



AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA

Annual Report of Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Nigeria: January – October 2024 Ending Child Early and Forced Marriage and Domestic Servitude in Ebonyi State

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1. Executive Summary

Between January and October 2024, the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Nigeria implemented a series of impactful activities in Ebonyi State, with a primary focus on ending child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude. The project was anchored in Ikwo Local Government Area (LGA) and reached a total of 6,715 participants, including traditional rulers, community leaders, religious leaders, parents, youths, and women.

AFJN's efforts began with strategic courtesy visits to key stakeholders, including the Vice President General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the State Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Multi-Sectoral Taskforce, and the South East Chairman of the Traditional Rulers Council, among others. These visits established vital partnerships and laid the groundwork for future advocacy.

A significant number of community sensitization activities and awareness-raising sessions were conducted across Ikwo LGA. These events, held in schools, churches, and community centers, focused on educating the public about the dangers of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude. AFJN also engaged the Catholic Women Organization during their August meetings, reaching 3,974 women across three parishes. These efforts led to a growing awareness among women and parents, driving a commitment to protecting children.

Youth advocates were trained in April 2024 to become ambassadors for child protection within their communities, and several youth engagement town hall meetings followed. AFJN played an active role in the global commemoration of World Anti-Human Trafficking Day on July 30th, raising awareness about human trafficking's role in child exploitation.

Through partnerships with traditional rulers and religious leaders, AFJN introduced a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at monitoring children taken outside the



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community for domestic service. Traditional rulers across Ikwo LGA endorsed the MOU, and several communities have since implemented it.

Despite cultural resistance in some areas, the project's outcomes have been promising, with a substantial shift in community attitudes toward child protection. Notable achievements include the training of youth advocates, heightened community awareness, the presentation of the MOU to Ndufu Echara Traditional ruler council, and strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders. The project also faced challenges, particularly in achieving male participation in advocacy efforts and monitoring children's safety once they leave their communities.

As AFJN moves forward, it plans to enhance its collaboration with government bodies, expand the youth advocate program, and deepen its monitoring systems to ensure sustained protection of children across Ebonyi State

2. Introduction

The Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Nigeria has been actively engaged in Ebonyi State, promoting the eradication of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude. AFJN works in partnership with Rev Sisters, Ikwo Noyo Youth Consultative Forum, AFJN trained Youth Advocate – Agent of change, local communities, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and various stakeholders to ensure the protection of children and foster social justice. This annual report highlights AFJN's efforts from January to October 2024, focusing on community sensitizations, advocacy, and capacity-building to create sustainable change in Ikwo LGA.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of the AFJN project in 2024 are:

- To raise awareness of the risks and consequences of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude.
- To empower youth, women, and community leaders to advocate for child protection.
- To foster collaboration between traditional rulers, religious leaders, and local authorities in preventing child exploitation.
- To establish a monitoring system for tracking the movement and welfare of children in domestic service.
- To build community resilience and legal frameworks to prevent child trafficking and exploitation.

4. Target Beneficiaries

- Young adolescents (aged 0-18 years)
- Women (specifically Catholic Women Organization members)
- Traditional rulers, faith leaders, and community leaders
- Parents and caregivers in Ikwo LGA
- Victims and survivors of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude



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5. Geographical Location

The project was implemented in various communities across Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State, including:

- Ndibokote Ezza-Enyimagu
- Ndufu Alik
- Ekpelu
- Orona Amagu
- Noyo Alike
- Inyibichiri
- Abina
- Igbudu
- Inyimagu

6. Implementation Status

Between January and October 2024, AFJN successfully conducted over 23 key events, including community sensitizations, church outreaches, stakeholder meetings, and youth engagements. The project reached a total of 6,715 participants, comprising 5,699 females and 1,016 males. These activities have led to widespread awareness and commitment from stakeholders to ending child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude.

7. Narrative

AFJN initiated the 2024 program with a series of courtesy visits and stakeholder consultations, laying the foundation for community engagement. The project gained significant momentum with various community sensitizations and outreach activities. Youth advocates and community leaders took an active role in delivering key messages, supported by AFJN staff and traditional rulers. During the August meetings, Catholic women organizations pledged to take ownership of the project, ensuring that children in their communities are protected.

Key activities included:

- Stakeholder consultative dialogues
- Youth advocate training sessions
- Church outreaches to amplify the need for child protection
- Sensitization during the World Anti-Human Trafficking Day rally
- Town hall meetings with youth, where participants shared personal experiences related to child early marriage



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8. Emerging Issues/Challenges

Several challenges were identified during project implementation, including:

- Resistance to cultural shifts in some communities, particularly regarding traditional practices of early marriage.
- Limited capacity among some stakeholders to monitor and track children's well-being after leaving the community for domestic service.
- Low male participation in advocacy efforts, despite the high prevalence of men as community decision-makers.

9. Lessons Learned

- Engaging traditional rulers and religious leaders from the outset significantly improves community buy-in.
- Empowering women, particularly through the Catholic Women Organization, plays a crucial role in sustaining community-led child protection initiatives.
- Continuous sensitization and follow-up are necessary to maintain momentum in advocacy efforts.
- Cultural sensitivity and aligning messages with local customs foster better acceptance of new child protection frameworks, such as the MOU.

10. AFJN Project Achievements (January - October 2024)

1. Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships:

- Held courtesy visits to key stakeholders, including the Vice President General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the State GBV Multi-Sectoral Taskforce, and the South East Chairman of the Traditional Rulers Council.
- Secured the endorsement of traditional rulers and religious leaders to support initiatives against child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude.

2. Community Sensitization and Awareness:

- Conducted numerous community sensitization activities, including at Ndibokote Ezza-Enyimagu, Orona Amagu, Ndiagu Amagu, and other locations.
- Organized church outreach programs in various parishes (Assemblies of God Church Nwakpu and Sacred Heart Parish) reaching a large number of community members.
- Sensitized 3,974 women during the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) annual August meetings across three parishes.

3. Youth Advocate Training:

- Trained 34 youth advocates from Ikwo LGA to become ambassadors for child protection and promote the fight against child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude.
- Held youth sensitizations and town hall meetings, reaching hundreds of adolescents and youths.

4. Successful Community and Church Engagements:

- Organized a series of town hall meetings across communities in Ikwo LGA to empower youth and community members, particularly in Eche Aliko and Inyibichiri.



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- Held a major youth engagement event on August 17th, with 571 participants discussing support systems and services for youth at risk of child marriage and domestic servitude.
- 5. **Commemoration of World Anti-Human Trafficking Day:**
 - Participated in the World Anti-Human Trafficking Day 2024 in Ebonyi State, which raised awareness on the link between human trafficking and child exploitation.
- 6. **Community Pledge and Action:**
 - Community stakeholders, particularly women from the Catholic Women Organization (CWO), pledged to act as watchdogs and report any case of child marriage or domestic servitude.
 - The appointment of welfare officers in various communities to oversee the protection of children and monitor their well-being.
- 7. **Impactful Sensitization and Capacity Building:**
 - Sensitization meetings conducted across multiple locations reached a total of 6,715 participants (1,016 males and 5,699 females).
 - Increased community awareness on the dangers of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude.

11. Recommendations/Conclusion

- Continue to strengthen the partnership with community and religious leaders to enforce the MOU.
- Expand the youth advocate program to include more male participants and leaders.
- Increase the capacity of local welfare officers to monitor and report on children's safety.
- Explore partnerships with local governments to link child protection efforts with broader social services, including healthcare, Police, Ministry of Women Affairs, Child protection Network, State GBV taskforce and education.
- Future projects should focus on reinforcing community ownership and building local monitoring systems to track and protect children's welfare.

12. Annexes

- Community Activity Register (January – October 2024) [AFJN COMMUNITY ACTIVITY REGISTER.docx](#)
- List of trained youth advocates [Youth Advocate Training attendance sheet](#)
- MOU template for child protection in domestic service [MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.docx](#)