

## Raising Girls Project, Nigeria Pilot: Report



Girls and women in Nigeria make up to 49% (80.2 million) of the country's population of about a 162.5 million and therefore, they cannot be undermined in the consideration of Nigeria's future (British Council, 2012:i). Despite the level of global attention invested in ensuring gender equality in Nigeria through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and agenda in Africa, girls and women are still worse-off in Nigeria. Many of them still disproportionately live in poverty even though 60-79% of the rural workforce are women. Women and girls are still victims or harmful traditional practices like FGM and face with limited socio-economic opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts.

"Up to one third of Nigerian women report that they have been subjected to some form of violence. One in five has experienced physical violence"(ibid). Many also face various forms of abuse including domestic abuse, sexual abuse and human trafficking amongst others. In addition, the recent kidnap of over 200 girls in Borno State, Nigeria by the insurgent terrorist group Boko Haram, further arouse the need to protect and safeguard girls and women in Nigeria. In ThinkKnowAct Initiatives, we believe that such advocacy and campaign should significantly engage girls

who are future women of tomorrow as a preventative measure.

In spite of the disadvantages and exclusion that girls and women experience in Nigeria, they remain 'Nigeria's hidden resource' (British Council, 2012:iii). Subsequently, investing in women and girls will not just increase productivity and sustain growth in this generation but will also reduce violence, promote peace and better health in the next generation. It is important to acknowledge the impactful works of many non-governmental and international organisations in amassing significant global attention to gender-based issues in Nigeria. However, more needs to be done in terms of

## ThinkKnowAct Initiatives – Raising Girls Project

empowering and including the voices of adolescent girls in this activism against the very issues that affect and concern them. The voices of adolescent girls are often drowned by religious and socio-cultural nuances surrounding their position in their communities which many at times, hinders their liberation to aspire. It is in the believe that empowering adolescent girls of this generation will lead to nurturing great women leaders of the next generation, that the Raising Girls Project was designed.

Raising Girls is a project designed with the aim to empower girls between the ages 11 and 17 years old (especially those in secondary school). We do this by targeting and engaging key stakeholders including parents, teachers, faith leaders, policy makers, women, men, boys and girls. We strongly believe that in order to advocate against those who abuse and undermine the Girl-Child, we have to begin to address the underling factors that weaken the global competitiveness of today's African Girl-Child. This includes addressing the generational social habits that emasculate and marginalize the African Girl-Child. Specifically, this project will firstly, empower girls not to see themselves as victims but as changemakers. Secondly, by re-engaging and re-socializing societies on how to interact with the Girl-Child at home, school and work, we hope to disarm harmful social practices and nuances that disempower the Girl-Child today. Thirdly, we aim to also re-engage policymakers to articulate policies and practices that better protect and safeguard the Girl-Child. The pilot of this project was recently realized in Nigeria with the focus to empower a hundred (100) girls through the Raising Girls Workshop.



The Raising Girls Workshop was carried in two secondary schools in Oyo State and Anambra state in Nigeria where we reached out to ninety-nine (99) adolescent girls. Many international organisations tend to limit their scope on similar projects to women in the Northern region of Nigeria. This is mainly due to the belief as well as the fact that women in

Northern Nigeria are the most marginalized in the society. As a result, other marginalized women and girls in the Southern region are often neglected. It is for this reason that we strategically decided to start with the Southern region.

**Table 1 - Participants**

Name of School	No of Participants
Umunya Comprehensive Secondary School, Umunya, Anambra State	61
St. Catherine College, Ibadan, Oyo State.	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>



The workshop was highly participatory and focused on three thematic areas of Safety, Self-Esteem and Leadership. The aspect of safety explored the difference forms of abuse that girls are they can keep themselves safe. The aspect of self-esteem touched on the emotional and physical challenges that girls face during puberty which can be quite confusing for them and most times difficult to discuss. Here, the workshop aimed to boost their confidence and ways to deal with related challenges. Lastly, the aspect of leadership explored qualities and ways through which they can contribute to their communities using examples of women leaders at different levels and

emphasising the importance of education. The workshop included the use of video (Unilever “Like A Girl” short film), discussions, role-playing and group work. At the end of each workshop, the girls worked as a group to draft out their manifesto as empowered young women as see in the picture below.

## On evaluating the workshop, the girls indicated the following:

- Before the workshop they felt that their choices in life were limited but now they believe that they can achieve anything.
- Increased knowledge of harmful traditional practices and its effect on their health
- They now believe that they have a voice and will aspire for greatness
- Increased knowledge of their human rights
- Increased knowledge of gender-based violence
- They were inspired by what they have learnt about leadership and would engage in activities that would nurture what they have learnt.
- Increase self-confidence.



## The girls indicated a number of challenges including:

- The girls indicated that they need more support in terms of role models and a safe space to talk about their challenges.
- Some of the girls made it clear that they are unable to speak to their parents, teachers or other stakeholders due to limitation in communication that stems from culture and belief systems. For instance, they are unable to report abuse due to stigmatization and chastisement.
- Lack of security in their schools to keep them safe from potential kidnapping
- Lack of information about career and related choices
- No girls focused club to nurture positive thinking/action.



## Quotes from Participants

“... Thanks to this Raising Girls Workshop, just seeing the shift in confidence in this girl [one of the participants] that was once shy and would not speak up in class has made me believe in the power of such workshop.... we need more of this even for the boys” **Teacher, St. Catherine's College**

“ More girls in this region need this... the South is usually forgotten in projects like this” **Principal, Umunya Com. Sec. Sch.**

“ I now believe in myself and I will practice all that we have been thought...”**Okafor Blessing**

### St Catherine College Students #RaisingGirlsToBe

“I now believe that there is nothing wrong with doing things like a girl. I can still be the best as a girl” **Osoko Regina**

“I have learnt that we are beautiful and strong and can make a difference in our country” **Nwabube Mmesoma Miracle**

## #RaisingGirlsToBe Campaign

At the end of this initial phase, ThinkKnowAct Initiative followed up with a campaign on Raising Girls To Be as part of getting everyone involved in promoting the empowerment of girls to be the women leaders of their communities.



Miss Nigeria 2014 supporting #RaisingGirlsToBe



Miss Nigeria 2013 supporting #RaisingGirlsToBe

## Future Plans!

We aim to raise more funds and resources to organise more workshops for hundreds of girls as well as engage, parents and teachers in the cause to empower girls in Nigeria. We are also partnering with a number of organisations both in Nigeria and the UK to further expand the scope of the project whilst sharing and learning from one another.

Thanks to the following sponsors who supported us through initial phase of the project;



Caledonian Suites Abuja



**We also thank all our individual supporters and volunteers!**



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