

SENATOR NATASHA'S CASE: HOW HER EXPERIENCE IMPACTS WOMEN'S JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

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JUSTICE

When Senator Natasha Akpotor-Uduaghan accused Senate President Godswill Akpabio of sexual harassment, she did something that many Nigerian women fear to do—she spoke out. In a country where justice for women is rare and speaking up can come at a steep personal cost, her brave stand has resonated across Nigeria. Her subsequent suspension from the Senate, following her allegations, has sent

a dangerous message: *if even a powerful senator is punished for demanding justice, what hope is there for ordinary women?*

This case is not merely about one individual, it is a symbol of the deep-rooted challenges Nigerian women face when seeking redress for sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and systemic discrimination.

The Reality for Women Seeking Justice in Nigeria

Women and girls in Nigeria face alarming rates of violence and abuse:

- 1 in 3 Nigerian women has experienced some form of sexual violence (UN Women, 2023).
- 70% of female students in Nigerian universities report sexual harassment from lecturers and male colleagues (BBC Africa Eye, 2019).
- Only 2% of sexual violence cases are formally reported (NOIPolls, 2022).
- Conviction rates for rape and sexual harassment remain abysmally low, with survivors often facing more scrutiny than their abusers.

For many women, the decision to speak out is heavy with fear, not only of personal and professional repercussions but also of a justice system that repeatedly fails to protect them. Senator Natasha's case is about more than one woman's struggle; it encapsulates the fear that silence is the only safe option. Her suspension reinforces the notion that even high-profile women can be punished for speaking out. Ordinary women-students, workers, and community leaders-risk far greater consequences when they report abuse.

Natasha was accused of misconduct to justify her suspension, a tactic all too common against women who dare to challenge the status quo. Victims often find themselves blamed and shamed, their credibility questioned at every turn. Reporting abuse can mean losing jobs, educational opportunities, or political positions.

Even when women find the courage to report abuse, the justice system in Nigeria rarely offers protection; Law enforcement often dismisses sexual harassment and abuse complaints. Courts are slow, expensive, and tend to favor the powerful. Many survivors are forced into out-of-court settlements that do little to deliver justice or restore dignity. This system, in effect, silences victims, leaving them to face humiliation, threats, and a future devoid of accountability for their abusers.

What Does Justice Look Like for Women in Nigeria?

Real justice for women is more than just punishing abusers, it is about systemic change. It means:

- ***Ending Impunity for Powerful Men:*** No one should be above the law, regardless of their position.
- ***Creating Safe Reporting Channels:*** Anonymous, independent reporting mechanisms are essential so women can seek help without fear of retaliation.
- ***Holding Institutions Accountable:*** All sectors, from the Senate to universities and workplaces, must enforce strict anti-harassment policies.
- ***Protecting Women Who Speak Out:*** Legal and psychological support for survivors is crucial, along with strong whistleblower protection laws.

In a dramatic turn of events, Senator Natasha recently defied a government ban on public gatherings by holding a homecoming rally in her Kogi constituency. Despite a police directive and a state-imposed curfew intended to stifle public assembly, Natasha arrived by helicopter to a mammoth, jubilant crowd in the Ihima community of Okehi LGA.

Addressing her supporters during the rally, she reaffirmed her commitment to her constituents and to the broader fight for justice. Her defiant act not only emboldened her supporters but also highlighted the systemic challenges women face when they choose to stand up against oppression.

Is There Hope for Women in Nigeria?

Despite the prevalent fear, there is glimpse of hope in the determination of women who continue to speak out. Organizations such as Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) and other CSOs, NGOS, Human rights and women rights organisations are fighting tirelessly for women's rights and systemic reform. Senator Natasha's rally is a testament to this spirit, a vivid reminder that resistance is possible even in the face of overwhelming opposition. Her act of defiance and resilience sends a powerful message that every woman has the right to speak her truth and to demand accountability without the fear of retribution. It challenges the narrative that silence is safer than resistance and reaffirms the need for a robust support system that protects those who dare to seek justice

The Fight Must Continue

Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's case, now further intensified by her recent homecoming rally, is both a warning and an inspiration. It exposes a broken system that punishes women for their quest for justice while simultaneously igniting a beacon of hope for change. If Nigeria is to move towards true gender equality, it must overhaul its systems, ensure safe spaces for reporting abuse, and hold perpetrators accountable, no matter how powerful they may be.

The fight for justice is not just Natasha's fight, it is the fight for every Nigerian woman and girl who has been silenced by fear. In reclaiming her space and defying government bans, Natasha has shown that courage can break even the most oppressive barriers. The future depends on sustaining this hope, transforming systemic failures into a legacy of empowerment and justice for all.