



RAPPORT ① ② ③

OVERVIEW OF THE
RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-
RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE
IN BORNO STATE

CONTEXTUAL REPORT

📍 **NIGERIA**

**Innovative technologies
to prevent and combat
conflict-related sexual
violence**

WE ARE
NOT WEAPONS
OF WAR



INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes the third in an analytical series produced under the project "*Nigeria: innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence*". The project is jointly implemented by **We are NOT Weapons of War** (WVoW) and **Bibliothèques Sans Frontières** (BSF), with the support from the **Crisis and Support Centre** (CdCS) of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE).

This report was compiled and written by the teams of We are NOT Weapons of War (WVoW), with the support of the Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA), WVoW's local operational partner based in Maiduguri.

The report examines the institutional, legal, and operational response to conflict-related sexual violence in Borno State. It analyses the mechanisms put in place to prevent such violence, protect the most vulnerable populations, and support survivors.

Borno State remains at the heart of a protracted crisis, where the combined effects of insecurity, forced displacement, and poverty continue to weaken social and institutional structures. In 2024, more than 7.8 million people were still in need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.7 million internally displaced persons. Despite a decrease in direct clashes, sexual violence persists. This situation highlights the fragility of the protection framework and the challenges of translating political and legislative commitments into concrete action.

This study assesses the scope and limitations of existing mechanisms addressing conflict-related sexual violence. It highlights progress achieved, persistent obstacles, and adaptive dynamics observed on the ground. The analysis is based on institutional and humanitarian data, field observations, and interviews with public authorities, humanitarian actors, and community representatives.

To this end, the report is structured around two complementary sections:

- The legal and institutional framework: an examination of the laws and policies governing the fight against sexual violence within a context of legal pluralism, and an assessment of their effective implementation in Borno State.
- Response initiatives and programmes: an analysis of actions undertaken by national institutions, international partners, and local organisations to strengthen prevention, protection, and survivor-centred care.

By providing an analytical overview of the current response system, the report aims to identify areas for improvement to enhance the coherence, sustainability, and effectiveness of interventions within the framework of the WVoW-BSF project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A

ACJA

Administration of Criminal Justice Act

B

BAY

Borno-Adamawa-Yobe

BSF

Bibliothèques Sans Frontières

C

CDCS

Centre de Crise et de Soutien

CEDAW

Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women

CJTF

Combined Joint Task Force
(FMM : Force Multinationale Mixte)

CPA

Criminal Procedure Act

CPC

Criminal Procedure Code

CRSV

Conflict-related sexual violence

CSO

Civil Society Organization

G

GBV

Gender-Based Violence

GRA

Grassroots Researchers Association

I

ICC

International Criminal Court

ICL

International Criminal Law

ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross

IDPs

Internally Displaced Persons
(Camps de Déplacés Interne)

IHL

International Humanitarian Law

IHRL

International Human Rights Law

INGO

(International) Non-Governmental Organization

IOM

International Organization for Migration

ISWAP

Islamic State in West Africa Province

J

JAS

Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad

L

LGA

Local Government Area

M

MDM

Médecins du Monde

MEAE

Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères

MSF

Doctors Without Borders
(Médecins Sans Frontières)

N

NAPTIP

National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person

NIAC

Non International Armed Conflict

NSAG

Non-State Armed Groups

O

OCHA

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

P

PHC

Primary Health Center

PUI

Première Urgence Internationale

U

UN

United Nations

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

S

SRSO-SVC

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

T

TPA

Terrorism Prevention Act

U

UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA

United Nations Population Fund

V

VAPPA

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act

W

WWOW

We are NOT Weapons of War

THE JUDICIAL RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN BORNO STATE

Understanding the judicial response to conflict-related sexual violence in Borno State requires examining how national, international, and local legal frameworks interact—or contradict one another—within an environment characterised by normative pluralism, institutional weakness, and persistent impunity.

This first part analyses the legal foundations, institutional structures, and the tensions created by the coexistence of multiple legal systems. It then presents the views of legal expert Victoria Ojo-Adewuyi, whose contribution provides additional insight into the concrete challenges of enforcing the law in Borno State.

1

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Amnesty International, *Promouvoir et protéger les droits humains : un programme en dix points pour le Nigeria*, Amnesty International, 2009.
- 2 Amnesty International, *Nigeria: A Harrowing Journey – Access to Justice for Women and Girls Survivors of Rape* 2020, p. 15–19.
- 3 Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act*, 2015.
- 4 Partners West Africa Nigeria, *Borno State Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law 2022* (official text).

Nigeria's legal framework for combating sexual violence is based on national law, international instruments ratified by the federal government, and legislation adopted by each federated state. This configuration, in the context of a pluralist legal system combining civil, customary, and Islamic law, generates inconsistencies that hinder the effective recognition and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence.

National and international legal framework relating to sexual violence in Nigeria

At the national level, the 1999 Constitution guarantees the right to human dignity and prohibits torture as well as cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment¹. In theory, these provisions ensure legal protection for victims of sexual violence. In practice, human rights organisations note weak enforcement of these provisions, particularly in areas affected by prolonged insecurity, where most sexual violence remains unpunished².

Nigeria's criminal law framework rests on two main texts: the *Criminal Code Act* (applicable in southern States) and the *Penal Code* (applicable in northern States, including Borno). Both texts define rape with a restrictive approach, centred on non-consensual vaginal penetration.

To harmonise legal protections, the Federal Parliament adopted the *Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act* (VAPP Act) in 2015. The VAPP Act expands the definition of rape to include any form of non-consensual penetration regardless of gender, and criminalises other forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, sexual coercion, so-called "harmful" practices, and female genital mutilation³. The VAPP Act applies in a State only after it has been incorporated into that State's domestic legislation. In Borno State, the State Assembly adopted the *Borno State Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law* in January 2022. The law entered into force the same year⁴. The adoption is a major step forward in the recognition of survivors' rights, although its implementation remains limited by institutional constraints.

At the international level, Nigeria is a party to several major instruments: the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW, ratified in 1985), the *Convention Against Torture* (CAT, ratified in 2001), the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (ratified in 1983) and its *Maputo Protocol* (ratified in 2004), as well as the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (ratified in 2001). These instruments impose obligations on the State to prevent, prosecute, and punish sexual

violence, including when committed in the context of armed conflict. However, the Rome Statute has not yet been fully incorporated into national law, limiting the ability to legally qualify conflict-related sexual violence as war crimes or crimes against humanity at the national level.

The lack of harmonisation among these different legal texts creates unequal protection across jurisdictions. In Borno State, this fragmentation results in different legal qualifications of offences, jurisdictional conflicts between civil, customary, and Islamic courts, and highly variable application of the VAPP principles in cases of conflict-related sexual violence.

The definition of rape and sexual violence in Borno State

5 Penal Code (Northern Nigeria), Section 282(2).

6 Amnesty International, *Nigeria: A Harrowing Journey – Access to Justice for Women and Girls Survivors of Rape*, 2020.

7 Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act*, 2015.

Borno State is at the intersection of several legal regimes. The law applicable to sexual violence is primarily derived from the *Penal Code* (Northern Nigeria), and since 2022 by the *Borno State Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law* (VAPP).

The *Penal Code*, which remains in force, defines rape narrowly. Section 282(1) limits rape to non-consensual vaginal penetration of a woman, and Section 282(2) provides that a husband cannot be convicted of raping his wife once she has reached puberty⁵. This formulation:

- excludes marital rape and non-penetrative sexual assaults;
- does not recognise sexual violence against men;
- does not account for aggravated forms of violence observed in armed conflict contexts.

In practice, the burden of proof remains extremely high. In jurisdictions influenced by Sharia law, some interpretations continue to require testimony from male witnesses to establish rape⁶. This evidentiary requirement—difficult to meet even in peacetime—makes the prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence committed in conflict zones almost impossible, where survivors are often isolated or displaced.

Borno State Parliament's 2022 adoption of Borno State VAPP Law is a significant advance. The law adopts a far more inclusive definition of rape and sexual violence. It covers any form of non-consensual penetration, regardless of the nature of the act or the victim, and it explicitly recognises marital rape as a criminal offence. The law also covers other forms of sexual violence, such as sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, female genital mutilation, and sexual intimidation⁷.

Despite these advances, several limitations persist:

- The law remains poorly known among judicial and law-enforcement actors;
- Implementation suffers from insufficient funding and weak inter-institutional coordination;
- certain provisions—particularly those on marital rape—face resistance in contexts where Sharia law retains significant influence.

8 The answers to questions 1 and 3, as well as the explanatory tables she provided, are included in the appendix. The extracts below reproduce her answers to questions 2 and 4 in full.

Finally, the coexistence of state law and Islamic law creates legal uncertainty for survivors. Islamic courts, recognised by the Constitution (Articles 275 to 279), retain jurisdiction over certain cases involving Muslims. Depending on the type of jurisdiction involved, the criteria for proof and even the recognition of rape may vary, leading to unequal application of the law across the territory.

Although Borno State has adopted legislation that is more closely aligned with international standards, overlapping legal frameworks continue to hinder its effectiveness. Restrictive practices and entrenched religious and social norms still limit survivors' access to justice.

Ambiguities within the legal system and the institutional response: insights from Victoria Ojo-Adewuyi

Analysis of Borno's legal and institutional framework shows that the Nigerian justice system remains deeply fragmented. Normative pluralism—combining federal law, state legislation, Sharia law, and customary law—produces contradictions that weaken recognition and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence.

In this context, WVoW sought the expertise of jurist **Victoria Ojo-Adewuyi**, author of *Criminal Justice Responses to the Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria* (2024). Admitted to the Nigerian Bar in 2012, she specialises in international criminal law, human rights, and gender issues. After working at the Babcock School of Law and Security Studies and contributing to *Human Rights on Gender, Sex and the Law in Nigeria* (2015), she completed a master's degree at the University of the Western Cape before joining the NGO *Project Alert*—on Violence against Women, where she provided legal support to survivors of domestic violence. She subsequently completed a doctoral thesis at Humboldt University of Berlin on the Boko Haram crisis from an international criminal justice perspective.

In this interview, Victoria Ojo-Adewuyi discusses the contradictions within Borno's judicial system and the obstacles preventing survivors of conflict-related sexual violence from accessing justice⁸.



Victoria Ojo- Adewuyi

In your opinion, how does the coexistence of the Criminal Code, the Penal Code, the VAPP Act, and Sharia law affect the recognition and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence in Borno State? What are the main legal gaps or inconsistencies that hinder effective protection for survivors?

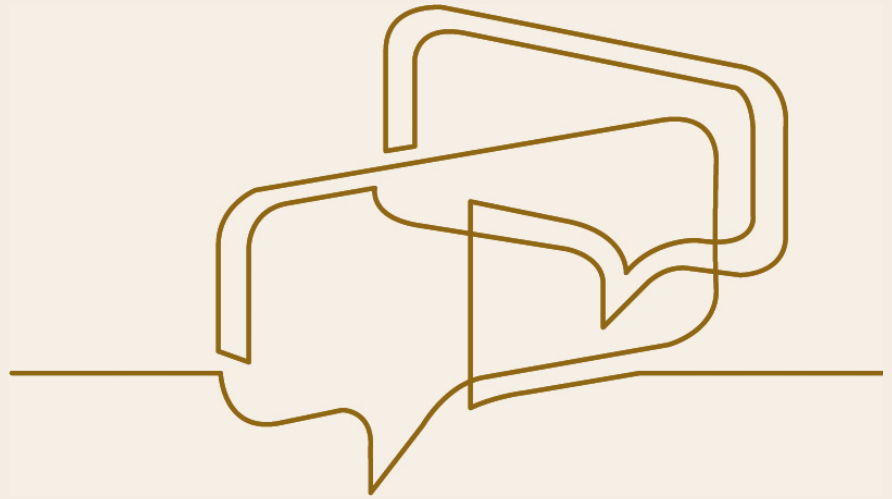
Borno State operates under a plural legal system combining, the Criminal Code (applicable mainly in southern Nigeria); the Penal Code (applicable in the northern states, including Borno), the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), passed federally in 2015 but only enforceable in states that have domesticated it including Sharia (Islamic) law, applied through Sharia Courts in personal and certain criminal matters for Muslims. Unfortunately, the fragmented and sometimes contradictory legal frameworks make justice for survivors extremely difficult. The Penal Code (1960) still governs criminal justice in Borno, but it provides narrow definitions of sexual offences (for example, rape is limited to penile-vaginal pene-

tration and excludes marital rape). The VAPP Act, by contrast, recognizes a broader range of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual assault, harmful practices, emotional abuse, and spousal rape, unfortunately, this has not been domesticated in Borno State*.

Sharia law also criminalizes zina (illicit sexual intercourse) but may blur the line between consensual and non-consensual sex, particularly when evidentiary standards (such as the requirement for four male-bayyinah- witnesses) are applied to prove rape. This results in situations where survivors face uncertainty about which law applies. Under Sharia, proving rape without four witnesses can expose the survivor to accusations of adultery (zina), especially if pregnancy results which may lead to secondary victimization. Under the Penal Code, corroboration is often required, and medical evidence collection is weak due to limited forensic capacity in conflict zones. CRSV by insurgents or security forces is rarely prosecuted due to overlapping jurisdictions between civilian, military,

and customary authorities, and fear of reprisals. In reality, most of the Boko Haram related cases that have been instituted do not contain CSRV due to the inherent evidentiary challenges.

Neither the Penal Code nor Sharia explicitly recognizes conflict-related sexual violence as a distinct category of crime. The VAPP Act does recognize broader forms of sexual violence but, as previously noted, is not in force in Borno. Nigeria's international obligations under the Rome Statute and CEDAW are poorly translated into local enforcement mechanisms and the Rome Statute remains undomesticated. This has led to CRSV being treated as 'ordinary rape' (a crime historically not prioritized and under reported in Nigeria), thereby ignoring its systematic and conflict-linked nature, and denying survivors the special protections due under international humanitarian and human rights law.



From your perspective, what improvements are most needed to ensure better protection and access to justice for survivors?

To ensure better protection and access to justice for survivors, comprehensive legal, institutional, and social reforms are needed. The following areas represent key priorities for improvement.

Domesticating and implementing the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act) to provide a comprehensive framework against sexual and gender-based violence is a step in the right direction. There is also a need to harmonize the Penal Code, Sharia, and Criminal Codes to align with international human rights standards. CRSV should be recognized as a distinct offence linked to conflict, consistent with the Rome Statute and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. These reforms would ensure consistent protection across jurisdictions and stronger accountability for perpetrators.

Training in gender-sensitive and survivor-centered investigation

methods is essential for the police, along with strengthened oversight for cases involving security forces. This would enhance professionalism, increase survivor confidence, and reduce impunity for armed actors.

Judges and prosecutors require regular capacity building on gender, trauma-informed justice, and international legal standards. The establishment of special courts or designated judges for SGBV and CRSV cases, as well as simplified procedural rules allowing for in camera hearings, would make trials fairer and less traumatic. These measures would likely result in higher conviction rates and more survivor-friendly court processes.

Engagement with traditional and religious leaders is vital for addressing stigma and encouraging reporting. Community-based awareness programs should focus on survivors' rights, reporting mechanisms, and the unacceptability of informal settlements for CRSV cases. This would foster a sup-

portive social environment and increase early reporting of offences.

Improved collaboration among the police, judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and humanitarian organizations is also critical. A centralized database for CRSV cases and integration of justice mechanisms into humanitarian response frameworks would streamline processes and improve data-driven policy making.

Nigeria aligning its national responses with international frameworks such as those of the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. The establishment of hybrid or special tribunals for grave conflict-related offences could strengthen accountability. Including CRSV survivors in transitional justice and reparations programs would further recognize their experiences and promote long-term justice and healing.

Political will is also crucial.

*Although Borno State formally adopted the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law (VAPP Law) in January 2022, this statement appears to reflect concerns about the lack of effective implementation and enforcement, rather than the absence of legislative adoption.

2

LAW ENFORCEMENT: BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND PERSISTENT OBSTACLES

⁹ *Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022*, Government of Nigeria, 2022.

¹⁰ Babington-Ashaye A. and al., *The Tide Turns: the Prosecution of SGBV Crimes as a Terrorist Offence in Nigeria*, International Center for counter-Terrorism-ICCT, 2022.

Judicial jurisdiction and prosecution mechanisms

Offences related to terrorism fall under the jurisdiction of the Attorney General of the Federation, acting through the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions of the Federation. The *Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act (TPA)*, revised in 2022, provides the legal framework for the prosecution of Boko Haram members⁹.

The law prioritises the demonstration of membership in a terrorist organisation over the investigation of specific crimes committed in that context, which complicates the legal qualification and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence.

Practitioners and observers have identified several key limitations¹⁰:

- A limited technical understanding of the link between sexual violence and terrorism, which prevents the use of the TPA to prosecute such offences;
- The criminal jurisdiction of the federated states for sexual offences, which restricts federal prosecutorial action;
- The absence of explicit criminalisation of rape, forced marriage, or sexual slavery as terrorist acts;
- The high evidentiary threshold required to establish rape, further compounded by the lack of forensic expertise in conflict-affected areas.

These factors largely explain a very limited number of prosecutions for sexual violence in Boko Haram-related terrorism cases, despite documentation by the United Nations and NGOs.

¹¹ Federal Ministry of Justice, official statement, May 2021.

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime & Wayamo Foundation, *Strengthening Nigeria's Judicial Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, rapport de formation, p. 8, October 2022.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Institutional initiatives to strengthen judicial response

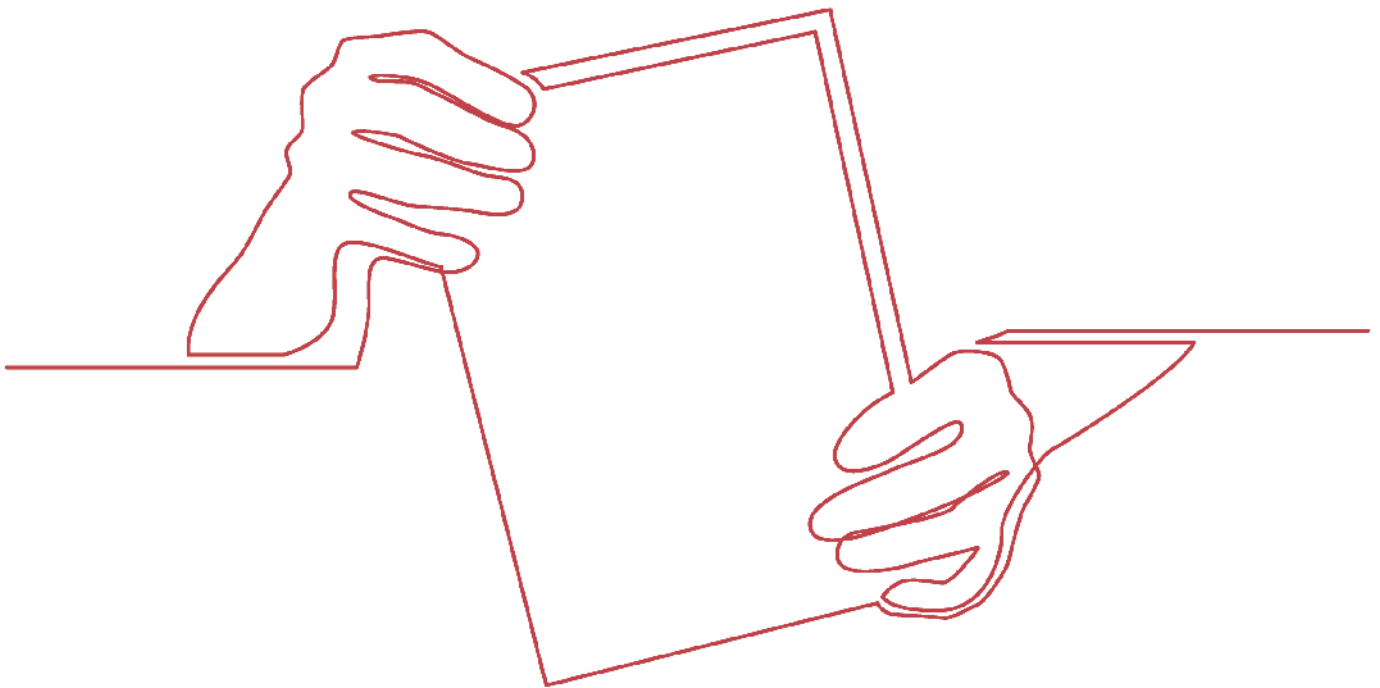
To overcome these weaknesses, the Federal Ministry of Justice established a *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit* (SGBV Unit) in 2021, tasked with harmonising policies and facilitating access to justice for survivors¹¹.

The Unit operates by:

- Analysing and harmonising existing legal instruments on sexual violence;
- Coordinating prosecutions;
- Providing legal assistance and mediation for survivors and public institutions.

In October 2022, joint training sessions were organised by UNODC, the Wayamo Foundation, and the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to strengthen the capacity of Nigerian prosecutors and investigators to investigate cases of conflict-related sexual violence¹². These workshops emphasised the need to integrate an understanding of rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and forced pregnancy into terrorism-related criminal proceedings¹³.

However, the absence of an independent incrimination for conflict-related rape and institutional fragmentation continue to limit the effectiveness of these efforts.



¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Nigeria: Flawed Trials of Boko Haram Suspects*, September 17, 2018.

¹⁵ Amnesty International, documents and summaries on mass trials and their procedural limits (selection of reports 2018–2020, including the 2018 compilation).

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Nigeria: Flawed Trials of Boko Haram Suspects*, September 17, 2018; Amnesty International, *We Dried Our Tears: Addressing the Harms to Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria*, 2020.

¹⁷ Babington-Ashaye, A. and al., *The Tide Turns: The Prosecution of SGBV Crimes as a Terrorist Offence in Nigeria*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), 2024.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Overview of criminal prosecutions

Until 2017, Boko Haram-related cases were adjudicated by the Federal High Courts, which had jurisdiction over terrorism offences under the *Terrorism Prevention Act* of 2011. Subsequently, Nigerian authorities initiated waves of prosecutions against alleged members of the terrorist organisation, first before the Federal High Courts and later through special sessions held at the Kainji military facility (Niger State)¹⁴.

Between 2017 and 2023, three cycles of trials involved approximately 1,669 defendants. Charges included membership in Boko Haram, kidnapping (notably the Chibok girls), murder, and the provision of material or financial support to the group¹⁵.

Independent observers, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, highlighted several shortcomings: limited access to effective legal defence, reliance on confessions as the primary form of evidence, a lack of transparency regarding verdicts, and the near-total absence of prosecutions for sexual violence, despite these crimes having been extensively documented in the region¹⁶.

From 2022 onwards, Nigeria's legal framework has been strengthened through amendments to the *Terrorism Act*. These changes have opened the possibility of qualifying sexual violence as terrorist offences.

- In 2018, a man was sentenced to 65 years imprisonment for his involvement in the abduction of the Chibok girls¹⁷.
- In 2019, another man was charged with sexual violence and forced marriage after forcibly marrying an abducted girl (case still pending)¹⁸.
- In 2023, Suleiman Garba Mohammed was sentenced to 345 years imprisonment, including 40 years for sexual and gender-based crimes, after being convicted of forced marriage, forced pregnancy, and the sexual enslavement of two girls abducted by Boko Haram¹⁹.

Despite these developments, conflict-related sexual violence remains marginal in judicial case files. Several structural factors continue to hinder prosecutions:

- The absence of adequate forensic resources in conflict-affected areas;
- The lack of witness protection mechanisms;
- The compartmentalisation of civil, military, and customary jurisdictions;
- Institutional reluctance to recognise sexual violence as constituent element of terrorism.

These obstacles illustrate the persistent gap between legislative advances and their concrete implementation in areas affected by the insurgency.

3

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS

²⁰ International Criminal Court (ICC), Report on Preliminary Examination Activities, 2015.

²¹ International Criminal Court (ICC), Statement of the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, on the Conclusion of the Preliminary Examination of the Situation in Nigeria, December 11, 2020.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Opening of an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a preliminary examination into the situation in Nigeria on November 18, 2010, following allegations of serious crimes committed in the context of the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian armed forces. Pursuant to Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute, the Prosecutor examined acts that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, particularly in Borno State, the epicentre of the insurgency²⁰.

After a decade of information-gathering, Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced in December 2020 that the legal criteria for opening a full investigation had been met, concluding that there were reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed by both Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces²¹.

Despite this step, the transition to a formal investigation has been delayed due to issues of complementarity: the ICC must establish that the State concerned is unable or unwilling to conduct credible prosecutions itself. Nigerian authorities have asserted that they are actively prosecuting alleged perpetrators through the Kainji trials and other domestic jurisdictions. However, human rights organisations and several experts have underscored the limitations of these internal proceedings, notably the absence of prosecutions for conflict-related sexual violence, the scarcity of published judgments, and the lack of meaningful access to justice for victims.

Successive reports from the Office of the Prosecutor indicate that sexual violence—particularly rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage committed by Boko Haram—constitutes a component of the crimes under examination. Other potential crimes identified include homicide, torture, recruitment of child soldiers, and deliberate attacks against civilians, as well as humanitarian, educational, and religious infrastructure. These acts could be classified as crimes against humanity and war crimes, including persecution on gender and religious grounds²². With regard to Nigerian armed forces, the Court has noted allegations of murder, rape, arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, population transfers, unlawful attacks against civilians, and the recruitment of child soldiers. Some of these acts could also constitute crimes against humanity, particularly given their systematic nature²³.

The ICC continues to analyse information submitted by Nigerian authorities; however, to date, no indictments have been made public.

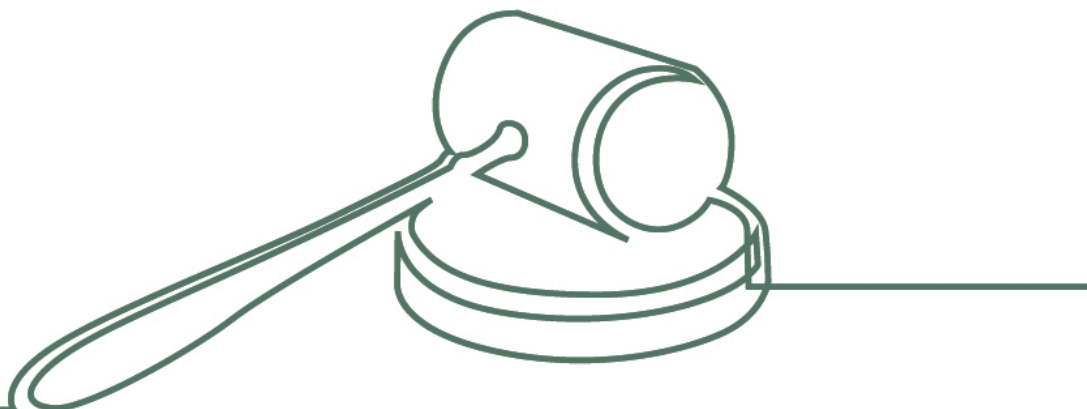
²⁴ TRIAL INTERNATIONAL, *Abubakar SHEKAU - TRIAL International - Universal jurisdiction database*, 2022.

Universal jurisdiction

With respect to universal jurisdiction, only one procedure has been initiated to date: in October 2014, the Baltasar Garzón International Foundation (FIGBAR) filed a complaint in Spain against Abubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, and several of its members for crimes against humanity and terrorism. On April 28, 2015, the Spanish Prosecutor requested the opening of an investigation, followed by judicial proceedings in May 2015²⁴.

The case did not result in formal prosecutions, notably due to Shekau's death in 2021 and the absence of suspects on Spanish territory. No other proceedings based on universal jurisdiction have been initiated to date in relation to the conflict in Borno State.

Overall, the analysis of the normative framework applicable to sexual violence in Borno State highlights a fragmented legal system in which contradictory legislations and still limited judicial practices coexist. Despite notable legislative advances—such as the amendment of the Terrorism Act and the gradual recognition of sexual violence as a component of terrorist crimes—implementation remains hindered by insufficient institutional capacity, weak investigations mechanisms, evidentiary complexity, and a lack of coordination between national and international levels. These shortcomings perpetuate persistent impunity for sexual crimes committed in the context of armed conflict in Nigeria.



PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES

This second part of the report is devoted to assessing the initiatives and programmes implemented to prevent and respond to sexual violence, as well as to support survivors in Borno State. Its objective is to analyse the relevance, coherence, and effectiveness of existing mechanisms, in order to draw lessons to inform the orientation and implementation of the project carried out by WWoW and BSF, with the support of GRA.

Since 2014, the institutional response and humanitarian mobilisation have gradually taken shape in Maiduguri and in certain accessible areas of Borno State, enabling the establishment of a multisectoral approach combining health, protection, and justice. However, this dynamic remains fragile and uneven due to persistent insecurity, logistical constraints, and limited access to isolated communities.

1

CURRENT DYNAMICS OF THE RESPONSE TO CRSV IN BORNO STATE

²⁵ Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, *Nigeria National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions (2017–2020)*, 2017.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (FMWA), *Annual Progress Report on Gender-Based Violence and SARC Implementation in Nigeria*, Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2024.

²⁸ Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Maximising the Impact of Defection Programming in the Lake Chad Basin: Lessons from the Borno Model*, Bonn / New York, 2025.

²⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Strengthening Reconciliation and Reintegration Pathways for Persons Associated with Non-State Armed Groups and Communities of Reintegration, Including Women and Children, in Northeast Nigeria*.

³⁰ UNDP, *Strengthening Reconciliation and Reintegration Pathways for Persons Associated with Non-State Armed Groups and Communities of Reintegration, Including Women and Children, in Northeast Nigeria (PBF Project Document)*, March 23, 2023.

Institutional mechanisms for prevention and response

Nigeria adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) in 2013 for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. This plan aimed to ensure women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, and to strengthen the protection of their fundamental rights during crises. The revised version (2017–2020) is structured around five pillars, including prevention, which encompasses strengthening access to justice for women and girls affected by conflict²⁵.

In practice, the decentralisation of its implementation has resulted in significant disparities among federated states. In Borno State, the application of the NAP remains limited due to a lack of financial and institutional resources and the weak integration of Women, Peace, and Security priorities into local governance mechanisms.

To structure the response to sexual violence, Nigeria established **Sexual Assault Referral Centres** (SARCs). These public facilities, coordinated by the Ministries of Justice, Health, and Women's Affairs, bring together institutional and non-governmental actors to provide comprehensive care—medical, psychosocial, and legal²⁶. **As of 2025, thirty-two SARCs were operational across nineteen States and the Federal Capital Territory.**

The *Nelewa Centre* in Maiduguri is the only operational centre of this kind in Borno State²⁷. It plays a pivotal role in the response to conflict-related sexual violence by providing emergency medical care, psychosocial support, and legal assistance to survivors. Its integration within programmes implemented by partner organisations, including WWoW and BSF, is essential to ensure coherence and sustainability of interventions.

In parallel, the Borno State Government launched in 2021 the “*Borno Model for Managing Mass Defections*”, a reintegration programme for individuals who have left areas under the control of non-State armed groups²⁸. Supported by the United Nations, the programme is implemented by several ministries, including the Ministries of Women's Affairs and Information. This model relies on transition centres responsible for assessing beneficiaries' needs, their levels of radicalisation, and providing them psychosocial support²⁹.

Facilities such as the Bulumkutu Interim Care Centre, created in 2016, accommodate former combatants, women associated with Boko Haram, and displaced children³⁰.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Human Rights Watch, *Those Who Returned Are Not Safe: Women's Rights and Reintegration Challenges in Northeast Nigeria*, New York, 2022.

33 UNFPA, Gender Based Violence (GBV) Sub Sector, Nigeria Mid-Year Report January – June, 2020.

These facilities are, in theory, expected to provide integrated services, including:

- psychosocial support;
- vocational training;
- socio-economic reintegration kits.

In practice, several reports highlight significant shortcomings^{31,32}:

- The absence of separate safe spaces for women and men;
- Insufficient forensic medical services and access to justice;
- The lack of standardised protocols for the support of survivors of sexual violence.

These limitations reflect a structural bias: the Borno Model remains focused on security and post-conflict rehabilitation, relegating the specific needs of survivors of sexual violence to a secondary level.

Humanitarian and community-based action in response to sexual violence

The humanitarian sector has gradually organised to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual violence in the context of the conflict. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) ensures inter-agency coordination in the area of prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. It leads the **Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster (GBV Sub-Cluster)**, which brings together major UN agencies, relevant Nigerian ministries, and local and international non-governmental organisations³³.

This Sub-Cluster establishes referral pathways for survivors and coordinates essential services, including:

- Emergency medical care;
- Psychosocial support and mental health services;
- Legal assistance;
- Safe spaces for women and girls.

However, despite these efforts, conflict-related sexual violence remains insufficiently understood. Humanitarian organisations do not always clearly distinguish between general sexual violence and conflict-related sexual violence, which limits the quality and relevance of the responses.

34 Global Survivors Fund, Interim Reparative Measures Project in BAY States, 2023 ; Global Survivors Fund, Nigeria, 2025.

35 Mukwege Foundation & GRA, Launch of the Nigerian Women and Children Conflict Survivors Foundation (WCCSF), statement, 2024.

36 Gaiya J., *Nigeria needs to do more to prevent & respond to conflict-related sexual violence*, Civilians in Conflict, 2023.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Remote interview conducted by Maïc Lesouef (We are NOT Weapons of War) with the Nigeria/CAR health coordinator for Médecins du Monde, December 10, 2025.

39 Médecins Sans Frontières, *Le centre d'urgence qui sauve des mères et des bébés chaque jour à Maiduguri*.

40 Remote interview conducted by We are NOT Weapons of War and Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA), November 10, 2025.

Several international organisations have developed programmes specifically focused on survivors of sexual violence in North East Nigeria:

- The *Global Survivors Fund* (GSF) launched in 2022 a project for **interim reparative measures** in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, in partnership with Youth Initiative Against Terrorism (YIAT), the Neem Foundation, and the Future Resilience And Development (FRAD) Foundation. This project identified more than 400 survivors and assessed their reparation-related needs³⁴.
- The *Mukwege Foundation*, in collaboration with the Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA), launched in May 2024 the **Nigerian Survivors Network (Women and Children Conflict Survivors Foundation – WCCSF)** in the three North East States (Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe). This initiative aims to strengthen solidarity among survivors and support their participation in peace and reparations processes³⁵.
- Since 2020, the *Center for Civilians in Conflict* (CIVIC) has supported the establishment of **Community Protection Committees** in North East Nigeria. These local structures raise awareness of survivors' rights and contribute to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence³⁶.

These initiatives demonstrate a growing but still uneven mobilisation. Limited coordination among actors, the underrepresentation of survivors in programme planning, and insufficient funding dedicated to legal and psychosocial support continue to constrain the impact of these actions.

Functioning of the health system in the management of CRSV cases

Primary Health Care (PHC) centres constitute the first point of contact for many survivors of sexual violence. Their role is essential in the provision of emergency medical care, including HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and emergency contraception³⁷.

The implementation of health and protection policies for survivors of sexual violence mainly falls under the responsibility of four institutions:

- The Ministry of Health (MoH);
- The Ministry of Education (MoE);
- The Ministry of Justice (MoJ);
- The Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Development (MoSWD).

These ministries directly manage public hospitals and health centres, often in collaboration with non-governmental actors. Several international organisations complement this service provision:

- *Médecins du Monde* (MdM), which supports primary health care services in Abbaganaram, including care for survivors of sexual violence³⁸;
- *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), which operates at the Kushari Health Centre in Maiduguri, where emergency medical and psychosocial care is provided³⁹;
- *The International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC), which provides support in surgical care and mental health services in certain referral hospitals⁴⁰.

41 GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) Northeast Nigeria, *Annual Report 2024*, ReliefWeb, 2024.

42 *Ibid.*

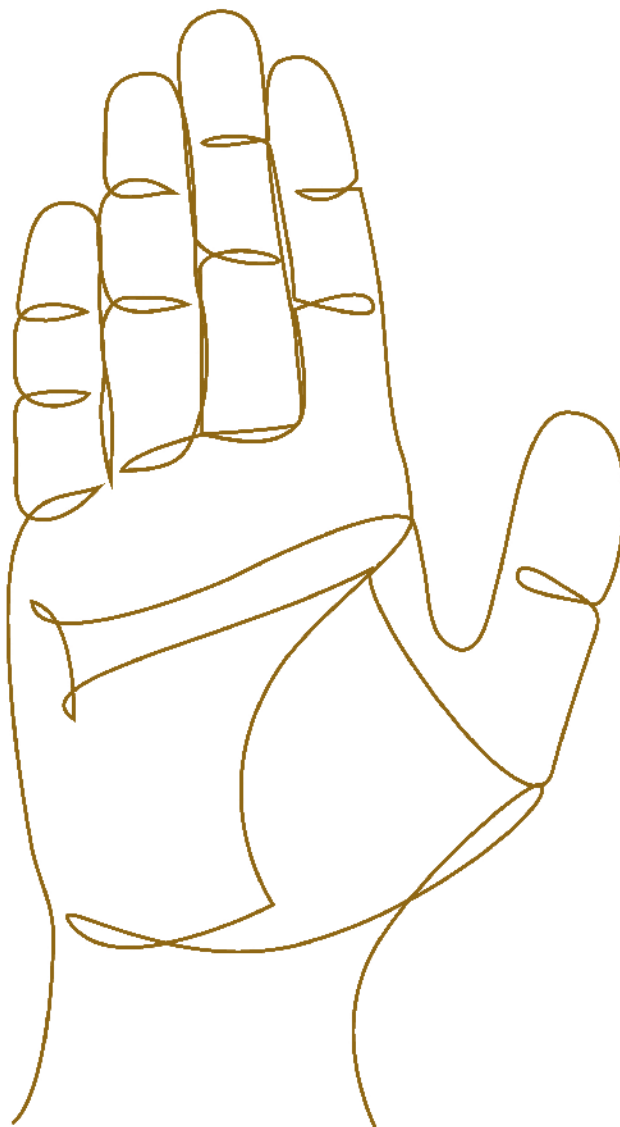
43 The table can be viewed at this link : <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiYjM1ZjdjZWEtY2NlYio0ZWlxlTlMmYmYtNDU3MjAzY2YwZmlwIiwidCI6ImY2ZjcwZjFlTjJhMmQtNGYzMCo4NTJhLTlTY0YjhjZTBjMTlkNyIsImMiOjF9>

Humanitarian intervention is structured around the **GBV Sub-Cluster** coordinated by UNFPA. This cluster supports health and social structures in responding to the urgent needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Priority interventions include:

- The *Clinical Management of Rape* (CMR);
- *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support* (MHPSS);
- Legal assistance;
- Training of health personnel and community awareness-raising⁴¹.

The Sub-Cluster has developed a referral **table for humanitarian organisation staff**, listing available service providers for the care of survivors of sexual violence, including conflict-related cases. This table, regularly updated in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States⁴², identifies structures providing:

- Management of sexual and gender-based violence cases;
- Emergency medical care;
- Psychosocial support;
- Economic reintegration programmes;
- Safe spaces for women and girls⁴³.



2

LIMITS AND CHALLENGES IN THE RESPONSE TO CRSV

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292)*, United Nations Security Council, New York, 2024.

⁴⁵ Interview conducted by We are NOT Weapons of War (W/WoW) with a representative of the Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster of Nigeria, January 15, 2024.

⁴⁶ United Nations, *Preventing and Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: 2023 Annual Summaries of Activities and Best Practices of United Nations Peacekeeping Missions*, Department of Peace Operations, June 2024.

The Borno State currently has a significant institutional and programmatic framework for the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Frameworks such as the National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), and the Borno Model demonstrate a political will to structure the response, coordinate state and humanitarian actors, and integrate a gender perspective into recovery policies. These initiatives constitute important foundations for future interventions.

Within this scope, the project implemented by W/WoW does not seek to establish new structures, but rather to strengthen and harmonise existing mechanisms, enhance knowledge and technical skills, and work with local authorities, relevant ministries, and civil society organisations to improve the coherence and quality of interventions.

However, these mechanisms remain weakened by persistent structural and contextual gaps: limited human resources, insufficient coordination, and ongoing security and sociocultural constraints. These obstacles, which limit the scope of public policies and the sustainability of implemented programmes, are analysed below.

Structural constraints of the care and response system

LACK OF ORGANISATIONS SPECIALISED IN CRSV

Despite the increasing presence of humanitarian organisations in Maiduguri since 2015, services specifically dedicated to conflict-related sexual violence remain scarce⁴⁴. Local structures address these cases within the broader framework of gender-based violence, without a clear distinction between sexual violence occurring in conflict contexts and violence within the domestic sphere⁴⁵.

This lack of specialisation leads to several consequences:

- A partial understanding of the specific needs of CRSV survivors;
- Inadequate psychological and legal support;
- A weak institutional recognition of sexual violence as a conflict-related crime.

The issue is not to establish a hierarchy among forms of violence, but rather to acknowledge that sexual violence committed in armed conflict contexts follows specific dynamics: it is often used as a strategy of war, generates complex trauma, and requires holistic responses that integrate security, community reintegration, and reparative justice.

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

CRSV is deliberately used as a tactic of war. In Nigeria, it serves to terrorise populations, destabilise communities, and instrumentalise women's bodies.

Survivors frequently face heightened stigma. In Nigeria, survivors are often labelled as "Boko Haram wives", while children born of this violence are perceived as the offspring of fighters.

Care infrastructures and services are often destroyed, and communication between services may be disrupted.

These acts of violence rarely result in convictions due to the unstable security environment, limited understanding of the phenomenon, persistent social taboos, and weak institutional capacity to document and prosecute sexual crimes.

THE NEED FOR SPECIALISED CARE⁴⁶

In North East Nigeria, many women and girls have been held captive for extended periods, subjected to repeated sexual violence, often followed by forced pregnancies and coerced motherhood. These experiences result in complex trauma that requires adapted therapeutic approaches—taking into account the duration of captivity, cumulative physical and psychological harm, and the social and economic consequences linked to the birth of children conceived through rape.

Interventions must be adapted to the cultural, religious, and social specificities of affected populations in order to ensure respectful and appropriate care. They must integrate the "Do No Harm" principle, ensuring that survivors are not subjected to additional harm and that existing community dynamics are not disrupted.

In this context, the response must be coordinated and multisectoral, involving all relevant actors—health services, local authorities, humanitarian organisations, and community, and religious leaders—to provide integrated and continuous support. Establishing functional coordination and communication mechanisms, such as *referral pathways* and intersectoral meetings, is essential to guarantee continuity of care and avoid duplication of effort.

It is essential to strengthen awareness among communities and local stakeholders—including traditional authorities, security forces, health professionals, and justice actors—so that conflict-related sexual violence is recognised as a serious human rights violation. This is necessary to improve case documentation, facilitate survivors' access to justice, and effectively combat impunity.

Over the past few months, several training sessions and awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted in Borno State to improve the understanding and identification of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) cases and to strengthen the equality of responses. Led by various institutional and humanitarian actors, these initiatives have helped sensitise health, justice, and social work professionals about the complexity and specificity of sexual violence in conflict settings.

However, efforts remain fragmented, and approaches vary significantly depending on structures and actors involved. Professional practices are still insufficiently harmonised, and the technical capacities of many actors remain limited.

It is therefore essential to continuously strengthen the skills of actors involved in CRSV prevention and response, prioritising human rights-based approaches, respect for survivors' dignity, and humanitarian principles grounded in the *"Do No Harm"* principle. The systematic adoption of a survivor-centred approach—respectful, confidential, and contextually-sensitive—is an indispensable condition for improving the coherence, quality, and sustainability of existing programmes.

INSUFFICIENT COORDINATION

Despite the presence of a structured humanitarian coordination framework centred on the *Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Cluster*, WWoW's analysis indicates that collaboration among actors involved in CRSV prevention and response remains limited.

This lack of coordination manifests on the ground through fragmented services and often incoherent support pathways for survivors. Some victims may receive psychosocial support without parallel access to medical or legal care, while others are referred to services without adequate follow-up. These gaps in care pathways reduce the overall effectiveness of interventions and compromise continuity of support provided.

The *2023–2025 GBV Cluster Action Plan*, covering Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, explicitly identifies these gaps. It emphasises the need to strengthen intersectoral coordination, consolidate links between health, protection, justice, and sexual and reproductive health, and establish harmonised referral and monitoring mechanisms to ensure comprehensive and coherent care for every survivor⁴⁷.

Despite progress, the absence of a fully operational coordination mechanism remains a major obstacle to the implementation of a truly holistic response to CRSV.

Contextual factors exacerbating response gaps

A WEAK INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

While Nigeria has progressively integrated women's rights into its public policies and international commitments, their implementation remains uneven. The country is party to several international protection instruments, including CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol. However, these commitments are only partially reflected in concrete programmes supporting women and girls affected by conflict in Borno State⁴⁸.

In practice, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence remain marginalised, stigmatised, and exposed to institutional re-victimisation. They continue to face persistent barriers to accessing justice, education, appropriate medical care, and sustained psychosocial support.

Although Nigeria is obligated to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, few programmes promoting women's and girls' participation in peace processes have been established. Local-level initiatives are rare, and reintegration mechanisms continue to focus largely on former combatants, with limited consideration of survivors' specific needs⁴⁹.

This lack of concrete translation of international legal obligations into local policies weakens the state system's capacity to ensure effective protection and sustainable support for survivors.

LACK OF FUNDING AND LIMITED CAPACITIES

Institutional and humanitarian responses to CRSV are heavily dependent on international funding. Since 2022, several budget cuts have affected the implementation of prevention and response programmes addressing sexual violence.

The Nigerian government has reduced funding allocated to combating rape and gender-based violence by nearly 49%, directly impacting health services, psychosocial support, and legal assistance for survivors⁵⁰.

In January 2025, the temporary 90-day suspension of U.S. foreign assistance through USAID further exacerbated this situation, forcing several partner organisations to suspend their activities. The consequences have been particularly visible in North East Nigeria, where some facilities have reduced medical and protection services⁵¹.

OCHA's humanitarian report on Borno State (July 2025) highlights that these financial constraints jeopardise the continuity of interventions, including in essential sectors such as health, food security, and protection⁵².

Without stable funding, many care facilities operate at reduced capacity or close entirely, leading to decreased access to healthcare, water, and food, and increasing the risks of malnutrition, epidemics, and exploitation. This tightening of resources compels humanitarian actors to prioritise life-saving needs, relegating the fight against conflict-related sexual violence to a secondary concern. As observed by WVoW during the implementation of its project, the temporary suspension of some funding forced several local and international partners to halt activities, increasing pressure on remaining organisations and weakening overall coordination of interventions.

⁴⁸ Attah, C. E., *Rejection, Re-victimisation and Human Rights Violations of Female Survivors of Boko Haram's Sexual Violence in Nigeria: Legal Analysis*. *Journal of African Law*, 1–19, 2025.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Gaiya, J., *Nigeria needs to do more to prevent & respond to conflict-related sexual violence*, *Civilians in Conflict*, 2023.

⁵¹ UNAIDS, *Nigeria: USAID Funding Suspension Affects HIV and Humanitarian Services in North-East*, March 27, 2025.

⁵² OCHA, *North-East Nigeria Humanitarian Situation Report – Borno State*, UNOCHA Exposure, July 2025.

⁵³ GBV Sub-Sector Nigeria, *Adolescent Needs Assessment on Gender Based Violence Services (GBV): Health and Community Perspectives*, 2024.

⁵⁴ <https://portal-backup.cleverapps.io/>

PERSISTENT SECURITY CHALLENGES

Despite a reduction in direct confrontations, Borno State remains affected by chronic insecurity. Sporadic attacks by armed groups, landmines, mass population displacement, and prolonged militarisation of certain areas continue to weaken protection mechanisms. This instability hampers humanitarian access, limits the implementation of prevention programmes, and increases the vulnerability of women and children to sexual violence.

CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL

Challenges related to the identification and referral of sexual violence survivors constitute another major obstacle to an effective response. Stigma, fear of rejection, financial constraints, distrust of institutions, and insufficient confidentiality within some care facilities discourage many survivors from reporting abuses⁵³. WWoW has specifically observed and analysed these dynamics in the BAY States.

Moreover, referral mechanisms often remain incomplete: some facilities lack clear protocols for referring survivors between medical, psychosocial, and judicial services. This situation leads to information loss, breaks in follow-up, and limited case traceability. Difficult access to rural areas and low healthcare coverage further exacerbate this invisibility.

In response to these challenges, the **BackUp web-app**⁵⁴ developed by WWoW represents an innovative solution to identification and referral: it enables the secure and anonymous centralisation of CRSV cases reports, facilitating the rapid referral of survivors to available medical, psychosocial, and legal services, while improving coordination among field actors.

Interview with Ibrahim Ishaku Balami, Executive Director of the FRAD Foundation, on the response of CSOs, particularly his organisation, to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).



I AM

Ibrahim Ishaku Balam...

... I am Ishaku Ibrahim Balami, the Executive Director of FRAD Foundation — a youth-driven humanitarian organization making real impact across Northeast Nigeria. Since 2019, I've steered the foundation through growth and transformation, championing initiatives that bring hope and dignity to vulnerable communities. Leading a team of passionate young changemakers, I focus on innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and sustainable impact. Our work reflects a deep commitment to humanity — from mobilizing critical resources to strengthening local resilience. As Executive Director, I'm driven by a simple vision: empowering people, restoring lives, and shaping a future built on compassion and action.

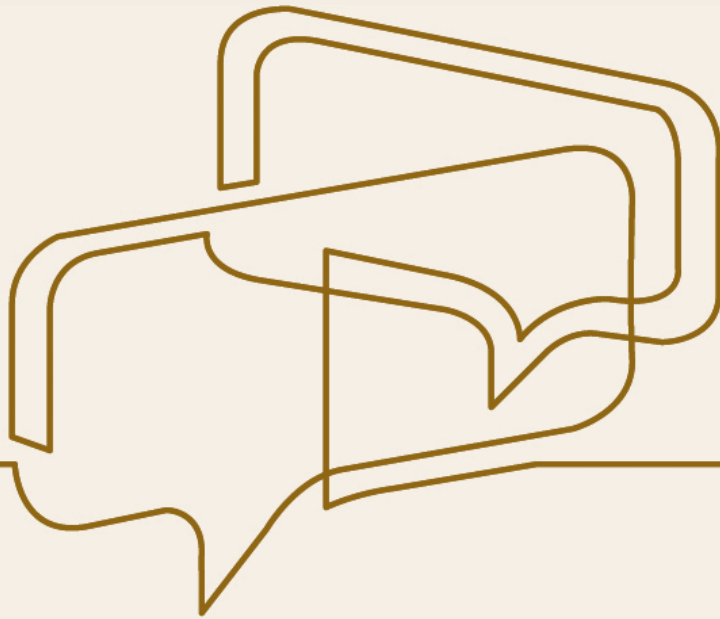
As an organisation supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, what progress and challenges have you encountered in implementing holistic support in Nigeria since 2019?

Since 2019, our organization has worked to support survivors of various forms of violence and abuse. At the start, CRSV was often misunderstood and treated merely as Gender-Based Violence (GBV), which limited both the scope and quality of care provided to survivors. While CRSV shares certain elements with GBV, the context, severity, and exposure to torture and humiliation faced by survivors require a more targeted and trauma-informed response.

Through continuous awareness-raising and advocacy, significant progress has been made. Humanitarian partners now better understand the unique na-

ture of CRSV and are beginning to integrate specialized interventions into their programming. Donor agencies are also starting to allocate dedicated funding for CRSV-focused activities, which was previously subsumed under general GBV funding.

However, key challenges remain. Stigma and discrimination continue to hinder survivors' reintegration and access to services. Limited resources and trained personnel also affect the provision of holistic care, including psychosocial, medical, and livelihood support. Despite these barriers, survivor networks have emerged across states and LGAs, providing representation and a collective voice for advocacy and peer support. Encouragingly, government commitment toward reparations and survivor-centered policies is beginning to take shape.



How would you assess coordination among actors involved in CRSV response— health services, public institutions, international organisations, and local civil society? What are the main strengths and weaknesses?

In the past, coordination among actors responding to CRSV in this region was hindered by limited understanding of the issue, inadequate funding, and insufficient technical expertise to address the unique needs of survivors. CRSV was often treated as a subset of general GBV programming, resulting in fragmented interventions and duplication of efforts.

Recently, awareness-raising and advocacy have led to notable improvements. Coordination platforms, such as GBV sub-clusters and protection working groups, now increasingly recognize CRSV as a distinct area requiring targeted response. Collaboration between government institutions,

international organizations, and civil society has improved information sharing, case referrals, and survivor-centered service delivery. The growing engagement of survivor-led networks has also strengthened community-level advocacy and improved accountability.

Key strengths include the establishment of referral pathways linking health, psychosocial, and legal services; increased government participation through ministries responsible for women's affairs and social development; and stronger partnerships between local and international organizations.

However, significant gaps remain. Coordination mechanisms are still largely centralized, with weak representation at state and local government levels. Inconsistent data collection and limited capacity of frontline workers affect service quality. Funding constraints continue to hinder sustained, multi-sectoral collaboration. Additio-

nally, stigma and security challenges in conflict-affected areas limit survivors' access to coordinated services.

Overall, while coordination has improved, sustained investment, decentralized structures, and continued capacity building are essential to achieving a truly integrated and survivor-centered CRSV response.

How do structural factors (governance, ongoing conflict) and immediate contextual challenges (aid reductions, evolving conflict dynamics, closure of IDP camps) affect your work? What strategies have you implemented to address them?

Broader structural factors such as weak governance systems, ongoing insecurity, and limited institutional capacity continue to pose significant challenges to our work with survivors of CRSV. The per-

...

sistent conflict and insecurity in affected regions restrict access to communities, disrupt service delivery, and expose both staff and survivors to protection risks. Weak coordination between humanitarian and government institutions also affects policy implementation and the sustainability of response interventions.

More immediate contextual challenges, including cuts in development aid, shifting conflict dynamics, and the closure of IDP camps, have further complicated our work. Reduced funding has limited the scale of our activities and the ability to provide comprehensive, long-term support to survivors. The closure of camps has led to secondary displacement, making it harder to trace survivors, ensure continuity of care, and maintain established referral pathways.

To mitigate these challenges, we have adopted several strategies. We strengthen partnerships with local organizations and survivor networks to ensure community-based service delivery and monitoring. We also engage government agencies at both state and local levels to build ownership and integrate CRSV response into existing protection and social welfare systems although this has yielded much. Additionally, we diversify our funding base, advocate for sustained donor engagement, and invest in staff capa-

city and security preparedness. Through these adaptive strategies, we continue to provide essential, survivor-centered services despite a rapidly changing and resource-constrained environment.

Do you think conflict-related sexual violence is sufficiently understood and integrated into civilian protection and humanitarian response programmes in Nigeria? What are the main gaps in terms of specialised structures or approaches?

CRSV is increasingly recognized within the humanitarian and protection space, however, it is not yet sufficiently understood or fully integrated into response programs and civilian protection strategies. While awareness has improved among humanitarian actors, many interventions still treat CRSV under the broader umbrella of GBV, overlooking its unique causes, contexts, and impacts. This has limited the availability of specialized, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered services.

Key gaps remain in technical capacity, coordination, and policy implementation. There is a shortage of trained personnel with expertise in CRSV case management, psychosocial support, and legal assistance. Referral pathways are uneven across states, and many local actors lack the resources to provide sustained follow-up

care. Integration of CRSV into security sector and civilian protection strategies also remains weak, with limited accountability mechanisms for perpetrators.

Furthermore, stigma and fear of reprisal continue to prevent survivors from seeking help. Dedicated CRSV coordination structures, consistent data collection, and stronger linkages between humanitarian and government actors are urgently needed. Strengthening survivor networks and ensuring their meaningful participation in decision-making would also enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of CRSV prevention and response efforts.

CONCLUSION

The response to conflict-related sexual violence in Borno State shows tangible yet still fragile progress. The adoption of the VAPP Act in 2022, the creation of dedicated structures, and the mobilisation of humanitarian actors demonstrate the initial emergence of a commitment to better protect survivors and to combat impunity.

However, the implementation of these mechanisms remains constrained by persistent obstacles: institutional weaknesses, insufficient coordination among actors, limited resources, and the weight of social norms. The coexistence of statutory, customary, and religious legal systems continues to hinder access to justice and to perpetuate unequal treatment across jurisdictions.

Strengthening prevention, improving medical and psychosocial care, and ensuring the effective application of the legal framework constitute key priorities for consolidating the progress achieved. A sustainable response ultimately requires strong political will and the active involvement of local communities to transform practices and guarantee survivors access to truth, justice, and reparation.

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PARTIE 3

APPENDIX

Tables created and shared by Victoria Ojo-Adewuyi

Annex 1

	LEGAL GAP/INCONSISTENCY	IMPACT ON SURVIVORS
DEFINITION OF RAPE/ SEXUAL VIOLENCE	→ Penal Code and Sharia law define rape narrowly; VAPP Act is broader but not domesticated.	→ Many forms of CRSV (oral, anal rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage) are not recognised.
MARITAL RAPE	→ Penal Code and Sharia law exclude marital rape; VAPP Act criminalises it.	→ No protection for women or underage girls abused by husbands or within forced marriages.
EVIDENTIARY STANDARDS	→ Sharia law requires four witnesses or confession ; Penal Code needs corroboration ; weak forensic capacity.	→ Survivors cannot meet unrealistic evidentiary burdens.
JURISDICTIONAL OVERLAPS	→ Criminal, Sharia, customary, and military courts operate in parallel.	→ Confusion about where to report or prosecute cases.
DOMESTICATION OF VAPP ACT	→ Borno has not domesticated the VAPP Act.	→ Survivors cannot access comprehensive legal remedies.
INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY	→ Weak policing, lack of trained investigators, stigma, and fear of retaliation.	→ Survivors rarely pursue justice.
VICTIM PROTECTION AND SUPPORT	→ No State-level framework for witness protection, psychosocial or medical support.	→ Survivors remain traumatised and vulnerable and, in some cases, do not report.

Annex 2

	KEY CHALLENGES	PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CRSV PROSECUTION
EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Weak forensic infrastructure and lack of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in many northern States.→ Survivors often delay reporting due to stigma or insecurity, leading to loss of physical evidence.→ Police rarely collect or preserve medical and DNA evidence properly.→ In cases of mass displacement, victims may lack access to healthcare or legal documentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Difficulty proving penetration or identifying perpetrators.→ Cases dismissed for 'lack of evidence.'→ Survivors retraumatized during repeated questioning.
INVESTIGATIVE AND POLICING CONSTRAINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Limited training of police and military investigators on handling sexual violence and trauma-sensitive interviewing.→ Cultural and religious stigma causes law enforcement officers to discourage survivors from reporting.→ In insurgency zones, police presence is weak or absent; security forces may also be alleged perpetrators.→ Fear of retaliation discourages cooperation with investigations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Survivors withdraw complaints or settle informally.→ Many CRSV cases never reach the prosecutor's desk.→ Lack of credible investigation weakens prosecution.
EVIDENTIARY AND PROCEDURAL RULES IN COURT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Sharia courts require four eyewitnesses or confession for proof of rape (zina standard).→ Penal Code requires corroboration of the survivor's testimony.→ Courts often treat survivor testimony as unreliable without medical or eyewitness support.→ Procedural rules do not allow for in-camera (private) hearings in all cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Unrealistic proof standards lead to acquittals.→ Survivors face humiliation during cross-examination.→ Many cases collapse before trial due to evidentiary insufficiency.

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JUDICIAL CAPACITY AND SENSITISATION

- Judges and magistrates often lack gender and trauma training.
- Some hold cultural or religious biases that perpetuate victim-blaming.
- Limited knowledge of international standards on CRSV (e.g., Rome Statute, CEDAW).
- Inconsistent interpretation of laws.
- Reduced trust in the formal justice system.
- Survivors discouraged from pursuing legal redress.

PROSECUTORIAL CHALLENGES

- Few specialised prosecutors for sexual or gender-based crimes.
- High turnover and weak coordination between police and prosecution.
- Poor case preparation and inadequate evidence files.
- Fear of reprisals or political interference in high-profile cases.
- Cases withdrawn or struck out due to poor documentation.
- Low conviction rates despite evidence of widespread CRSV.

VICTIM AND WITNESS PROTECTION

- Absence of effective witness protection law at State level.
- Inadequate psychosocial and legal support for survivors during proceedings.
- Survivors often face stigma, ostracism, or threats.
- Survivors avoid testifying or relocate before trial.
- Prosecutions collapse due to uncooperative witnesses.

INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION

- Fragmented justice response—weak collaboration between police, judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and humanitarian agencies.
- Delays in case handling, unclear accountability for CRSV by armed actors.
- Overlap of military and civilian jurisdiction in conflict-related cases.
- Few or no convictions for CRSV in conflict zones.
-

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