strengthen existing laws. Martawa Zuromaye seeks to ensure the safety and inclusion of women and girls through GBV prevention at the community level, strengthening linkages to post-GBV referral services for survivors, and building the capacity of providers to offer survivor-centered care.

² Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2018. P427

What is the VAPP Act?

The VAPP Act aims to eliminate all forms of violence in both the private and public spheres and includes the right to assistance for victims of violence. It is a key, legal framework in Nigeria that aims to strengthen states' efforts to address violence against women and girls. The Act offers protections for smallholder farmers, internally displaced people, refugees, and disabled people. It includes commitments to building a safer and empowering environment for women and girls, violence prevention programs, and strengthened case management for GBV survivors.

The VAPP Act was passed federally in 2015, but for it to be implemented, it must be contextualized to fit each state's geographical, sociocultural, religious and individual settings, and then adopted at the state level through the assent of the Governor. As of February, 2023, 32 out of 36 Nigerian states had adopted the VAPP Act.³

In Yobe State, the Act was contextualized and sent to the Governor's office for his assent in December, 2020. Following a long period of inaction, CARE, in collaboration with local women's rights organizations, international organizations, Millennium Development Agencies, and other stakeholders were able to mobilize for the adoption of the Act, through. Alongside the VAPP Act, two other, related bills were passed into law: the Child Rights Act and the Justice Sector Reform Law. All three contain important provisions on protection from GBV.

How did we get there? The advocacy journey

The Martawa Zuromaye project created a Yobe GBV Advocacy Working Group including local women's rights organizations, government ministries, other stakeholders such as the Justice and Reforms Sector; and international partners such as Save the Children International, Plan, and UNFPA. At the beginning of the advocacy process, the project found that key GBV actors already advocating for passage of the VAPP Act were disconnected and working in silos. The project worked to convene and connect all interested parties through stakeholder meetings, advocacy trainings, workshops, and collaborative work-planning.

The project deployed the following advocacy tactics to achieve passage of the Act:

- Identified and mobilized women-led Civil Society Organization (CSOs) who are passionate about creating a society free of violence for women and girls to identify issues and gaps on GBV in Yobe State through consultative meetings;
- Formed a GBV Advocacy Working Group to lead the advocacy campaign to pass the VAPP Act;

³ Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative. [VAPP Act Tracker](#). Accessed 1 February 2023.

- Created a virtual platform for the Advocacy Working Group to communicate, share and strategize. The platform allowed for collective planning and development of activities to be carried out in line with the Advocacy Workplan, and was essential to the continuity of advocacy efforts when the COVID pandemic restricted the ability to meet face to face.
- Trained community stakeholders (religious and community leaders) and local government area (LGA) stakeholders on GBV, relevant national and international legal frameworks Nigeria has signed onto, and how the proposed laws would complement existing laws and policies in Nigeria and strengthen efforts towards women's protection and justice.
- Organized an advocacy workshop where key stakeholders from Yobe state were brought together to identify bottlenecks that were delaying the adoption of the Act and to develop an advocacy action plan. The workshop also included learning from the experience of stakeholders in neighbouring states in the North who had successfully contextualized and passed the VAPP Act;
- Through the US Department of State, CARE obtained the support of the Embassy of the United States in Nigeria to send a letter of encouragement to pass the VAPP Act to the Governor of Yobe State, which helped the advocacy network push for its passage;
- Conducted a high-level advocacy visit to the Executive Governor of Yobe State where CARE was recognized as an important ally on GBV advocacy. CARE provided financial and technical support for the workshop to ensure the governor assented to the law. The main decision makers were House of Assembly members, Justice and Reforms Sector, religious leaders, traditional leaders, the Deputy Governor of Yobe State, Commissioners and the Executive Governor, Mai Mala Buni.

Challenges and lessons learned

Lack of awareness

Across communities, CSOs, INGOs and government, there was little awareness about the seriousness of GBV in Yobe and the importance of the Act. The project therefore began the process by engaging local actors such as Village Savings and Loans Associations; Bulamas (community or village leaders); and youth, religious, and community opinion leaders on the GBV issues experienced at the local level and how they could be engaged in the response.

The project trained the local actors on the contents and importance of the VAPP Act and Child Act and fostered a common understanding to obtain their support. Part of the reason the bill was pending adoption by the Governor for over six years was because of the lack of buy in from local leaders. Additionally, the Governor's Office was reluctant to go against the will of local leaders, so it was critically important to obtain their buy-in.

The project developed a nomination process to elect key stakeholders as champions of the Act, including government employees, political partners of the governor, and traditional and religious leaders across the state. The moment CARE organized the stakeholders workshop to understand the contents of the proposed laws and creation of an advocacy action plan, things began to move fast.

Lack of coordination

There was a lack of coordination of disparate advocacy efforts to ensure the passage of the Act. Individual efforts by advocates or organizations did not have as much influence as the cohesive front presented by the Yobe GBV Advocacy Working Group. The group also involved international bodies such as the US Embassy and UNFPA, which was integral to its success.

Expectation of incentives

Identifying key stakeholders to front the advocacy and influence the governor was also a challenge because most of the key stakeholders were expecting to receive personal financial incentives to engage with the governor.

To overcome this challenge, meetings were held with the key stakeholders to further brief them on the importance of having the Governor assent to the laws to promote a violence-free society for the people of Yobe, and ensure the rights of all the people of Yobe are protected— especially women and girls. In Northern Nigeria, Yobe was among only two states that had not passed the VAPP and Child Acts into law. CARE leveraged this fact to put pressure on policy makers to take action.

Marginalization of women in the advocacy process

From the beginning of the advocacy campaign, women were involved and played a vital role in mobilizing stakeholders for deliberations, suggesting advocacy tactics and actions that would yield results. As the advocacy actions progressed to the height of the campaign, women who were mostly leaders of civil society movements were systematically dropped from the meeting with the Executive Governor to adopt the law. The project will continue and strengthen its advocacy to ensure women are leaders and active participants in the costing and implementation of the law.

What's next?

The next phase of advocacy is to push for implementation of the Act and track its impact to ensure it makes a true difference in the lives of women and girls in Yobe. Activities planned include:

- Through the Yobe GBV Advocacy Working Group, the project will hold a workshop to develop a time-bound, costed implementation and monitoring plan to ensure accountability and enforcement of the Act.
- Implementation partners will be mapped out in the state, including women-led and human-rights-focused CSOs, the federation of female lawyers, the Justice Sector Reform Team, the Ministry of Women Affairs, and others.
- The project will amplify its efforts to raise awareness about GBV, the passage of the VAPP and Child Acts and the benefits they offer, the protections and services available for women and girls, and the punishments for perpetrators.



Photo: High-Level Advocacy Meeting with the Executive Governor of Yobe State

Learn More:

- [1. Yobe records over 700 Gender-Based Violence cases in 2 years](#)
- [2. Yobe adopts the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act](#)
- [3. Yobe: Buni signs Violence Against Persons Prohibition bill, two others into law](#)
- [4. Child Protection Law: Yobe Delegation Meets Buni | HOTPEN](#)
- [5. Gender Based Violence \(GBV\) Sub Sector, Nigeria Mid-Year Report 2020](#)