

GENDER, MASCULINITIES AND SOCIAL COHESION

Exploring the role of religion and religious communities in shaping social norms and understandings in Plateau state, Nigeria



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Executive summary

Introduction

This is a report of a qualitative survey conducted in six communities in the city of Jos, Plateau state, and Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi state in Nigeria in November 2017. Christian and Muslim community members were interviewed with the aim of investigating 'current social norms around gender, particularly concepts of masculinities, and attitudes to and understandings of sexual and gender-based violence'. This was carried out in the context of ongoing family planning, HIV and peacebuilding work in the targeted communities. The study also sought to explore the intersections between these issues.

The study was commissioned by Tearfund, an international NGO working across 40 countries. Tearfund has a long-term commitment to working with local churches globally, with a vision to empower and enable them to address issues of poverty and injustice.

In this study, Tearfund sought to explore the connection between HIV and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the harmful social norms pertaining to masculinities. It worked with some of its Nigerian partners:

- COCIN (Church of Christ in Nations) AIDS Awareness and Care Program - CAACP
- Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA)
- Faith Alive Foundation (FAF)
- TEAM-CIHD (Community Integrated Health Development)
- ECWA POD (Evangelical Church Winning All – People Oriented Development)

As a country, Nigeria has been subject to extreme conflict, terrorism and violence that have torn communities apart and destroyed livelihoods. In addition, huge numbers of individuals have been exposed to sexual violence, which has been a key contributor to the large number of HIV cases in the country. Conflict has also left many children orphaned and vulnerable.

The report has four main sections:

1. Introduction – the profile of the country and background to the project
2. Methodology – an outline of the process, from the selection of participants to the drafting of the report
3. Key findings – theoretical and theological analysis, where the data is interpreted against a limited literature review
4. Recommendations – to Tearfund and partners on future interventions.

Methodology

- Focus group discussions were used as the primary method of enquiry and data collection. A total of 19 focus group discussions were conducted in six communities in the city of Jos in Plateau state and Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi state.
- A total of 377 people participated in the focus group discussions, of whom 182 professed to be Muslim and 195 Christian. Participants included 119 married men, 132 married women and 126 youth who were mainly unmarried. Of the 132 married women, only 21 described themselves as housewives.

- In all communities, focus group discussions were divided into men, women and youths. All groups were made up of Christians and Muslims, except for one, where Christians and Muslims met separately and on different days.
- The facilitator used a set of guiding questions to elicit responses from participants, who were encouraged to use their local language.
- Questions raised were clustered in the following categories:
 1. Exploring gender norms
 2. Views on family planning
 3. Prevalence of and responses to SGBV
 4. Gender and peacebuilding
 5. Faith responses to SGBV
 6. Suggestions on how to overcome these challenges.
- The facilitator took extensive notes during discussions. These were later collated to draw out key themes and further analysed to identify key findings and recommendations. Recommendations made were tested against known working practice.
- A key limitation of the study was the need to use interpreters, with the accompanying risk that participants' responses became diluted or influenced by the interpreter. Logistical challenges, such as late arrivals and holding focus group discussions on market days, put pressure on the time available for the study.
- The focus on the six selected communities confines the application of the findings and recommendations to these communities and not much further beyond.

Key findings

Prevailing norms

- In most instances, both male and female participants embraced the notion of the superiority of men over women, by defining men as leaders in society and heads of their families. Religion and culture were identified as the source of and basis for these norms.
- Stemming from their perceived superior status, men were seen as providers and protectors, while women's primary responsibility was household chores, such as caring for children, cooking and cleaning.
- Female participants showed a preference for having girl children. While initially men showed a greater preference for boy children, they did agree with women that the benefits of girl children were that they were more compassionate and more likely to take care of ageing parents later in life. Girl children were also seen as more likely to help their mothers with household chores and raising other children.

Evolving norms

- The groups acknowledged some shifts in beliefs and practice as socioeconomic and political realities changed. For instance, women were increasingly taking responsibility for providing for their families, because more worked and earned an income, whereas some men were no longer working, or had abandoned their families. It was also noted that women are already leaders in society, such as in politics, civic institutions (clinics and schools) and in local enterprises.
- The groups agreed that some men were involved in housework. Many women felt this did not happen enough. However, the overriding view was that housework is not a man's duty, but something that men did out of love for their wives, and when women were sick or otherwise unable to fulfil their duties.

SGBV

- Participants conceded that SGBV is prevalent in their communities. It can be physical, psychological (when men insult women) or economic (when men stop providing for their families even though they could afford to do so).
- The majority of participants agreed that it is never right for a man to beat a woman, for a woman to beat a man, or for a woman to be violated in any way, including through forced sex in marriage. However, all groups struggled with the concept of marital rape, citing that marriage gave the man the right to have 'sex on demand'.
- Violence against children featured prominently in the discussions. Child neglect, children sent out to work on the street and non-payment of school fees resulting in children dropping out of school were the main examples cited. This problem was exacerbated by large numbers of orphaned children in communities that had recently experienced conflict. These children were more vulnerable to different forms of violence, such as rape and forced marriage.

The causes of SGBV

Violent and abusive male behaviour was identified as a key driver for violence against women and children and was also seen as responsible for men's violence against other men. Participants believed it was caused by a number of factors:

- Poverty and joblessness were seen by all groups as the major causes of violence.
- Some men left their families to pursue extramarital affairs or took additional wives, even when they could not afford to. Greed and sexual desire were identified as the major causes, mainly by women, although men did not dispute this.
- Participants cited the misuse of drugs and alcohol as another cause of SGBV. Men drank for their own enjoyment using family money, but when they did so, they became abusive at home.

It was also stated that women provoked men into violent reactions, for example when women were disobedient or they did not cook for their husbands. Younger women were accused of enticing men into transactional sex by dressing inappropriately. Such acts could be argued as being consensual but were viewed by participants as abusive by preying on women's vulnerability.

- Illiteracy was cited as another cause of SGBV. Participants said that poorly educated parents were less likely to educate their children, and that poorly educated children, men and women were less likely to be aware of the ill effects of SGBV. Similarly, they thought that illiterate women and children were less likely to be aware of their rights and recourse within the law.
- Religious and cultural beliefs were also mentioned as one of the causes of SGBV. Men and women were brought up to believe that men are superior to such a degree that men are free to chastise women, including using violence as a means of punishment.
- Some perpetrated sexual violence, such as raping minors, as part of fulfilling rituals perceived to enhance their livelihoods and business prospects, as prescribed by ‘traditional healers’.
- Corruption in the criminal justice system allowed SGBV to persist, as perpetrators were let off the hook; consequently, many women had lost faith in the system and did not report instances of SGBV.

Family planning

- Most participants, both men and women, agreed that ideally decisions on family planning should be reached through consensus.
- However, the overriding norm of men being the ultimate decision-makers meant that most believed that the man, by virtue of being the head of the family and the provider, should have the final say.
- Most participants felt that decisions about family planning should be arrived at through a consultative process, except for Muslim communities and a few others who argued that family planning is subject to religious and cultural decrees for married couples. All, however, accepted family planning using natural methods.

Role of faith communities

- Participants stated that faith communities were responding to the scourge of SGBV in different ways.
- Primarily, faith communities provided care to survivors of violence and ran education and training, that is, faith-specific programmes seeking to build the character of the individual believer. These included processes intended to build an individual’s faith and understanding of doctrinal teachings. They advocated chastity before marriage and sexual fidelity for married couples. Pre-marital counselling classes were also used as a space for such teaching.
- Faith leaders prioritised mediating between couples to prevent separation and divorce when told about violence or abuse. This approach was informed by the general abhorrence of divorce by faith communities. On rare occasions, faith leaders referred serious cases to law-enforcement agencies.

- Most abused women did not report their abuse to faith leaders because of the stigma prevalent in their communities.

Peacebuilding

- Faith leaders were commended for their role in peacebuilding. Instances of Muslim and Christian clergy visiting each other's place of worship were shared, especially in Tafawa Balewa.
- Conflict can affect men and women in different ways and therefore peacebuilding approaches should account for this. Most men agreed that women suffer most in conflict situations. The high levels of violence experienced in communities meant that women lived in constant fear. Women could not walk alone at night or in some areas, whereas men could walk anywhere and at any time. Women were left with the trauma of surviving abuse during the crisis and were often widowed and left to bring up children alone and therefore peacebuilding approaches must be sensitive to this.
- Politicians were identified as the drivers of conflict in communities at election times or during periods of heightened political activity. They mainly used young people to spread their partisan messages, deepening divisions and hostility to win votes.

Key conclusions

- Prevailing societal norms prevent women from speaking out. This is rooted in the belief that men have the right to do as they wish and women who speak out bring shame on their homes, families and communities.
- There is a lack of awareness of legal rights pertaining to SGBV that are provided for in the constitution and state policies.
- There is an understandable clash between fulfilling the expectations of dominant gender norms and the aspirations for gender equality as times change.
- The daily experiences of participants highlighted the intersectionality of gender equality, SGBV, economics, human rights and faith responses.

Recommendations

- Faith communities and religious leaders play an important role in the communities surveyed, with many participants adhering to their teachings and looking to them in times of need. Any interventions should have a capacity-building component for faith leaders to help them develop skills such as supporting and working with survivors of SGBV beyond praying and mediating, and reading and interpreting sacred texts in a more gender-sensitive way. They should also be mobilised to become advocates for SGBV survivors in their communities.
- Interventions to increase women's economic empowerment are needed to reduce women's dependence on men and enable them to better contribute to their own well-being and that of their families and communities.

- Awareness programmes, highlighting the extent and impact of SGBV, should be run in faith communities and the wider community. They must emphasise the benefits of a violence-free and more gender-equal society.
- Having noted that men are generally the perpetrators of SGBV, it is imperative that male-focused transformation interventions aimed at addressing harmful aspects of masculinities should be implemented. Working only with women will, in the main, address the symptoms rather than the root causes of SGBV and will contribute little towards breaking the cycle of violence.
- The criminal justice system must be held accountable and supported to enforce existing mechanisms through collaborative efforts with civil-society stakeholders.
- Tearfund partners should join multi-stakeholder forums, starting at the community level. Such an approach will amplify voices for advocacy, sharing lessons about what works best, as well as scarce resources.

1. Glossary of terms

The report has four main sections:

1. **Introduction** – the profile of the country, including background to the project
2. **Methodology** – an outline of the process, from the selection of participants to the drafting of the report
3. **Key findings** – theoretical and theological analysis, where the data is interpreted against a limited literature review
4. **Recommendations** – to Tearfund and partners on future interventions.

Definition of key concepts

Abandonment

This refers to instances when a husband leaves his wife and children in the marital home without a formal divorce and moves in with another woman. The wife is then left to look after herself and her children.

Child neglect

This refers to the act of leaving children, whether orphaned or not, without any care or support to meet their basic needs, such as food and shelter.

Faith communities

They are communities of people who share the same religious beliefs and often worship together; they include clergy and other leaders as well as lay people – women, men, youth and children. In this report, the term primarily refers to Muslim and Christian communities.

Gender

Gender refers to a socially defined understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman and the roles ascribed to each in particular communities and in specific historical contexts.

Law enforcement system/agencies

These are government agencies responsible for implementing the laws of the state, related in this report to tackling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They include the police, the judiciary and the prison service.

Masculinity

This term denotes expectations of what it means to be a man, largely on the basis of prevailing gender norms and how such expectations are acted out. Often the adjective ‘toxic’ is attached to the word in reference to the destructive behaviours that men adopt as they seek to conform to the dominant norms of masculinity.

Marital rape

In most instances, this refers to a man forcing his wife to have sexual intercourse with him, though it also includes a man being forced to have sex with his wife.

Gender norms

These are a set of socially defined and accepted behaviours and practices for both men and women in a given period and context. ‘Norms’ also refers to generally accepted roles that society expects men and women to play on the basis of their sex.

SGBV

The term denotes violence, such as rape, committed against individuals on the basis of their sex (male or female), and/or on the basis of their gender role. It may be physical, psychological or economic.

2. Introduction

This is a report of a qualitative survey conducted in six communities, namely Fobur, Mista Ali, Jengre, Yelwa, Tafawa Balewa and Tudun Wada, in Plateau and Bauchi states in Nigeria in November 2017. Christian and Muslim community members were interviewed with the aim of investigating 'current social norms around gender, particularly concepts of masculinities, and attitudes to and understandings of sexual and gender-based violence'. This was carried out in the context of ongoing HIV, family planning and peacebuilding work in the targeted communities. The study also sought to explore the intersectionalities between these issues.

2.1 Tearfund

Tearfund is an international NGO working across 40 countries globally. Tearfund has a long-term commitment to working with local churches globally, with a vision to empower and enable them to address issues of poverty and injustice.

Tearfund began working in Nigeria in direct response to the Biafran war. It works with faith-based partners to implement its projects with support from Tearfund and institutional donors both within and outside the country. Its work now spans humanitarian aid, responses to HIV, SGBV, peacebuilding, environmental and economic sustainability, church and community mobilisation, etc.

With this project, Tearfund seeks to deepen its work by exploring the connection between HIV and SGBV and the harmful social norms pertaining to masculinities.

2.2 Country profile

Nigeria occupies an area of 923,768 square kilometres with a population of almost 187 million (UN data, 2016). Nigeria is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with over 250 ethnic groups and 400 languages and dialects.

Plateau state

Plateau state is the twelfth-largest state, located in the centre of the country. Its features include steep hills, rocky plains and lush vegetation, as well as the Jos Plateau, from which the state takes its name. Average temperatures range from 10°C to 27°C year-round. The state has a population of about 3.5 million people who are predominantly farmers and civil servants. There are 17 local government administrations in Plateau state: Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Jos East, Jos North, Jos South, Kanam, Kanke, Langtang North, Langtang South, Mangu, Mikang, Pankshin, Qua'an Pan, Riyom, Shendam, and Wase.

Bauchi state

Bauchi state is the eleventh-largest state by population and is located in the north-east of the country. It shares borders with Plateau state to the south, Kano and Jigawa states to the north and Yobe and Gombe states to the north and east.

Political context

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It gained independence in 1960; since then, there have been about 30 years of military rule. Nigeria is endowed with human and natural resources but years of despotic and debilitating military rule have rendered the country vulnerable to arbitrary and often poor governance, a lack of transparency and accountability, lawlessness, underdevelopment, economic instability and human rights violations on an alarming scale. The current civilian rule began in 1999. Conflict and terrorist attacks are frequent in Nigeria today. Boko Haram has continued to unleash terror, mainly in the north-eastern part of the country, resulting in the deaths of over 20,000 people since 2009.

Economic context

Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa and one of the largest in the world, yet it is home to the third-largest number of poor people in the world, after India and China. The prevalence of HIV fell from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2008. Maternal mortality has fallen by 32 per cent in five years, from 800 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003 to 545 in 2008. Infant mortality fell from 100 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003 to 75 in 2008. In the same period, the under-five mortality rate fell from 201 to 157 deaths per 1,000 live births. The rate of economic growth increased from 2–3 per cent during 1990–1999 to 6–7 per cent during 2000–2010. But as noted above, the increase in growth has not translated into poverty reduction. Poverty actually increased, from 54.4 per cent in 2004 to 65.1 per cent in 2010. Growth has been neither inclusive nor job-generating.

Social context

Nigeria ranks very low in all socioeconomic and development indices. In its Human Development Report for 2007/8 (2016), UNDP ranked Nigeria at 157 (152) out of 177 countries. It has been consistently rated by Transparency International as among the most corrupt in the world in its Corruption Perception Index. Several investigations from the National Assembly indicate that there is a high level of corruption in the country. Nigeria has very poor social indicators. About 10 million school-age children are out of school. Nigeria, which was one of the 50 richest countries in the early 1970s, has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of the twenty-first century. It is therefore ironic that Nigeria is one of the leading exporters of oil in the world whilst being home to the third-largest number of poor people in the world. Statistics show that the incidence of poverty (based on 1 USD per day) increased from 28.1 per cent in 1980 to 46.3 per cent in 1985; then declined to 42.7 per cent in 1992 but increased again to 65.6 per cent in 1996, and to 69.2 per cent in 1997. A 2004 report by the National Planning Commission indicated that poverty had decreased to 54.4 per cent, but by 2010, it had risen again to 65.1 per cent.

2.3 Partners

The partners involved in this research were:

- Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN AIDS Awareness and Care Program (CAACP))
- Scripture Union West Africa (SUWA)
- Faith Alive Foundation (FAF)
- TEAM-CIHD (Community Integrated Health Development)
- ECWA POD (Evangelical Church Winning All – People Oriented Development)

2.4 Project brief

The aim of the qualitative survey was to inform Tearfund's proposed work on SGBV by leveraging its existing work in six communities on HIV and peacebuilding. It also aimed to serve as formative research to inform the envisaged SGBV prevention response project, with a special emphasis on challenging and transforming harmful masculinities. Finally, the survey aimed to give an insight into the attitudes and practices around SGBV in the chosen communities.

2.5 Participants

A total of 19 focus group discussions were conducted in six communities in the city of Jos in Plateau state and Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi state. Participants were recruited by the partner organisations with whom Tearfund already works. There were 377 participants in total, with 182 professing to be Muslim and 195 Christian. Participants included 119 married men, 132 married women and 126 youth who were unmarried. Of the total study population of 377, 326 gave their occupation/employment status. Most (84) said that they were business people, followed by civil servants and farmers/farmworkers. None said they were unemployed. Of the 132 married women in the discussion groups, only 21 described themselves as housewives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

- The focus group discussions were divided into men, women and youth groups. All groups were made up of Muslims and Christians, except for one where Christians and Muslims met separately on different days.
- The facilitator took extensive notes during discussions, which were all recorded electronically as backup.
- Participants were encouraged to use their local language, Hausa, and a staff member from a partner organisation interpreted where necessary.
- A guide for the facilitator was developed upfront, with some flexibility allowed during the actual discussions to pick up on any emerging issues.

3.2 Guiding questions

Guiding questions (see Annex A) were used to facilitate discussions, with some flexibility to allow space for deeper enquiry and follow-up on issues that participants raised. Participants were also allowed to ask questions or to input on any other matter that had not been raised that they felt was important.

Questions raised were clustered in the following categories:

1. Exploring gender norms
2. Views on family planning
3. Prevalence of and responses to SGBV
4. Gender and peacebuilding
5. Faith responses to SGBV
6. Suggestions on how to overcome these challenges.

3.3 Limitations

- The need to use interpreters meant there was a risk that the nuances of speakers' expressions were lost. There were also instances when interpreters had an extended dialogue with a participant without explaining anything to the researcher.
- Participants arrived at the focus group venues at the same time and later than the agreed times. This put pressure on the time taken for the actual discussions, with most being conducted within 50–60 minutes.
- Two of the focus group discussions took place on the communities' market day. This caused delays and put pressure on the discussions as participants were eager to go to the market to trade.

4. Key findings

4.1 Gender norms

Prevailing norms

All groups expressed the belief that men were the heads of the family, and as a result are viewed as the leaders in wider society. They argued that this was ordained by God/Allah at creation, when men were created first. Culture and tradition were also cited as reasons for this idea.

'God created man first and made women second. It is stated in the Bible and in the Qur'an. We can't question God for making the women less.' (A woman in Mista Ali)

'Women are by nature weak, slow and emotional. They cannot handle complex situations or protect the family from danger when it comes. Therefore, they cannot be leaders, this requires men.' (A youth in Mista Ali)

On the first point, participants argued that women cannot be leaders at home, except where there are only women in the house. The headship and leadership of men at home by default gave men the responsibility of meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter; women's primary responsibility was seen as taking care of household chores, such as caring for children, cooking and cleaning.

'It is the man who marries the woman so that she can give him family and take care of him as his helper. The man provides. The woman has the duty to raise the man's children.' (A woman in Forbur)

Asked about whether they had a preference for male or female children, most male participants preferred to have boys to carry forward the family legacy. Surprisingly, some men joined women in wishing for girls, at least as the first child, because they thought girls would be more compassionate and caring and help their mothers with household chores.

Evolving norms

The groups did note that changing socioeconomic realities were causing shifts in some practices. For instance, women were increasingly taking responsibility for providing for their families, either because men were no longer working or they had abandoned them.

Participants agreed that women were already leaders in society and, in some instances, were performing better than men, such as in politics, civic institutions (clinics and schools) and local enterprises.

'We had Queen Amina in Nigeria in the fifteenth century.' (A male participant in Tafawa Belewa)

'The Bible has other women as great leaders, such as Esther and Debora.' (A man in Forbur)

The groups agreed that men can be involved in housework. However, many women felt this did not happen enough. The overriding view, though, was that this is not a man's duty, but a favour that men did for their wives because they love them, or because women were sick or otherwise unable to fulfil their duties.

'Cleaning the house, cooking and taking care of children is the work of the woman. Men can do it if they want to or if she is sick. If men do it often, the woman will become lazy and disrespectful.' (A man in Tudun Wada)

Some had different views, such as one participant in Mista Ali:

'The prophet helped his wife, according to Islam history. We are enjoined by Islam teaching to emulate the prophet. It is not about our tradition. So husbands must help their wives at home.' (A Muslim woman in Mista Ali)

While men had the final say at home, it was felt that ideally, decisions on all family matters should be reached after a discussion between the man and the woman.

Participants across the board noted that family planning (using natural methods for many on religious and cultural grounds) was acceptable. Their view was that it is something that must be discussed and agreed between both partners. Some, mainly Muslims and men, held onto their doctrinal faith positions that rejected other methods of family planning.

This position shows the power play between men and women and highlights the gender norm of male superiority, also reflected in the comment below:

'It is the man who knows what they can afford and how big his family must be as he is the one who will pay. So he must have the final say. But we know that women will go behind the back of the man to do family planning. So in reality the women have the final say.' (A man in Tafawa Balewa)

SGBV

The majority of participants agreed that it is never right for a man to beat a woman or for a woman to beat a man.

However, to varying degrees, participants conceded that violence was prevalent in their communities. The types of violence mentioned were physical, emotional or psychological (when men insult women), and economic (when men stopped providing for their families when they could afford to do so).

All groups disagreed with the concept of marital rape.

'Yes, a man can force a woman to have sex with him, but this is not rape. It is not possible. It is just forced sex. A married man is entitled to have sex with his wife. Even the police will not arrest you for that.' (A youth in Tafawa Balewa)

The groups also raised questions of child neglect and regarded sending children out onto the streets as hawkers and not paying for school fees as violence.

In some communities where there had been conflict, it was mentioned that there were large numbers of orphaned children who had lost their parents in the conflict. These children became vulnerable to different forms of violence, such as rape and forced marriage.

4.2 Causes of SGBV

The irresponsible and abusive behaviour of men was seen to be at the centre of violence against women and children, and for men's violence against other men. Participants differed, however, on what caused this behaviour. The groups understood violence against women to be more than physical beatings. Their engagements showed an appreciation of the fact that violence has emotional/psychological and economic dimensions. The study participants cited the following causes:

- Poverty and joblessness was given by all groups as the major causes of violence.
- Men often abandoned their families, causing suffering for their children. Men who were unemployed and had no income also reacted violently when women continually asked them for money for food and childcare.
- Children were sent onto the street as hawkers to help supplement the family income, with young girls becoming more vulnerable to relationships with older men in an attempt to obtain money.
- Families allowed their children to marry early because the husband would help take care of them financially as well.

'Men are idle and fall into all sorts of traps. They do wrong things to keep themselves busy as they have nothing to do. And an idle mind allows the devil to mislead them.' (A woman in Jengre)

- While excusing men, the groups – as the previous comment may suggest – also regarded men as simply uncaring and irresponsible. Men left their families to pursue extramarital affairs or took additional wives even when they could not afford to, because of greed and sexual desire.

'Culturally men can do what they want to do, when they want to do it, and undo it without explaining to anyone.' (A woman in Mista Ali)

'Culturally men see women as something you can just do whatever you can with, but if you go deeper into culture, it does not say so. Women are seen as queens.' (A man in Yelwa)

- Participants cited the misuse of drugs and alcohol as another cause of SGBV. Men drank for their own enjoyment using family money, but when they had done so, they became abusive at home.
- It was also stated that women provoked men into violent reactions, for example when women were disobedient or did not cook for them.

'A hungry man is an angry man.' (A man in Jengre)

- Illiteracy was cited as another cause of SGBV. Participants said that poorly educated parents were less likely to educate their children; and that poorly educated children, men and women were less likely to be aware of the ill effects of SGBV. Similarly, they thought that illiterate women and children were less likely to be aware of their rights and recourse within the law.
- Religious and cultural beliefs were also mentioned as one of the causes of SGBV. Men and women were brought up to believe that men are superior to such a degree that men are free to chastise women when they err, to withhold support when women misbehave and to have forced sex if women refuse. Also, they felt a man could simply abandon his partner or take another if she did not fulfil her role at home or in bed.
- Participants also cited instances of men being led into violent behaviour, such as the rape of minors, as part of fulfilling rituals to enhance their livelihoods and business prospects. Often this would be on the advice of traditional 'doctors'.
- Another reason given for sexual abuse was the manner in which young women dress. It was suggested that they dress scantily to attract and seduce men into sexual relationships. Such behaviour was attributed to the lack of an appropriate moral upbringing.
- Others, though few, saw the high levels of SGBV and violence as a sign of the end times prophesied in scripture and communities' lack of the fear of God.

- Participants felt that SGBV remained common as perpetrators were let off the hook, because of the low levels of reporting to protect family reputations, as well as corruption in the law enforcement and judicial systems, where bribery is commonplace and cases are easily bought.

4.3 Role of faith communities

Participants said that faith communities were responding to the scourge of SGBV in different ways.

- Faith communities primarily used preaching and teaching spaces to promote responsible, caring and loving behaviour in the family. Instances of organisations forming within faith communities were cited. Some had women's, men's or youth groups where formal teaching took place.
- A strong emphasis was placed on sexual fidelity for couples. This meant no extra-marital relationships and no sex before marriage. Pre-marital counselling classes were also used as a space for such formation.
- Faith leaders also responded when there was conflict in families or when women reported abuse of any form. This was largely limited to praying for survivors and counselling the affected parties to work things out. This meant that women were sent back to their husbands even after they had been abused. This approach was informed by faith communities' general abhorrence of divorce, which is also frowned upon by the wider community.
- Participants also noted that most abused women did not report their abuse to faith leaders because of the stigma prevalent in their communities. Those known to have survived SGBV were seen as not appropriate for marriage. Families also prioritised protecting their reputation and often survivors did not find the help they needed after reporting SGBV.
- In some cases, faith leaders would refer serious cases to law enforcement agencies and/or social welfare offices.

4.4 Peacebuilding

- Faith leaders were commended for their role in peacebuilding. Instances of Muslim and Christian clergy visiting each other's place of worship were shared, especially in Tafawa Balewa.

'I am happy that our religious leaders have come together to preach peace. Now we can walk into each other's areas without any fear, something we could not do in the past. My pastor has invited an imam to come and talk about peace and oneness in our church.' (A lay person involved in the peace committee in Tafawa Balewa)

- Peacebuilding needs to address the differing effects of conflict on men and women: the high levels of violence in communities meant that women lived in fear of violence in most communities as they were more vulnerable. Most men agreed with this view. Women could not walk alone at night or in some areas, whereas men could walk anywhere and at any time. Women carried a bigger burden in the aftermath of conflict, carrying the trauma of abuse and were often widowed and left to bring up children alone.
- Politicians were identified as the main drivers of conflict in communities. They mainly used young people to preach their partisan messages to win votes. Engaging with this group would be key in the peacebuilding process.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Women are prevented from speaking out

'Women are silenced from reporting when they have been abused, by tradition and culture. We see women coming to the clinic with wounds, but they cannot report it to the church or even the police at times because of the huge amount of stigma attached to SGBV. Even in the church they are treated as irresponsible. You must learn how to handle your home, is the message sent back to them.' (A staff member of a faith-based organisation)

5.2 Awareness of and access to legal rights and protection

'That is why divorce is allowed in Islam. If you do not agree with each other as husband and wife, or you can no longer tolerate each other, you can separate and start again.' (A woman in *Mista Ali*)

A lack of awareness of human rights enshrined in Nigeria's constitution and in state legislation was evident in discussions. Participants were asked about the legal position on marital rape and on the age of consent for children, but in all discussions, it was suggested that such laws do not exist. It was also implied that police have released suspects in the rare cases where men were reported for marital rape. Participants believed that sex between a minor and an older man was permitted if the minor had consented, as there was no age of consent.

It was established, however, that there are five laws on sexual violence. These are:

- The Criminal Code – applicable in all the southern states
- The Penal Code – applicable in all the northern states
- The Criminal Law of Lagos – applicable only in Lagos state
- The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act – applicable only in FCT Abuja
- The Child Rights Act – applicable in states that have domiciled it.

The Sexual Offences Act of 2009 sets 16 as the age of consent. In 2015, Nigeria drafted a Sexual Offences Bill that set the age of consent at 18.

5.3 Clash between norms and aspirations for gender equality

It is interesting to note that while participants acknowledged examples of women leaders in their history, in the scriptures and in contemporary society, they nevertheless drew a distinction between these women and women taking the lead at home. This inherent contradiction went unacknowledged or was not seen.

5.4 Intersectionality between SGBV, economics, human rights and faith responses

In this survey, Hajiya Zainab, a middle-aged woman, described how she had been starved, beaten, sexually abused and finally abandoned by her husband. They had been married for 18 years and had four children. Hajiya became his second wife ten years after her husband's first marriage, because his first wife could not bear him children. After giving him much-awaited and wanted children, his attitude towards her changed. He stopped listening to her and wouldn't eat the food she prepared. The situation worsened to such an extent that she developed psychosis.

According to Zainab, 'His attitude changed when he was about to take his third wife. He married her and totally abandoned me, but looked after the children.' His third wife also bore him four children, but then he threw her out and is presently living with his fourth wife, with whom he also has four children.

Zainab reminisced about happier times. 'Our relationship and marriage used to be very sweet, my husband and I were living peacefully and harmoniously until he started dating the woman whom he finally married as his third wife. We were living in Bauchi state, Nigeria where he works and stills lives to this day, while I stay with my parents in the Tudun Wada area of Jos, in Plateau state.'

She now sees her husband and every other man as wicked creatures who are selfish and only after what they can get. 'My husband is a wicked man,' she says frequently. She reported her case to the imams, who asked her husband to come and see them. He ignored their request, quoting instead the Qu'ran (Suratul An-Nisa verse 3, the fourth Sura) that confirms he is entitled to have four wives. 'Zainab said, 'He has made his decision and no one can change his stand on taking another wife.' All efforts to get him to change his mind have failed.

Zainab is currently living with her parents. She laments the fact that her husband does not pay their children's school fees on time or buy textbooks and stationery for them. She fries and sells bean cakes to earn a living; she gives the profits to her children to supplement the money their father gives them.

Zainab's story illustrates how SGBV is interconnected with other social problems facing women and children and is a perfect summary of the issues discussed. Evident here are the patriarchal norms that define a woman's value according to her ability to bear children, illustrated by Zainab's husband taking a second wife. He is able to have an affair and abandon Zainab because of the privileges bestowed on men by society. We also see how religious norms and practice allow a man to walk away from their families and place the 'sanctity' of marriage above the well-being of women. The woman is left with the burden of caring for children and ensuring they have food and an education.

5.5 Gender identities and preferences

The benefits of giving birth to girls or boys was discussed among participants. Men initially preferred boys and women preferred girls, with few exceptions. However, most men did agree with women that having girl children gave certain benefits. When asked of the key benefits for having boys or girls the following two clear conclusions that participants shared demonstrate how entrenched gender stereotypes exist have influence on whether boys or girls are preferred:

- Girls would help their mothers at home, were more compassionate and caring, and would take care of ageing parents.
- Boys would continue the father's name and the family legacy, and help with farming while the girls were married off.

The discussion on child preference also highlighted how participants understood being male or female and their gender roles. Men are defined by what they do or have and/or what they fail to do and lack. A man has to provide for his family or he becomes less of a man. A woman's role lies in nurturing and caring. Shifts in these roles were seen as an anomaly. In some cases, women had to earn an income to support the family and supplement what the men brought in. In other cases, women worked because they had been abandoned and had children to support. In other instances, there were no men in the household who could be expected to play the provider role. So women were seen to be acting like men, that is, acting out of their natural character to do things that were the preserve of men. Men, on the other hand, only helped with housework when their partners were sick or because they felt sorry for them when they were tired. Rarely was it felt that a man should help because it was a good thing to do. Instead, some said that men who did housework voluntarily were thought to have been bewitched by their partners. Most participants felt that men did not have the emotions and patience to raise children.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Working with faith leaders

Faith communities and religious leaders play an important role in the communities surveyed, with many participants adhering to their teachings and looking to them in times of need. Any interventions should have a capacity-building component for faith leaders to help them develop their skills, such as supporting and working with survivors of SGBV beyond praying and mediating; and reading and interpreting sacred texts in a more gender-sensitive way. They should also be mobilised to become advocates of SGBV survivors and their communities.

6.2 Economic empowerment

Of women

The prevalence of SGBV, notably incidences of women being abandoned and left to bring up children alone, highlights the urgent need for women's economic empowerment. This would increase women's independence from men and improve the livelihoods of families and children.

It has been shown that women are more likely than men to use any income they have to support their families.

Of men

The communities surveyed are still largely patriarchal, placing the burden of providing for families on men. With high unemployment rates and scant income-generating opportunities, it is important that men are also given support to develop income-generating skills, alongside other interventions to promote women's empowerment. The ideals of a gender-transformed society require that both men and women live together harmoniously and fulfil their potential in an equitable society.

Therefore, Tearfund's work in Nigeria should explore ways of including economic empowerment of both women and men in their programmes. This could also include networking with and referral to other organisations offering such services.

6.3 Community awareness

Participants, both men and women, noted that their understanding of what constitutes SGBV is coloured by what they have been taught and what they believe to be the right or wrong behaviour, according to their culture and religion. There was little appreciation of the effects of SGBV on women, children and communities, because most women do not speak out about their abuse, as explained earlier. Participants were also unaware of their legal rights and how to access justice if they were abused.

Awareness and community education programmes on SGBV – its causes, impact and what could be done – should be run in faith communities and in the wider community. These programmes should:

- highlight the benefits to both men and women of a more gender-equal society
- show the impact of violence in communities
- articulate the rights enshrined in the constitution and access to justice
- explore the role of tradition and religion in ending SGBV and promoting gender equality
- promote the reading and interpretation of scripture through a gender lens.

6.4 Engaging men

'The primary perpetrators of violence against women and girls are men. As such, prevention efforts must engage them. Many men in society, if provided with information and sensitisation about the issue, represent untapped but potentially influential allies in the struggle to end violence against women, within their families, communities and decision-making circles...

Men continue to hold the majority of powerful and influential positions in law, politics, finance, the justice and security sectors, business and the media. They determine policy and legislative priorities, as well as public budgets. In many countries, the frontline institutions charged with responding to violence against women, are male-dominated (e.g. the police, health and legal professions, the judiciary, etc.).' (UN Women online)

Men are central to the scourge of SGBV, firstly as perpetrators and then as possible allies. Because they hold key positions in society, they need to be included in any interventions. Working only with women will, in the main, address the symptoms rather than the cause, and will contribute little towards breaking the cycle of violence.

It is therefore strongly recommended that a gender-transformation programme targeting men, but including women and aimed at transforming negative masculinities, should be rolled out as part of an SGBV-prevention intervention. This programme should seek to address the intersectional issues of religion, faith and gender.

6.5 Strengthening the legal and justice systems

Many participants lamented the reality of corruption throughout the law enforcement system, from the police to courts and prisons. Though this is part of a bigger, country-wide problem, it is recommended that:

A rights and access to justice campaign should be run in conjunction with other civil society partners to educate communities, expose corruption and advocate for fair and consistent implementation of the laws of the country relating to SGBV.

6.6 Multi-stakeholder forums, starting at the community level

The scourge of SGBV is multifaceted, linked to other social ills, such as poverty, and is a much bigger issue than can be addressed by any one sector of society. In discussions, participants were not aware of other initiatives outside those of their own faith communities and immediate partners. A brief scan of the media shows that there are many NGOs working on SGBV in different states of Nigeria.

It is recommended that Tearfund partners and communities working on SGBV should connect with other stakeholders working in the field and join multi-stakeholder forums where such exist.

Such an engagement will help to amplify voices for advocacy, sharing lessons about what works best, as well as scarce resources.

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8. Appendix

Introduction

- 1) Introduce the project
- 2) Explain purpose of the interview
- 3) Ground rules
 - a) Assure confidentiality
 - b) Seek consent
 - i) The interview
 - ii) Recording (visual & audio)
 - c) Promise feedback

Socio-demographic characteristics

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) What is the highest grade that you have completed at school?
- 3) Do you belong to any religion? What is your religion?
- 4) What is your marital status?
- 5) How many children do you have?
- 6) Where are you living?
- 7) Who lives with you?
- 8) What is your employment status?

Awareness of SGBV, peacebuilding and family planning

- 1) Is SGBV a problem in your community?
- 2) Who is affected by SGBV and in what ways?
- 3) Do you know of any stakeholders working in the area of SGBV?
- 4) Are you aware of any conflict in your community? What are the types of conflict you experience?
- 5) How does conflict affect your community?
- 6) What do you think are the causes of SGBV?
- 7) Who in your family makes decisions about:
 - a) The health of women and children?
 - b) When to have children and how many?

Gender norms

- 1) Who should be the head of the family? Why?
- 2) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - a) Women must obey their husbands under all circumstances.
 - b) Men should also be involved in household work, such as cooking, taking care of children.
 - c) Wives cannot refuse to have sex with their husbands.
 - d) Husbands cannot refuse to have sex with their wives.
 - e) Women can be leaders in all areas of society, including in faith communities and politics.
 - f) Men and women are created equal before God.
 - g) Dowry entitles the man to do whatever with the woman because he has 'bought' her.

Masculinities

- 1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - a) A woman's most important role is taking care of her home and cooking for her family.
 - b) Changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding the children is the mother's responsibility.
 - c) It is manly for a man to beat his wife when she is disobedient.
 - d) A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.

- e) To be a man, a man has to be tough.
- f) Women cannot be leaders in society.
- g) To be a man means providing for your family and your extended family.
- h) It is manly to defend the honour of your family even by using violent means.
- i) Men should be involved in taking care of children.
- j) I believe that a man is superior to a woman.

Conflict and peace

- 1) Where do people feel at most risk, from what?
- 2) What roles do men & women play in the bringing about safety & security?
- 3) Who is most affected by conflict & how?
- 4) What drives conflict?
- 5) Who is mostly involved in peace making in the home, community & any society?
- 6) How can women be more involved in peacebuilding?
- 7) How can men be more involved in peacebuilding?
- 8) Have gender norms shaped or been shaped by conflict. If so, how?

Family planning (FP)

- 1) Is it important for couples to plan for the number of children they should have and when?
- 2) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - a) Men must have the final say over all decisions about the number of children a couple have.
 - b) Women have the right to decide what happens over their bodies.
 - c) Faith communities must be involved in assisting families with family planning.

Faith, SGBV and family planning

- 1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please provide examples.
 - a) I have heard my faith leader speak out against SGBV
 - b) There are programmes and teachings about SGBV and family planning in my faith community.
 - c) Survivors of SGBV feel free to seek support from my faith community.
 - d) I believe God condemns violence against women and children.
 - e) Faith communities must be involved in SGBV and family planning.
 - f) Faith communities must promote gender equality and women empowerment programmes.

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you would like to add that has not been mentioned?
2. How do you feel about this session?

GENDER, MASCULINITIES AND SOCIAL COHESION

Exploring the role of religion and religious communities in shaping social norms and understandings in Plateau state, Nigeria

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