



AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA NATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES PROTECTING CHILDREN TRANSFORMING FUTURES

A YEAR OF COLLECTIVE ACTION AGAINST CHILD
EARLY & FORCED MARRIAGE (CEFM) AND DOMESTIC
SERVITUDE (DS) FEATURING HIGHLIGHTS FROM:
EBONYI | ENUGU | RIVERS | AKWAIBOM | BENUE | CROSS
RIVER | PLATEAU | LAGOS | ANAMBARA



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Africa Faith and Justice Network Nigeria (AFJN-N) 2025 Annual Report
Empowering Communities and Vulnerable Individuals to Work together
Towards Ending Early and Child Marriage and Domestic Servitude



1. Message from the National Coordinator

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud of the resilience, commitment, and collective impact demonstrated by the Africa Faith and Justice Network – Nigeria (AFJN-N) across our implementing states. In a context marked by economic hardship, entrenched cultural norms, and persistent child protection challenges, our network remained steadfast in its mission to protect children and uphold human dignity.

Throughout the year, AFJN worked hand in hand with traditional rulers, faith leaders, women and youth groups, civil society organizations, and government institutions to confront the realities of child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude. Together, we moved beyond awareness-raising to strengthening **community-owned monitoring systems**, formal partnerships, and safeguarding structures that enable early identification, reporting, and response to child rights violations. These achievements reflect the power of collaboration and the trust communities continue to place in AFJN's faith-inspired approach.

At the same time, the year was not without challenges. Deep-rooted cultural practices, poverty-driven vulnerability, weak enforcement of child protection laws in some areas, and logistical constraints tested our resolve. However, these challenges also provided valuable lessons. They reinforced the importance of sustained community engagement, youth leadership, economic empowerment pathways, and strong partnerships with government institutions to achieve lasting change.

Looking ahead, AFJN-N remains committed to consolidating and scaling the gains recorded. Our vision for the future is one where communities take full ownership of child protection, where harmful practices are permanently abandoned, and where children—especially girls—are supported to learn, grow, and pursue dignified livelihoods. As we move into the next phase of implementation, we will deepen community monitoring systems, expand skills and entrepreneurship opportunities for vulnerable youth, strengthen safeguarding and accountability, and continue evidence-based advocacy at state and national levels.

I extend my sincere appreciation to our partners, donors, community leaders, and the dedicated sisters and staff whose unwavering commitment made these achievements possible. With your continued support, AFJN-N is well positioned to protect more children, strengthen communities, and contribute meaningfully to a future free from child exploitation.

Together, we are building communities where every child is safe, valued, and empowered to thrive_



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2. Project Overview



The Africa Faith and Justice Network Nigeria (AFJN-N) implements a nationwide child-protection initiative focused on **ending Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude (DS)** through community-driven advocacy, system strengthening, and inter-faith mobilization. Operating across **eight states—Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River, Lagos, and plateau**—the project empowers communities to protect children by transforming harmful norms, strengthening local accountability, and promoting collective action.

At its core, the project builds the capacity of **traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth groups, government agencies, women associations, and community volunteers** to prevent exploitation, identify at-risk children, and enforce safeguarding practices. AFJN's signature tools—the **Community Monitoring System (CMS)** and the **Child Protection MOU**—serve as practical mechanisms for tracking children's welfare, reducing unsafe migration, and ensuring transparency whenever a child is placed under another household's care.



Through **policy briefings, town hall meetings, church outreach, school engagements, youth advocacy, media campaigns, and multi-**

stakeholder dialogues, AFJN has strengthened the protective environment for thousands of children. The initiative also collaborates closely with government agencies such as **NAPTIP, State Ministries of Gender and Social Welfare, GBV Taskforces, Child Protection Networks, and the National Commission for Out-of-School Children** Ebonyi State to enhance reporting and referral systems.

Over the past year, the project has ignited a **grassroots movement** against domestic servitude and early marriage—yielding stronger community accountability, more MOU compliance, increased case reporting, heightened awareness, and growing public commitment to child rights. AFJN's approach ensures that **communities themselves become the custodians of child safety**, creating sustainable, long-term impact across Nigeria.



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3. Key Highlights of 2025



1. Expanded National Footprint Across Eight States

AFJN successfully implemented activities in **Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River, Lagos, Anambara and the FCT**, engaging thousands of children, parents, and stakeholders in child-protection awareness and action.

2. 120+ Community Sensitizations Conducted

Through town hall meetings, church outreaches, school visits, and market campaigns, AFJN reached **over 15,000 people** with messages on *ending child early marriage and domestic servitude*.



3. Strengthened Community Monitoring Systems (CMS)

Multiple communities across Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom adopted or strengthened CMS structures.

- Increased reporting of suspected cases
- Improved tracking of out-of-school children
- Greater community accountability

4. Adoption and Use of Child Protection MOUs

Traditional rulers and community leaders facilitated the use of **over 40 MOUs** regulating child placement, reducing unsafe migration and exploitation.



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5. Youth Leadership and Advocacy Growth

More than **300 youth volunteers** were trained and mobilized to lead sensitizations, monitor vulnerable households, and support referrals—fuelling a new **youth-led movement against domestic servitude**.

6. Government Partnerships Deepened

AFJN strengthened collaboration with:

- **NAPTIP**
- State Ministries of Gender/Social Welfare
- **GBV Taskforces**
- Child Protection Networks

These partnerships enhanced case referral, law enforcement, and community protection.

7. Impact Assessment Conducted in Two States



A formal research exercise in **Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States** provided evidence of:

- Increased awareness of CEFM & DS
- Reduction in sending children for domestic work
- Greater acceptance of MOU and CMS
- More children staying in school
- Improved survivor support pathways

8. Establishment of Learning Centre in Izzi LGA, Ebonyi State

AFJN volunteers, with support from the National Commission for Out-of-School Children, set up an informal education centre for **out-of-school and dropout children**—one of AFJN's most inspiring achievements in 2025.

9. Strong Media and Communication Presence

AFJN leveraged social media, radio talk shows, WhatsApp campaigns, and local announcements to amplify behavioural-change messaging across states.



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10. Increased Community Ownership

Traditional rulers, religious leaders, town unions, and women associations led **self-initiated activities**—a strong sign that the movement is becoming *community-driven and self-sustaining*.

4. State Activity Highlights (National Overview – 2025)

A state-by-state summary reflecting the real activities recorded in AFJN's official activity registers (Oct 2024–Dec 2025).

1. Ebonyi State — A Model of Community Transformation



- **Establishment of Out-of-School Learning Centre** in Oswanka Izziogo (Izzi LGA), serving children three times weekly.
- **End-of-Year Learning Celebration** hosted by AFJN with the National Commission for Out-of-School Children.
- **Widespread adoption of AFJN MOU & CMS**, particularly in Ikwo, Izzi, and Ebonyi LGAs.
- **Over 20 community sensitizations** emphasizing child protection.
- **Major community dialogues** involving traditional rulers, youth leaders, women leaders, and welfare officers.
- **Strong church engagement:** Assemblies of God, Anglican, Catholic CYON, Presbyterian churches adopting MOU.
- **High youth mobilization:** Over 1,087 youths engaged in 13 LGAs.
- **Increasing case reporting** from churches and youth groups.



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- Youths now proactively track suspected placements and alert welfare officers.
- Parents report increased knowledge of laws and harmful effects of domestic servitude.

2. Akwa Ibom State: (Policy Engagement + Youth Training + Multi-channel Advocacy)



Between **October 2024 and September 2025**, the Akwa Ibom State team implemented **over 30 community-based advocacy and partnership engagements** across **Ikot Abasi, Ini, Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, Ikono, and Uyo LGAs**, reaching **more than 1,100 community members** including traditional rulers, women leaders, faith leaders, youth, and local government officials.

- **Widespread Adoption of Community MoUs:**

AFJN facilitated the **signing and adoption of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)**

- **Strong Local Government & Institutional Partnerships:**

Strategic courtesy and advocacy visits were conducted to:

- **Ikot Ekpene, Ini, Essien Udim, Ikono, and Ikot Abasi LGAs**
- **NAPTIP (Uyo Zonal Office)**
- **Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Akwa Ibom State**

- **Faith-Based & Community Platforms Utilized:**

Advocacy outreaches were successfully conducted through:

- Churches (Catholic, Presbyterian, Apostolic)
- Health centres
- Council halls and family halls

- **Youth Advocacy & Survivor Support:**

AFJN trained and mobilized youth advocates who:

- Conducted grassroots sensitization
- Partnered with **NAPTIP** on anti-trafficking advocacy etc.





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3. Enugu State



(Advocacy, Training, Policy-level Engagement, Media Visibility)

- **Policy Briefing at Jubilee Hall, Holy Ghost Cathedral**, presided over by AFJN with over 80+ stakeholders.
- **Training of Youth Advocates** across key LGAs.
- **School Sensitizations** targeting adolescents, teachers, and church-based youth groups.
- **Advocacy visits** to religious bodies and community gatekeepers.
- **Media outreach at NTA (Nigerian Television Authority)** to

raise statewide awareness.

- Strong collaboration with Ministry of Gender, NAPTIP Enugu Zonal Office, and CPN.

Enugu's approach has focused heavily on structured advocacy, youth mobilization, and policy influence.

4. Rivers State

(School Sensitization–Focused State)



- **Large-scale school sensitizations** in multiple schools.
- Activities centered on **awareness creation, protective behavior, and identifying child exploitation signs**.
- Youth and teachers reached through structured school visits.
- **No MOUs or CMS adoption activities** recorded in Rivers State for 2025

Rivers State's interventions strongly targeted school-age adolescents.

5. Plateau State

(Advocacy & Community Sensitization)



- **Advocacy visits** to community leaders and relevant local stakeholders.
- **Community sensitizations** on ending domestic servitude and early marriage.
- Engagement with **local traditional institutions** and faith leaders.

Plateau activities were foundational and focused on building awareness and establishing partnerships.

6. Cross River State

AFJN Nigeria made important entry and consolidation gains in **Cross River State**, particularly in **Akamkpa Local Government Area**, by laying a strong foundation for **traditional and women-led child protection efforts**.

- **Traditional Rulers & Women Councils Engagement:**
Advocacy visits were conducted with:
 - **Council of Traditional Rulers (TRC), Akamkpa**



- **Akamkpa Women Council**
These engagements focused on **sensitization and adoption of the AFJN Community MoU** to prevent child domestic servitude, child labour, and early marriage.

- **Community Acceptance & Commitment:**
Traditional leaders and women's groups **formally accepted collaboration with AFJN and youth advocacy groups**, resolve to address harmful practices

affecting children and adolescents.



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- **Youth Advocacy Collaboration:**
Youth groups in Akamkpa partnered with AFJN to:
 - Support awareness creation
 - Report suspected cases
 - Serve as community watchdogs
- **Dialogue meetings with key community stakeholders** on ending child marriage and domestic servitude.
- **Town hall engagements** involving village heads, women leaders, and youth leaders. Sensitization on reporting mechanisms and support structures.

7. Benue State

(Community Engagement + Advocacy to Traditional Rulers + Strong Media Presence)

- **Community engagement activities** across targeted LGAs.
- **Advocacy visits to traditional rulers** to introduce MOU concept and child protection strategies.
- **20 weeks of continuous Radio Programming on Radio Maria 93.5 FM** (one of the longest-running outreach efforts recorded nationwide).
- Discussions on VAPP Law, child rights, exploitation risks, and safe community practices.

Benue had the strongest media-driven intervention among all AFJN states.

8. Lagos State



(Urban Advocacy, Rallies, Policy Briefings & Media Outreach)

- **Advocacy rallies** against child servitude in key urban communities.
- **Policy Briefings** engaging activists, legal bodies, and community representatives.
- **Advocacy trainings** for youth and civil society.
- **Media engagements** (radio and social media campaigns).
 - Outreach focused on **urban child exploitation patterns**, including domestic servitude in city households.

Lagos contributed significantly to advocacy visibility and urban anti-exploitation awareness.



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9. Anambra State Highlights



(Community Engagement, Advocacy & Policy Action)

In Anambra State, the African Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) intensified its efforts to end **child early and forced marriage and domestic servitude** through strategic community engagement, high-level advocacy, and grassroots sensitization.

A key advocacy visit was paid to **HRM**

Igwe Dr. Emeka Ilouno JP, the Traditional Ruler of **Ifitedunu Community, Oyi LGA**. The engagement involved a closed-door dialogue with the Igwe, during which AFJN presented a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** and a **Community-Based Child Monitoring System (CBCMS)** framework for review and adoption. The Igwe publicly pledged his commitment to ending child early marriage and domestic servitude in his community and demonstrated leadership by mobilizing women across Ifitedunu for sensitization and dialogue.

The engagement was followed by community sensitization sessions addressing the dangers, legal implications, and long-term impact of child exploitation. The Traditional Ruler further showed solidarity by distributing tubers of yam to participants, reinforcing community ownership and goodwill.

AFJN also conducted a **market outreach and sensitization at Awkuzu Market**, where women shared alarming firsthand accounts of children—mostly minors—trafficked from **Ebonyi State** and placed in exploitative domestic servitude across Anambra State. Emotional testimonies highlighted cases of children as young as ten years old working late at night, exposed to abuse, rape, and neglect, with limited access to reporting or protection mechanisms.

The Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) organized a one-day Policy Briefing on **Ending Child Early and Forced Marriage and Domestic Servitude** as part of its strategic advocacy and stakeholder engagement efforts. The briefing aimed to deepen awareness, strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration, promote policy dialogue, and secure concrete commitments toward the protection of children in Anambra State.

The event also served as a platform to introduce and formally **adopt the AFJN Community Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** and **Community Monitoring System (CMS)** as community-led mechanisms for preventing child early marriage and domestic servitude.



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8. National-Level Ripple Effects

Across all Nine states:

- AFJN's messaging reached **more than 10,000 community members** directly.
- Volunteers and youth networks expanded exponentially.
- MOU adoption grew beyond the initial target communities.
- Churches increasingly serve as **primary intervention points**.
- Traditional rulers strengthened accountability frameworks.
- Community awareness of child rights laws increased significantly.

These cumulative efforts indicate a **nationwide movement toward safer childhoods** and stronger community structures for preventing exploitation.

5. Success Stories



1. Eka-Awoke Community Takes Ownership in Ending Child Marriage and Domestic Servitude

Background & Demography

Eka-Awoke Autonomous Community, located in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, is a rural settlement known for its strong cultural heritage and communal values. Like many communities in the region, poverty, cultural norms, and limited access to education have contributed to high rates of child early and forced marriage as well as domestic servitude—often robbing children, especially girls, of their right to education, safety, and a future of dignity.

The Problem

Before intervention, many children from Eka-Awoke were sent away for domestic work or married off at a young age under informal arrangements. These practices not only exposed them to exploitation, abuse, and neglect but also perpetuated cycles of poverty and inequality. There was no formal tracking system for the movement of children, making accountability difficult and leaving them vulnerable.

The Turning Point

Following the High-Level Policy Briefing on Ending Child Marriage and Domestic Servitude in Ebonyi State held in April 2025, the African Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Ebonyi State Chapter, in collaboration with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), paid a follow-up courtesy visit to the Traditional Ruler of Eka-Awoke, HRH Eze Oliver Eze, on 17th May 2025.



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During the visit, AFJN presented the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Community Monitoring System (CMS) framework—strategic tools designed to regulate child apprenticeship, monitor the welfare of children, and ensure accountability.

Achievements & Commitments

- Official Adoption of the MOU: HRH Eze Oliver Eze formally approved the MOU for use across all villages under Eka-Awoke.
- Directive for Full Implementation: The Traditional Ruler instructed all cabinet members, village heads, and community leaders to ensure strict compliance.
- Community Monitoring System Established: A registration and documentation process for all children leaving the community for apprenticeship or domestic work was approved.
- Pledge for Awareness Campaigns: The Traditional Ruler committed to raising awareness across the community and encouraging other leaders to follow suit.



Impact

This decisive action by Eka-Awoke Community has set a powerful precedent for other communities in Ebonyi State. With the MOU and CMS in place, the risk of child exploitation will significantly reduce, while ensuring that children remain in safe, supportive environments that prioritize their education and well-being.

Quote from the Traditional Ruler

“We must know where our children are, with who, and for what purpose. Let us join hands to protect and give proper direction to our future hopes, my good people of Eka-Awoke Kingdom.” – HRH Eze Oliver Eze

2. “From Silence to Strength” – Oswanka Community, Izzi LGA, Ebonyi State

Before AFJN’s intervention, Oswanka was one of the communities where early marriage was quietly normalized and girls were routinely sent out for domestic servitude due to poverty. Families felt they had no alternative.

During one of AFJN’s community dialogues, a mother stood up and shared how she had almost sent her 14-year-old daughter to a distant relative in Lagos “for help.” After the session, she said:

“I never knew it was dangerous. Nobody had ever explained the risks to me. Today I understand that my daughter belongs in school—not in someone’s house.”

This encounter became a turning point.

The community went on to **adopt the Child Protection MOU**, created a **Monitoring Committee**, and stopped several potential cases of child trafficking that same month.



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Today, the community proudly reports:

- A significant drop in child migration
- Increase in girls' school attendance
- Active youth volunteers monitoring households.

3. “Saved Just in Time” – Oswanka Learning Centre, Izzi LGA, Ebonyi State

Oswanka was identified during the **Out-of-School Children Mop-Up** as one of the highest-risk zones for child servitude and early marriage.

With support from AFJN, a *community-led learning centre* was established for children who had dropped out.

One of the boys, aged 12, shared:

“I wanted to stop school and follow my friend to Abakaliki to look for work. My teacher told me to come back and learn. Now I can read again.”

This year, AFJN Ebonyi team held an **End-of-Year Party** to motivate the children. Parents, teachers, and the National Commission for Out-of-School Children celebrated the progress.

The learning centre has:

- Brought **31 children back to learning**
- Prevented **multiple child migration attempts**
- Created a safe hub where children feel valued and supported

Parents now refer to it as “*the centre that saved our children*.”

4. “The Pastor Who Became a Child Protection Advocate” – Rev. S. N. Ewah

Rev. Ewah, Minister-in-Charge of Assemblies of God Church, Oguzorouweya, was deeply moved after Church Outreach at his Church AFJN’s Oguzoriuweya, Ebonyi LGA, in Ebonyi state.

He had grown up witnessing domestic servitude and early marriage but had never seen a structured solution.

When he heard about the **Child Protection MOU and Community Monitoring System**, he became one of the strongest advocates.

Within weeks:

- He **adopted the MOU** at church level
- He mandated all nine sectional churches under him to **comply with CMS reporting**
- He instructed every member:



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“If you see a child being taken away for work, ask questions. We must protect our own.”

This bold leadership led to:

- Reporting of two suspected cases
- Prevention of one early-marriage attempt
- Stronger collaboration between churches and traditional authorities

His testimony is now used as an example in other LGAs.

5. “Youth Rising to Protect Their Own” – Abakaliki & Ikot Ekpene Multi-State Voices

From Ebonyi to Akwa Ibom, youth advocates trained by AFJN have stepped into leadership roles.

One youth from Ikot Ekpene said:

“AFJN made us know that we have a voice. I used to feel these issues are for elders. Not anymore.”

In Ikono, youth volunteers helped rescue a 13-year-old girl who had been taken for domestic work under false promises.

Their efforts show:

- Rising confidence
- Rejection of harmful norms
- Youth-driven early-warning systems

The transformation is spreading across states.

7. “A Government Champion” – Mrs. Alo Elizabeth, HOD Social Welfare and Education, Ezza North

Mrs. Elizabeth has worked for years without recognition, trying to sensitize communities on early marriage.

AFJN trainings empowered her with structured tools—MOU, CMS, reporting guidelines.

She said:

“This project gave us the strength to engage communities boldly. We now have evidence, not just passion.”

Her leadership resulted in:

- Strengthened GBV Taskforce collaboration



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- Better reporting of child-related cases
- Higher community trust in government referral systems

AFJN's approach is not only effective—

It is restoring dignity, hope, and safety to children

6. Community Voices (Quotes & Testimonials)

1. Traditional Ruler- HRH Eze Oliver Eze

We must know where our children are, with whom, and for what purpose. Let us join hands to protect and give proper direction to our future hopes, my good people of Eka-Awoke Kingdom.” – HRH Eze Oliver Eze

2. Religious Leaders: Rev. S. N. Ewah – Assemblies of God Church, Oguzorouweya, Ebonyi State

“The MOU changed everything. As a church, we now monitor our members, protect our children, and report cases. We preach it from the pulpit.”

3. Mother at Oswanka Community, Izzi LGA

“I almost sent my daughter to Lagos. After the AFJN meeting, I realized the danger. Today, she is back in school. God bless AFJN.”

4. Youth Advocates: CYON St John De Evangelist Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

“AFJN made us realize that we are powerful. We now speak for children who cannot speak for themselves.”



7. Achievements & Impact

Transforming communities. Protecting children. Changing norms.

1. Strengthened Community Protection Systems Across Multiple States

AFJN successfully revitalized and strengthened local child-protection structures across eight states—



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Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River, and Lagos—using a unified community-driven model:

Key Results

- **22 communities** adopted the AFJN Child Protection **MOU** (Memorandum of Understanding).
- **18 Community Monitoring Systems (CMS)** established.
- Communities now track child movement, apprenticeship, and potential exploitation **for the first time in history**. *“We must know where our children are, with who, and for what purpose.” – HRH Eze Oliver Eze, Ikwo LGA*

This strategic shift improved coordination between town unions, welfare offices, churches, traditional councils, and youth advocates—resulting in faster reporting, prevention, and early intervention.

2. Increased Awareness & Attitude Change on Child Marriage & Domestic Servitude Through **policy briefings, town halls, church outreaches, and community dialogues**, AFJN Direct Reach:

- **Over 18,000 people** across all implementing states.
- **Over 200 youth** trained directly as child-safety champions.
- **Over 100 religious leaders** mobilized to preach against early marriage.
- **27 traditional authorities** formally endorsed community reforms.

Impact on Knowledge & Attitudes

Independent assessment (2025 Impact Study) revealed:

- **82%** of respondents now know that child marriage is illegal.
- **76%** understand that sending a child for domestic work without documentation is exploitation.
- **68%** reported that AFJN changed their perception of “child helpers” as normal practice.
- **59%** said they would now report abuse—up from 18% before AFJN intervention.

This represents a **40–60% shift in attitudes and awareness** within just one year.

3. Improved Reporting & Reduction in Abuse Cases

Communities reported a noticeable **drop in child-servitude cases** in Ebonyi, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom States due to monitoring committees and stronger enforcement.

Community-Reported Outcomes

- **Child domestic servitude reduced by 40%** in Ikwo and Izzi LGAs (Ebonyi State).
- **Early marriage cases declined by 35%** in rural Akwa Ibom due to church-led surveillance.



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- **Reporting increased by 54%** in communities with active CMS.

“People now understand abuse, and they report it. Before AFJN, silence was our biggest enemy.” – SSA on Community Engagement, Ebonyi State

4. Religious & Traditional Institutions Became Active Child Protection

Major Faith-Based Impacts

- Assemblies of God, Catholic CYON, Presbyterian & Anglican leaders now run **anti-servitude sermons**.
- Faith leaders established **child-safety watch teams** in 6 communities.

5. Establishment of Learning Centres for Out-of-School & At-Risk Children (Ebonyi State)

One of the most significant achievements was the establishment of a **community learning center in Izzi LGA** in collaboration with the National Commission for Out-of-School Children.

Impact Achieved

- **94 children** enrolled (out-of-school + dropouts).
- Learning English, Mathematics, and Igbo 3 times weekly.
- **End-of-year party organized**—rewarding top learners, motivating attendance.
- Parents now prioritize schooling **over sending children to work**.

6. Strengthened Collaboration with Government Agencies

AFJN solidified institutional partnerships with:

- **NAPTIP** (Zonal Commands)
- **Ministry of Gender Affairs**
- **CPN (Child Protection Network)**
- **Ministry of Education & Social Welfare**
- **Local Government GBV Taskforces**

7. Youth Leadership & Grassroots Mobilization Strengthened

AFJN trained and empowered **200 youth advocates** who now:

- Report suspected child movement
- Partner with church leaders
- Mobilize peers to resist domestic servitude recruitment
- Act as watchdogs for traditional rulers

Impact on Youth



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- Increased confidence to challenge harmful norms.
- Youth-led awareness outreaches in Ebonyi, Akwa Ibom & Enugu reached over **10,000 adolescents**.
- Youth now serve as **the primary drivers** of community monitoring systems.

8. Evidence of Real Behaviour Change (From 2025 Impact Assessment)

The assessment revealed powerful shifts across the communities:

Key Measured Changes

- Decrease in children being sent out for domestic work
- More parents choosing apprenticeship within the community
- Increased documentation of child movement
- Higher school enrolment and retention
- Reduced tolerance for child marriage

8. Challenges

Summary of Key National-Level Challenges

Challenge Area	States Most Affected	Evidence from Registers
Cultural resistance	Ebonyi, Plateau, Cross River	Town halls identified cultural barriers
Weak law enforcement	Enugu, Lagos, Benue and Ebonyi	Policy briefing testimonies
Poverty & economic pressure	Ebonyi, Rivers, Plateau	Community reports & FGD patterns
Terrain/logistics	Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Plateau	Access issues recorded

9. Lessons Learned

The implementation of AFJN's community-driven project across **Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Benue, and Cross River States** revealed several important lessons that will shape the next phase of programming (2025–2028). These insights highlight practical realities, community dynamics, and strategic considerations necessary for sustaining gains in ending Child Early & Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude (DS) in Nigeria.

1. Community Ownership Is the Most Powerful Driver of Change

The strongest project successes occurred where **traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community structures** fully embraced the initiative.



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Lesson: Projects thrive when communities lead the change, not when interventions are externally driven.

2. Follow-Up Engagements Are Critical for Sustainability

One-off sensitizations created awareness but **did not guarantee adoption** of practices. However, consistent follow-up visits—especially after policy briefings—led to:

- MOU adoption,
- Formation of community monitoring committees,
- Clear reporting channels,
- Stronger accountability.

Lesson: Follow-ups convert commitment into action.

3. Youth Structures Are Effective Early-Warning and Reporting Channels

Across states, youth groups (especially CYON, youth presidents, and community mobilizers) showed:

- Higher responsiveness to reporting cases,
- Better presence in remote communities,
- Stronger willingness to challenge harmful norms.

Lesson: Youth platforms are the project's most strategic allies for **early detection and community surveillance**.

4. Religious Leaders Remain Gatekeepers of Social Norms

Churches played a decisive role in:

- Ending silence around domestic servitude,
- Mandating compliance with the MOU,
- Extending sensitization messages to rural congregations.

Lesson: Faith leaders are influential changemakers and must remain central to community outreach.

5. Poverty Is Still a Key Driver of CEFM and Domestic Servitude

Across FGDs and KIIs, the most common reasons for sending children away were:

- Economic hardship,
- Food insecurity,
- Lack of school fees.

Lesson: Prevention requires coupling sensitization with skills training, livelihood support, and school support programs.



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6. Weak Law Enforcement Undermines Reporting

Many respondents reported:

- Fear of police retaliation,
- Distrust of authorities,
- Cases being overturned due to influence or corruption.

Lesson: Without stronger enforcement, interventions remain fragile. Collaboration with NATIP, welfare officers, and LGAs must be intensified.

7. Awareness Has Increased, but Behavioural Change Takes Time

Most communities now know:

- The legal marriage age is 18,
- Domestic servitude is harmful,
- Reporting channels exist.

Yet, behaviors—especially among older adults—change slowly.

Lesson: *Information is not enough.* Continuous dialogue, reinforcement, and visible success stories drive actual behaviour change.

8. Volunteers Are the Backbone of Community-Level Success

Across all seven states, the most impactful work was done by:

- Youth volunteers,
- Catechists and women leaders,
- Community teachers,
- Taskforce members.

Lesson: Supporting, training, and motivating volunteers must remain a top project priority.

10. Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement Impact

Stakeholder Group	States Active	Key Contributions	Overall Value
Government agencies	All 8 states	Policy support, law enforcement, welfare	Legitimacy & sustainability
Religious bodies	Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Lagos	MOU adoption, awareness	Moral authority & trust



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Stakeholder Group	States Active	Key Contributions	Overall Value
Traditional rulers	Ebonyi, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Plateau, Cross River	CMS setup, enforcement	Cultural acceptability
Youth networks	All states (strongest in Ebonyi, Akwa Ibom & Enugu)	Reporting, mobilization	Grassroots ownership
Media	Nationwide	Visibility and public accountability	Mass awareness
Schools	Rivers, Ebonyi, Enugu, Akwa Ibom	Sensitization, early warning	Protecting children

11. Looking Ahead: 2026 Priorities

The Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) is launching a strengthened three-year intervention aimed at empowering communities, faith institutions, and vulnerable households in Nigeria to work collaboratively toward ending Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Child Domestic Servitude (CDS). Building on the achievements of the 2023–2024 project, the new phase (2025–2028) focuses on consolidating community systems, expanding partnerships, strengthening monitoring structures, and deepening socio-economic support for at-risk children.

The project will operate through three strategic objectives:

1. **Deepening community–sister partnership structures** for awareness, social norms transformation, and adoption of the community-based monitoring system (CMS) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regulating child placement.
2. **Strengthening faith and educational institutions** to deliver skills acquisition, life-oriented economic empowerment, and protection support for vulnerable children, while establishing and equipping joint monitoring groups.
3. **Conducting comprehensive annual evaluations** to assess progress, document lessons learned, and communicate evidence-based best practices for policy change and community action.

Across the 2025–2028 cycle, the project will target the establishment of ***over 8 functional community partnerships, 13 collaborative institutions, 8 skill-trainings enrolment agreements, and up to 250 children acquiring life-enhancing skills***. Through partnerships with traditional leaders, religious leaders, women’s groups, youth bodies, and social welfare officers, the project will strengthen accountability mechanisms such as the CMS and foster stronger enforcement of community by-laws.

Expected outcomes include:

- Significant reduction in CEFM and CDS due to strengthened monitoring and reporting systems;
- Increased adoption of child protection MOUs and community-led surveillance;



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- Enhanced community awareness and shift in social norms;
- Improved livelihood opportunities and reduced vulnerability among at-risk children;
- Stronger synergy between communities, faith groups, CSOs, and government institutions.

Overall, the project will build resilient community structures capable of independently sustaining child protection gains and preventing exploitation, ensuring that every child lives in dignity, safety, and hope.

The 2026 priorities reinforce the Hilton Project's direction by focusing on:

- ✓ Strengthening systems (CMS, bylaws, monitoring tools)
- ✓ Expanding influence (LGA by-laws, traditional declarations, state-level advocacy)
- ✓ Empowering people (youth advocates, faith networks, traditional leaders)
- ✓ Protecting children (survivor pathways, safe reporting mechanisms)
- ✓ Deepening evidence (data-driven interventions, midline assessments)

Together, these priorities set AFJN firmly on track to achieve the **2025–2028 vision of sustainable community-driven child protection systems across Nigeria**





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School Outreach

