



A digital anti-corruption approach in the fight against sexualized violence by the German Development Cooperation

Background

Sexual extortion, also called sextortion, is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe. Moreover, it is a type of corruption that happens when those entrusted with power abuse it to exploit those dependent on that power. Sextortion happens in every sector of life and is a global issue, however, it has only been recognized or addressed as such in very few countries, for instance, Tanzania. The 2019 Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) results for Latin America and the Caribbean, published by Transparency International, found that one in five citizens has experienced sextortion or knows someone who has, while more than [70%](#) of respondents believe sextortion happens at least occasionally. Similar numbers are seen in Africa. A survey by [UNODC](#) in Nigeria in 2020 demonstrates that both men and women feel reluctant to speak about sextortion, although estimates show that more than 45% of female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have experienced sexual harassment.

Pilot Project

To break the silence and the stigmatization of persons affected, the GIZ sectoral program Anticorruption and Integrity (GIZ AkuI) and the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), the Nigerian chapter of Transparency International, agreed on a joint project. Among advocacy and communication work, a digital tool was introduced to assure success of addressing sextortion as an act of sexualized violence. CISLAC and GIZ AkuI have created digital assistance and reporting channels for persons affected by issues of sextortion in tertiary institutions. This project was supported from May 2021 until March 2022 with funding from the BMZ. Furthermore, the realization of this initiative is supported through the multi-actors approach, including the private sector (*TIMBY* - “This is my backyard”), NGOs such as WARD-C and the SOAR initiative, and through the cooperation with Nigerian state anti-corruption agencies, namely, the *ICPC* (“Independent Corrupt Practices Commission”) and *EFCC* (“Economic and financial crimes commission”).

Why is anti-corruption mainstreaming within gender approaches so important?

Although several sextortion incidences were documented, Nigerian anti-corruption agencies have not been taking consequent steps to further investigate these cases. Risks, as perceived by (female) students in tertiary institutions and related to the reporting of sextortion and human rights violations, resulted in a low number of reports and limited cooperation.

These identified risks are:

- The stigmatization of persons affected and the widespread impunity which has resulted in a *culture of silence*.
- The lack of awareness among students and even within the society that sextortion is both: a *form of corruption and sexualized violence*.
- People’s fear that even if they report sextortion, the likelihood of getting justice is low.
- The absence of a specifically tailored law or legal framework that criminalizes sextortion (in tertiary institutions).



Group picture of participants at a One-Day Stakeholders Consultative Forum focused on the issue of sexual exploitation (sextortion) in tertiary institutions in Nigeria

The overall objective of the initiative is to contribute to the fight against sextortion in tertiary institutions in Nigeria while utilizing digital solutions to reach the objective. The intended goals can be summarized in three main points:

- Create digital and physical complaint and reporting channels on sextortion to pursue psychological support and redress.
- Advocate for the passage into law of the “Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Education Institution Bill” and strengthen compliance enforcement of existing laws and policies to institutionalize the criminalization of sextortion.
- Create awareness amongst students, especially within select tertiary institutions on the issue of sextortion.

Approach and strategy

To break the culture of silence, the first step was to identify and mobilize partners, who are supportive in fighting sextortion in Nigeria. Two NGOs were identified, WARD-C, a women's rights organization in Nigeria providing pro bono legal services for women affected by gender-based violence, and the SOAR Initiative, an NGO working with relevant stakeholders to prevent the sexual abuse of children and providing care and support for survivors. The cooperation helped CISLAC to extend its mainstreaming channels and broaden its reach-out.

While fostering possible collaborations, the private actor TIMBY was engaged to customize its digital application according to CISLAC's demands. The application is used as a digital reporting tool that allows documentation (incl. pictures, videos and geocache data) and communication (incl. channels for redress and further support) for cases affected by acts of sextortion. Furthermore, trainings on the use of the application have been conducted by CISLAC.

Following the steps of creating synergies and partnerships, consultative forums were organized by CISLAC to create a space for exchanges to address the issue more effectively. As a result of these efforts, a soft coalition of organizations working on the issue of gender-based corruption (WARD-C, SOAR, Gender Mobile etc.) has been established to complement each other's efforts and to update stakeholders equally.

Sensitization meetings for students at partnering universities were conducted to introduce them to the application and to raise the awareness of sextortion being an act of gender-based violence and of possible risks this topic entails. As an example, radio programs have been organized where CISLAC exchanged knowledge on gender-based violence and sextortion in Nigerian universities with the public.

Challenges and lessons learned

First and foremost, the greatest achievement is (re-)giving relevance and space for discussions related to sextortion. Especially through the involvement of state anti-corruption agencies and international development partners, the need of finding a solution to sextortion has regained its importance on the highest level of Nigerian politics. Moreover, NGOs have actively engaged in the fight against sexual exploitation as a collective. The network of participating civil society organizations created a greater leverage to open a discussion on the state and national level. Following this, the "Sexual harassment in Tertiary Education Institutions Prohibition Bill" has been passed by the Senate and House of Representatives of the National Assembly (information according to August 2022) and is awaiting the President's approval.

Secondly, the work on sextortion continues to be recognized by state and non-state actors, which also created a window of opportunity for further engagements on other levels of the education system. The Nigerian anti-corruption agency ICPC, with the assistance of CISLAC, started to draft a policy on sexual

harassment in secondary schools in Nigeria. This commends the efforts of actors involved by creating opportunities in areas where no bills or policies have ever been drafted before.

Lastly, the mainstreaming and networking efforts to break the silence around sextortion have been very successful. Among many, the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria – recognizing that sextortion is a human rights violation - invited CISLAC to train its staff on the issue of sextortion. Ultimately, CISLAC has embraced its role as a focal organization in the fight against sextortion by sensitizing relevant stakeholders on the topic.



Audience during one of the sensitization workshops for students and university staff in Abuja 2021

This was the very first time that sextortion in Nigeria is being dealt with from the (anti-)corruption and gender-based violence angle, involving relevant actors from all sectors. The multi-stakeholder approach has proven to be the best way to involve relevant partners into one forum with one goal of strengthening the fight against sexualized violence.

Considering that the topic is still regarded as a taboo in Nigeria, the willingness of sharing utmost sensitive information via an application, instead of in person, differs. Although TIMBY has not received any in-app complaints for now, CISLAC's Advocacy and Legal Advice Center (ALAC) received several calls and contact requests with regards to cases of sexual exploitation since the inception of this initiative. In the future, it is essential to think about possible barriers, which the target group may encounter when using the app. Although the application offers key reporting features, a revised version of the app should better account for anonymity and enable more direct contact to relevant authorities with dedicated hotlines and video-call options, for instance.

The use of the application provides entry-points and further opportunities for GIZ projects where digital reporting tools are essential for projects focusing on gender-based or sexualized violence. Future partner organizations can use this digital documentation tool for cases relevant to their project objectives. This experience in Nigeria shows that through civil society participation, effective and visible results can be achieved, i. a. facilitated by one out of more than 100 national chapters of Transparency International. Further, inclusive participation – one of the core principles of anti-corruption – has proven to be essential.

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