



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

VISION SPRING INITIATIVES
RC No. 908183



Vision Spring Initiatives

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VSI's Thematic Areas

<p>Gender Justice</p> <p>This is Central and the core of VSI programming.</p>	<p>Participatory leadership/ women's decision-making</p> <p>Through VSI various programs women and girls have taken ownership of their bodies and voices</p>
<p>Sexual and reproductive health and rights</p> <p>Through partnerships our voices are amplified and greater results are achieved.</p>	<p>Education/Research</p> <p>VSI contributes to learning and results that impact women, girls and vulnerable groups</p>

The Year in Numbers

WORKSHOPS HELD: 89

WORKSHOPS ATTENDED: 34

CAMPAIGNS HELD: 2

CAMPAIGNS ATTENDED: 2

TRAININGS OF TRAINERS HELD:23

MEDIA EVENTS HELD: 11

MEDIA EVENTS ATTENDED: 3

PUBLICATIONS:5

Individuals reached

WOMEN: 420

MEN:149

GIRLS: 605

Boys: 54

KEY INFLUENCERS: 252

Media: 2,012

Executive Summary

Hello dear readers and friends! Welcome to Vision Spring Initiatives' 2023 Annual report. It is very safe to say that 2023 was a very productive year at Vision Spring Initiatives. Staff, board and volunteers united to push advocacy beyond boundaries. We can look back and say that we made some impact. Our biggest achievement is the ability of our constituents to gain their voices and begin to self-advocate. We left no stone unturned in this quest.

We are constantly aware that change cannot happen if we do nothing, we are also aware that patriarchy and its agencies will always re-strategize to fight back. The push back was real. From Lagos state government rescinding on its commitment on safe termination of pregnancies to the government at the national level deciding to yank off sex education from its educational curriculum. However, we were undaunted in our commitment and held on to our belief that change was possible. Our work touched all our thematic areas and we just could not stop pushing the envelope.

Every day, in Nigeria, women are confronted by discrimination and inequality. They face violence, abuse and unequal treatment at home, at work and in their wider communities – and are denied opportunities to learn, to earn and to lead. Our work on gender justice which is at the core of our intervention continued to challenge this anomaly.

According to UNICEF Nigeria, 70 per cent of children in Nigeria cannot read with meaning or solve simple math problems. Only 49 per cent and 55 per cent of children in school achieve basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This alarming reality not only hinders the child's development but poses a significant threat to the overall progress and well-being of the nation. Our girl impact project responds to the challenges posed by poor educational outcomes for girls and beckons on the government to do more.

Vision Spring Initiatives has carved a niche for itself in the area of responding to sexual and reproductive health and rights in Nigeria. The organization recognizes that

SRHR is a critical aspect of human development, particularly in Nigeria. We pushed for inclusion insisting that Sexual and reproductive health and right are human rights.

In the area of women's political participation, it is safe to state that 2023 was a bleak year with less than 20% women emerging in both appointive and elective positions. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2022, Nigeria is positioned as the 123rd country out of 146 countries, indicating the country's standing concerning gender disparities in political participation. This ranking sheds light on the challenges and gaps that persist in affording equal opportunities and representation for men and women in the political sphere. While we celebrate the gains we made in 2022 by winning a landslide court judgement on women's participation, we are not resting until this win is implemented.

In 2023, VSI actively expanded our strategic partnerships across local, national, and international spaces; joining several solidarity networks, collaborations, and campaigns in line with our vision.

We are proud to state that we stood our ground in the past year and will not relent as we push for a better year in 2024.

Organisational Background

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) is a duly registered (RC 908183) non-governmental, not-for profit human rights organization partnering with stakeholders to achieve developmental rights of children, young people and other vulnerable groups and supporting their attainment of these rights using a multipronged approach and diverse strategies.

Our vision: A society where gender equality and social justice becomes part of everyday life.

Our mission: Is to provide our constituents- Women, girls and those made vulnerable by regressive laws, policies and practices with practical tools for self-development, voice and action through research, education, advocacy and movement building.

We strongly believe that fundamental rights are interrelated, inalienable and inseparable and cannot be achieved in isolation. We therefore focus on the following thematic areas towards achieving our mandate:

1. Gender justice and inclusion (Central and the core of VSI programming)
2. Education and Research
3. Participatory Leadership/Political education
4. Sexual and reproductive health and rights
5. Partnerships and Movement building

Our objectives

- To promote gender equality in all spheres of our programming and develop literary skills amongst women and young persons.
- To advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people and vulnerable groups
- To promote and advance education and research in Nigeria
- To promote participatory leadership and advance youth inclusion in decision making
- To engage with strategic stakeholders and demand implementation of Laws and Policies that guarantee the rights of citizens
- To collaborate with like-minded organizations and find areas of knowledge sharing and build strategic partnerships.

Our target Beneficiaries:

Children, young people, persons made vulnerable by regressive laws, policies and practices.

1. GENDER JUSTICE

Gender justice is central and the core of VSI programs. Discrimination and violence against women and girls are major causes of poverty all over the world. Ensuring that women and men / boys and girls benefit equally is at the core of all VSI intervention programs. Gender justice and equality therefore underpin all our work and interventions.

Project under Gender Justice-

Policy Advocacy-VSI's policy advocacy project enables it to engage in advocacy to promote the inclusion of women and girls in Laws and policies relating to gender, as well as the enactment of these Laws and the Constitutional commitments towards equality and closing of gender gaps

Legal Reform –VSI's legal reform project enables it to challenge obnoxious and discriminatory Laws, asking for their repeal and demanding institutionalization and implementation of Laws that respect in equal terms the rights and dignity of women/men and boys/girls.

Interpretation and Simplification of Laws – This initiative provides the opportunity for young people to benefit from interpretation and simplifications of Laws to enable them use these Laws to hold governments accountable and demand implementation of these Laws. The Laws are simplified for different age groups and for easy grasping for the users.

2. Education and Research:

Vision Spring Initiatives Girl Impact Project enables young girls and a few boys to 'unlearn' gender stereotypes and gain knowledge on gender and SRHR. While girls learn that they can undertake any role and responsibilities if they are provided with the knowledge they require, boys learn to respect girls and

ultimately become 'champions' in challenging stereotypes. This is one VSI's long term project and plan to charge a fee for the education as a means of sustaining the organization. Through Vision Spring Initiative's gender Manuals, young people's reading culture will be enhanced.

VSI's Gender and human rights Institute Project- for gender trainings, curriculum review and development, including ensuring they are relevant to time and needs, teacher training, counsellors, school debates.

Research –All interventions promote evidence-based research.

3. Participatory Leadership / Political education Project

Project under Participatory Leadership/Political Education-

Participatory and horizontal approach to leadership- VSI's leadership project draw from many years of partnering and engaging in leadership approaches that are inclusive and horizontal, respecting diversity, enhancing communication skills, every body's input and commitment and sharing results and challenges.

VSI's Political Education Project- election preparation, preparation as voters and those to be voted, school clubs on elections and citizenship, manifestoes and preparing youth for elections and violence free elections.

4. Sexual and reproductive health and rights Project: {Sexual and reproductive health and rights-from a development perspective}

Project under Sexual and reproductive health and rights' project

Women and young peoples' sexual and reproductive health and rights remain the most debated issue including lack of its inclusion as a development issue: Comprehensive sexuality education, information about life skills, communication strategies, diversities, bodily autonomy, bodily care, self-esteem, VAWG, sexual violence and responding to them.

5. **Partnerships and Movement Building:** {Youth represent developed and on-going development. They have passions, determination and constitute half of the world's population}.

Project under Network/exchange Program / Youth Outreach

This space enables young people and other groups to dialogue and reach a consensus, understanding and yearnings of young people. It creates safe space for exchange, information sharing, dialogues, debates, peace initiatives amongst others.

Our work in 2023

1. Gender Justice: A Yearlong Odyssey of Impact and Transformation

Gender justice is central and at the core of Vision Spring Initiatives' programs. The organization is dedicated to fostering gender justice by promoting equality across all areas of our programming. Our focus extends beyond conventional boundaries, encompassing research, education, advocacy, and movement building. Central to our mission is the empowerment of women and young people, equipping them with literacy skills and a robust platform to advocate for their rights.

Every day, in Nigeria, women are confronted by discrimination and inequality. They face violence, abuse and unequal treatment at home, at work and in their wider communities – and are denied opportunities to learn, to earn and to lead.

Women form the majority of those living in poverty. They have fewer resources, less power and less influence compared to men, and can experience further inequality because of their class, ethnicity and age, as well as religious and other fundamentalism.

According to Oxfam, Gender inequality is a key driver of poverty. And a fundamental denial of women's rights.

Gender inequality in numbers

- 24%** Women make up less than 24% of **the world's parliamentarians** and 5% of its mayors.
- 24%** On average, women are **paid 24% less** than men for comparable work, across all regions and sectors.
- 2/3** Nearly two thirds of the world's 781 million **illiterate adults** are women, a proportion that has remained unchanged for two decades.
- 153** 153 countries have **laws which discriminate against women** economically, including 18 countries where husbands can legally prevent their wives from working.
- 1 in 3** Worldwide, 1 in 3 women and girls will **experience violence or abuse** in their lifetime.
- 61%** 44% of lesbians and 61% of bisexual women experience rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to 35% of heterosexual women.

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Go to Se

Oxfam's Statistics on Gender Inequality

As we look back on a year marked by purposeful endeavors, legal advocacy, and strategic partnerships, it becomes evident that VSI's multifaceted approach is a beacon in the pursuit of gender equality and social justice in Nigeria.

Legal Reform in the Pursuit of Gender Justice

To achieve gender justice, Vision Spring Initiatives takes bold steps against discriminatory laws, advocating for their repeal and aligning with legislation that upholds the fundamental principles of equal rights and human dignity for all. Recognizing the inherent connection between legal frameworks and the achievement of gender justice, VSI channels its efforts into challenging existing statutes that perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

This commitment extends beyond mere advocacy; it embodies a call for systemic change. VSI strategically targets laws that disproportionately impact vulnerable groups, especially women, and seeks to dismantle these barriers to ensure an equitable legal landscape. The organisation's approach involves not only challenging the discriminatory statutes but also actively engaging with lawmakers, policymakers, and stakeholders to foster a dialogue that promotes a legal framework grounded in the principles of justice and equality.

Legal Reform and Policy Impact: A Steady March Towards Protection and Equality

In line with this commitment, the organization developed a costed Action plan to facilitate the implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) in Abia State. This strategic initiative takes on heightened significance in a nation where recent statistics reveal that over 30% of women aged 15-49 have experienced some form of violence. The gravity of these numbers underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of women, girls and other marginalized groups. The goal is to establish a robust legislative foundation that not only addresses the immediate concerns related to violence against women but also serves as a catalyst for broader systemic change.

Furthermore, the organisations' active engagement and contribution to the comprehensive state-level review of the Lagos Protection Against Domestic Violence Law exemplifies its commitment to strengthening legal safeguards. Collaborating closely with civil society partners, this

participatory approach ensures a nuanced and comprehensive perspective, allowing for the incorporation of vital provisions from the VAPP Act. This approach underscores VSI's dedication to creating a legal environment that actively fosters gender justice, laying the foundation for a future where every individual, regardless of gender, can thrive in an environment free from violence and discrimination.

Leadership and Public Engagement: Shaping Narratives for Change

Leadership emerged as a pivotal element within our multifaceted engagement strategy, enabling us to cast a spotlight on the pressing issues confronting women and girls. Across diverse platforms, we harnessed the power of leadership to advocate for change and amplify voices. Commemorating World Day of Social Justice, themed 'Overcoming Barriers and Unleashing Opportunities for Social Justice,' VSI took a proactive stance by publishing an [insightful article on its website](#). This piece not only delved into the intricate web of connections between gender equality, women's empowerment, and social justice but also transcended mere intellectual exploration. Instead, it functioned as a catalyst, sparking societal reflection and compelling a collective call to action. Through the lens of leadership, our engagement efforts aim to foster meaningful dialogue, inspire change, and contribute to the dismantling of barriers that hinder the realization of justice for all.

This discourse, disseminated across various channels, encourages individuals and communities to critically evaluate existing norms, fostering a collective consciousness towards building a more just and equitable society. In this way, our engagement strategy goes beyond the dissemination of information; it seeks to create a paradigm shift in societal perspectives, paving the way for tangible and sustainable change in the pursuit of social justice.

On Zero Tolerance Day for Female Genital Mutilation, VSI's engagement took a poignant form through a compelling interview with a traditional leader who is opposed to this harmful practice. The resonating impact of this interview reverberated across various social media channels, creating waves of awareness and sparking crucial conversations. VSI's purpose for this approach is to dismantle deeply entrenched harmful norms that perpetuate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). As we continue to navigate the complex landscape surrounding gender-based violence, initiatives like these exemplify our commitment to driving tangible change, one that transcends digital platforms and resonates in the lived experiences of those affected.



VSI's Interview with Baale of Ibeshe, Chief J.O Badejo

Capacity Building: Empowering Grassroots Leaders for Lasting Change

Recognizing the pivotal role of grassroots leaders, VSI organised a comprehensive training workshop in Abia State. This workshop, specifically tailored to enhance the capacity of female community leaders (UM¹UADA), aimed to equip them with the skills needed to respond effectively to gender-based violence and foster women's leadership. By investing in these leaders, we strive to create a ripple effect of positive change within local communities. UMUADA have been known as patriarchal champions who are used to implement the plans of men. Our mandate was to transform their role and this intervention has placed the organization on the map as a transformational organization.

¹ UMUADA are first daughters of family and wield considerable power in South East of Nigeria



Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation Training For UMUADA in Enugu, Nigeria

Strategic Partnerships: Acknowledgment of Impact and Dedication

The dedication of VSI to gender justice found recognition in the form of the Women Advancement Award, presented to our Project Director by esteemed civil society partners. This prestigious acknowledgment is a testament to her long-standing efforts in championing women's rights and advancing gender justice across Nigeria. It also reflects the broader impact of VSI's work in creating meaningful and sustainable change.



VSI Receives Award for Women Advancement

In reflection, 2023 stands as a testament to VSI's commitment to gender justice. Our multifaceted approach, grounded in legal advocacy, transparent leadership, capacity building, and strategic partnerships, positions the organisation as a catalyst for transformative change. As we embark on the ongoing journey towards equality, VSI remains resolute in its mission to create a society where gender equality and social justice are not mere aspirations but integral components of everyday life. Through collaboration, advocacy, and empowerment, we continue to pave the way for a more just and equitable society.

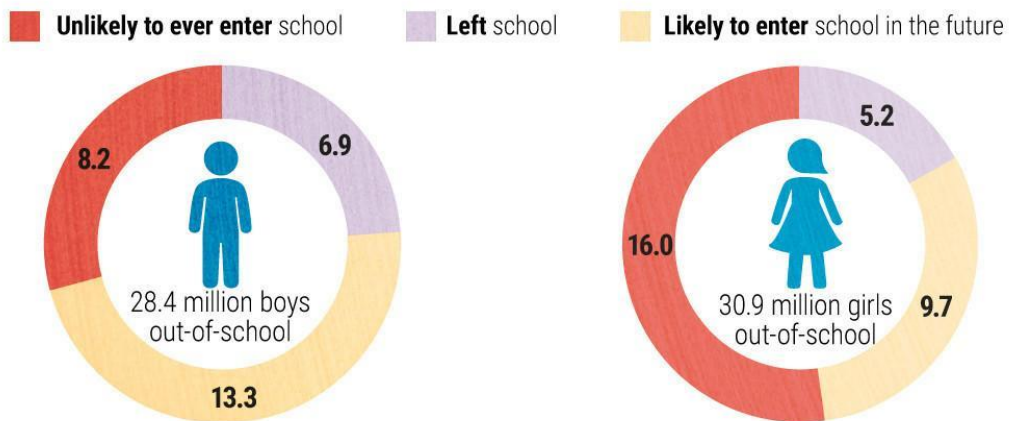
2. Education and Research

Education and research stand as pillars of paramount importance in fostering positive outcomes for the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young girls. In Nigeria, the prevailing lack of access to quality education and inadequate investment in research has undeniably contributed to sub-optimal SRHR outcomes for girls.

According to UNICEF Nigeria, 70 per cent of children in Nigeria cannot read with meaning or solve simple math problems. Only 49 per cent and 55 per cent of children in school achieve basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This alarming reality not only hinders the child's development but poses a significant threat to the overall progress and well-being of the nation. Literacy rates are as low as 38 per cent in the Northwest and 42 per cent in the Northeast for young women compared to 57 per cent in the Northwest and 53 per cent in the Northeast for young men. This gender gap not only perpetuates inequality but also restricts the potential contributions of young women to the socio-economic development of their communities and the nation at large. The impact of limited literacy and numeracy skills among young women and girls extends far beyond the academic realm. It restricts their access to economic opportunities, hinders civic engagement, and undermines their potential for active participation in national development. Addressing this educational crisis becomes not only a matter of academic improvement but a critical step towards empowering young women and girls to break free from cycles of poverty and limited social mobility.

TWICE AS MANY GIRLS AS BOYS WILL NEVER START SCHOOL

Out-of-school children of primary school age



Source: UNESCO eAtlas of Gender Inequality in Education - <http://on.unesco.org/gender-map>

UNESCO's statistic on Education between the girl and boy child



The connection between education and SRHR is profound. Quality education empowers young girls with knowledge about their bodies, reproductive health, and rights, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their well-being. Unfortunately, the existing educational disparities in Nigeria, particularly for girls, create barriers to this essential knowledge. The limited investment in research exacerbates this challenge, hindering the development of targeted interventions and evidence-based policies that could positively impact SRHR outcomes.

Addressing these shortcomings requires a holistic approach. By prioritizing access to quality education, Nigeria can empower young girls to navigate and assert their SRHR. Additionally, increased investment in research is imperative for comprehending the unique challenges these girls face, informing the development of effective programs, and advocating for policies that safeguard their rights.

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) is aware of the urgency surrounding these challenges and is dedicated to playing a transformative role. By specifically focusing on initiatives that enhance access to quality education, foster literacy and numeracy skills, and bridge gender disparities in education, VSI aims to contribute to a future where every young woman and girl in Nigeria has the opportunity for a meaningful and empowering education.

In a stride towards fostering lasting change, Vision Spring Initiatives organized training-of-trainers workshop on the 5th and 6th of May for its #GirlImpact project. Over two days, volunteers underwent an extensive program on leadership, sex and gender, self-esteem, human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The comprehensive training equipped these volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively engage, relate to, and communicate with students. The objective was clear – to mold them into positive role models and mentors capable of inspiring and guiding the younger generation.



VSI's GirlImpact Project - Training of Trainers

Through a strategic partnership with the EMpower Foundation, VSI extended its reach to 'Home of Scholars Academy' and Ipakodo Junior Secondary School in Ikorodu, where dedicated volunteers engage in weekly sessions. This sustained effort is poised to continue for a year and beyond, aiming to instill values of gender equality and empower young girls with the tools and knowledge necessary for making informed choices on sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Students at VSI's GirlImpact Session at Ipakodo Junior Secondary School

Since the project's initiation in May 2023, VSI's #GirlImpact has been actively transforming classrooms at 'Home of Scholars Academy' and Ipakodo Junior Secondary School. The weekly sessions, facilitated by VSI's passionate volunteers, focus on cultivating leadership skills, nurturing self-esteem, and promoting human rights awareness among adolescent girls and a select group of boys.



By empowering the next generation, VSI strives to catalyze progress towards gender equality within the Nigerian context. Simultaneously, the organization ensures that teachers receive specialized training to effectively support students, particularly on critical issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights; ultimately the organisation will set up reading rooms equipped with computers and books on SRHR and counselling section in the schools as a means of sustaining its interventions. Through these initiatives, VSI will create a ripple effect, transforming not just classrooms but entire communities, one empowered student at a time.



VSI trains teachers at the Home of Scholars Secondary School

3. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Women's health is often narrowly defined as reproductive health, but women and girls are increasingly advocating for a more comprehensive approach to healthcare.

Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health means recognizing that starting from childhood, through adolescence, reproductive years and beyond, there are sexual and reproductive health and

rights (SRHR) needs that cumulatively impact quality of life, health and wellbeing. It is estimated that approximately 4.3 million sexually active persons worldwide will receive poor and/or limited access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services in their lifetime. Globally, approximately 200 million women and girls still endure female genital cutting, 33,000 child marriages occur daily, and a myriad of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) agenda gaps continue to remain unaddressed. These gaps are particularly pertinent for women and girls in humanitarian settings where SRH conditions including gender-based violence, unsafe abortions, and poor obstetric care are among the leading causes of female morbidity and mortality.

Nigeria is among the top six countries in the world that contribute to more than 50% of all global maternal deaths. Maternal health persists in Nigeria despite strategies like the promotion of institutional deliveries, training and deploying new skilled health workers. Barriers to accessing SRHR services in Nigeria include, gender roles, inadequate funding, social taboos, religious factors, lack of proper infrastructure and lack of access to the right information.

VSI recognizes that SRHR is a critical aspect of human development, particularly in Nigeria, where it is still a contentious issue. Therefore, the organization operates in five thematic areas, one of which is SRHR, with a focus on implementing, promoting, and advocating for inclusive, comprehensive, and integrated SRHR policies and services for women and girls in Nigeria. Furthermore, VSI has an outstanding history of organizing and executing programs that promote SRHR in Nigeria.

In pursuit of this vision, VSI has initiated several programs targeted at educating critical stakeholders such as religious leaders and traditional rulers, healthcare providers, educators, and other persons that can impact positive change in communities.

One of the programs run by VSI is the "We-lead" project sponsored by HIVOS that focuses on advocacy for the SRHR of young women with disabilities, those living with HIV, individuals in displacement, and LGBTQI+ individuals. The project's target relevant stakeholders with the ability to create change. In the year under review, VSI conducted series of Value Clarification and Attitude Transformation (V-CAT) training sessions in all the six southwest states in Nigeria,

designed to engage traditional and religious leaders in meaningful conversations about the SRHR of young women. The sessions included medical doctors who provide valuable insights into the medical aspects of SRHR, emphasizing the dangers of unsafe abortion. The V-CAT sessions added depth to discussions, highlighting the critical need for safe and accessible SRHR services for all individuals, including those within marginalised communities.



We-Lead Project - V-CAT Training with Religious and Traditional Leaders in Ondo State, Nigeria

VSI also engage in advocacy initiatives, particularly in promoting gender inclusion in laws and policies and addressing discriminatory laws. VSI's legal reform project challenges discriminatory laws, demands their repeal and implementation of laws that respect the rights and dignity of persons in their diversity. In the year under review, the organisation organised a National SRHR Summit titled 'Fostering Dialogue and Progress'. This event brought together duty bearers, stakeholders, partners, and rights holders from the six southwest states in Nigeria. The summit served as a collaborative platform to foster dialogue, address challenges, and identify opportunities in comprehensive SRHR, especially for marginalized girls. The summit facilitated knowledge sharing, enabling the exchange of best practices and evidence-based approaches to promote and protect SRHR. The summit was supported by HIVOS and other partners which underscored VSI's commitment to promoting SRHR. The police personnel at the Summit explained that due to the pressures mounted by the CSO organisation, the agency has created a Unit that handles reports by vulnerable persons.

The representative from the National Human Rights Commission also stated that the agency was open to partner with CSOs to ensure that rights are protected and committed to review laws that are discriminatory. At the end of the workshop, all participants numbering more than 40 signed VSI's commitment board.



We-Lead Project - National SRHR Summit in Abuja, Nigeria.

Collaborating with HIVOS and other partners, VSI also hosted Value Clarification and Attitude Transformation (V-CAT) training across six states in Nigeria. Targeting healthcare providers, the training focused on the importance of SRHR services. Healthcare providers play a critical role in ensuring access to family planning, safe abortion services, comprehensive sexuality education, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. This training empowers healthcare providers, reducing maternal mortality and ensuring comprehensive SRHR services for women and young girls.



We-lead Project : V-CAT Training for Healthcare Providers in Lagos, Nigeria

The organisation recognizes that providing SRHR services is not limited to just healthcare providers; committed educators play a crucial role in the facilitation of SRHR training for young girls. VSI held a transformative event for the "Home of Scholars School" and "Ipakodo Junior Grammar School" educators under the GirlImpact Project. The purpose of the meeting featured a discussion surrounding vital and delicate topics such as leadership, sex/gender diversity, self-esteem, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

In a bid to enhance the capabilities of young women, Vision Spring Initiatives recently held a transformative 2-day event—the Feminist Leadership Institute. This unique gathering was meticulously designed to cultivate advocacy, leadership, and intersectionality capacities among young women with disabilities, living with HIV, experiencing displacement, and LBQ individuals from across southwestern Nigeria facing distinct challenges.

The curriculum of the institute was carefully crafted to encompass a spectrum of vital subjects. From Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) to the honing of leadership skills, the participants engaged in a holistic learning experience. These initiatives indicate VSI's commitment to nurturing voices that are not only well-versed in the intricacies of SRHR but also poised to drive legal, policy, and social change. By investing in the next generation of leaders, VSI envisions a future where bodily autonomy and health equality are not just aspirations but fundamental rights. This institute marks a crucial stride in fostering a generation of advocates who will shape a more

inclusive and equitable world, where every woman's voice is heard, and every woman's rights are upheld without compromise.



We-lead Project: Feminist Leadership Institute in Lagos, Nigeria

As a member of the Community of Action (COA) organisations in Nigeria, Vision Spring Initiatives has been opportune to take part in various workshops, programs and trainings to enhance its capabilities. The organisation participated in a series of capacity-building workshops organised by HIVOS for the We-Lead Project. These workshops were strategically designed to empower COAs with the skills and knowledge necessary for the effective implementation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) initiatives.

The following is an overview of workshops organised during this reporting period:

- Capacity Assessment for Rights Holders (March 21):

VSI, in collaboration with HIVOS, organised a Capacity Assessment for Rights Holders. This workshop focused on gathering and analysing essential data on the capacities of rights holders, with a particular emphasis on women living with HIV. The self-assessment platform empowered rights holders to embark on a profound journey of self-reflection and growth. The data presentation revealed strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and transformations after SRHR training. The resounding call for skills development, active involvement of young people, and honing of public speaking abilities echoed throughout, igniting a fervent desire for progress.

- African Girls and Young Women Festival, Maputo@20 Celebration, and We Lead Regional Training (July 9th-14th):

VSI's rights holders participated in the 3rd African Girls and Young Women Festival, Maputo@20 Celebration, and We Lead Regional Training. The event emphasised the critical importance of SRHR for young women, addressing challenges they face in accessing comprehensive services. It underscored the urgency of addressing gender-based violence and commemorated the 20th anniversary of the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). The training sessions equipped rights holders with essential skills for evidence-based advocacy, monitoring opposition, and driving meaningful change.



VSI's

Right Holder speaking at the African Girls and Young Women Festival, Maputo@20 Celebration

- Intersectional SRHR Workshop (June 19th -21st):

Vision Spring Initiatives actively participated in a transformative three-day workshop hosted by HIVOS and Education as A Vaccine. The workshop delved into the complexities of SRHR programming, emphasising the concept of intersectionality. Representatives

shared unique challenges faced by those championing the rights of young women with disabilities, living with HIV, in displacement, and LGBTQIA. Key takeaways highlighted the significance of inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment in SRHR programming.



VSI Representative Aanuoluwapo (first from left) at We-lead's Intersectional SRHR Workshop

- We-Lead Self-Care Workshop (July 12-13):

VSI attended the We-Lead Self-Care Workshop, a collaborative effort between Hivos and Education as A Vaccine. This workshop aimed to promote self-care and well-being among activists and advocates from the We-Lead COA organisations. Participants explored various self-care approaches to ensure continued positive impact on the lives of those they support.



We-Lead Self-care Workshop for Community of Action (COA)

- Meaningful Youth Engagement Training (July 31 - August 2nd):
VSI participated in the Meaningful Youth Engagement Training organised by We Lead in Abuja. The workshop highlighted ways to meaningfully engage young people and rights holders during the We Lead program and beyond. It involved group activities, brainstorming sessions, and the development of actions and activities to actualize meaningful youth engagement.



VSI's Representative Mary Udoh (second from back row- left) at We-lead's Meaningful Youth Engagement Training

- GIN Scoping Meeting (August 21st):

VSI attended the GIN scoping meeting with We-Lead COA representatives and Global Interfaith Network (GIN) attendees. Discussions revolved around GIN's mission, the Free to Be Me program funded by HIVOS, and collaboration strategies. The meeting emphasised accurate information dissemination, the inclusion of traditional and religious leaders, and strategic planning for SRHR campaigns.



VSI's Representative Oluwabukola (second from the left) at the We-lead's GIN Scoping Meeting

- SRHR In-Country Workshop (August 6th-7th):

VSI attended the Inception for Strengthening of National Human Rights Institutions, Communities of Action, and Rights holders. The workshop aimed to strengthen NHRI's engagement in international, regional, and national processes on sexual and reproductive health rights.



VSI's Representative Mary Udoh (first from the back row-right) at We-lead's SRHR In-Country Workshop

- Theory of Change/ Reflection/Writer'shop/Validation Workshop (September 25th - 30th): VSI representatives and other COA members attended the workshop organised by HIVOS and E.V.A for the We-Lead Project. The workshop facilitated a mid-year review, Pestle Analysis, and sessions on budgeting and reporting framework for 2024, providing a valuable juncture for reevaluating strategies and gearing up for future impact.



VSI's Representative Ohwabukola making a presentation at the We-lead Theory of Change/ Reflection/Writer'shop/Validation Workshop

- FEMNET SRHR In-Country Training (October 16th -20th):

VSI's representative attended the FEMNET SRHR In-Country Training focusing on the promotion of access to unbiased SRHR healthcare services. The workshop covered Evidence-Based Advocacy, data-driven approaches, and effective use of media to drive conversations for positive change.



VSI's Representative Aanuoluwap (first from right) at FEMNET SRHR In-Country Training

These comprehensive workshops and training sessions underscore VSI's commitment to advancing SRHR in Nigeria. Through strategic collaborations, skill-building initiatives, and evidence-based advocacy, VSI continues to play a pivotal role in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, fostering inclusivity, intersectionality, and diversity.

4. Participatory Leadership/Political education

Vision Spring Initiatives places a dedicated focus on empowering women through Participatory Leadership and Political Education, recognizing that the active engagement of women in politics is pivotal for fostering inclusive and equitable society.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2022, Nigeria is positioned as the 123rd country out of 146 countries, indicating the country's standing concerning gender disparities in political participation. This ranking sheds light on the challenges and gaps that persist in affording equal opportunities and representation for men and women in the political sphere.

In political participation, the 123rd position suggests that Nigeria faces significant disparities in areas such as political representation, decision-making roles, and access to political processes. Women may encounter barriers that hinder their active involvement and influence within political institutions, contributing to an imbalanced political landscape.

Understanding Nigeria's standing in the global gender gap ranking within the context of political participation is essential for tailoring targeted initiatives. By addressing specific challenges identified through this ranking, policymakers and advocates can work towards creating an environment that encourages equal participation and representation for both genders in political processes, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable political landscape in the country. Female participation in Nigerian politics encounters formidable challenges rooted in a complex web of political violence, ²godfatherism, and deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes, particularly evident in northern Nigeria. The interplay of these factors significantly impedes the progress of women seeking active roles in the political arena.

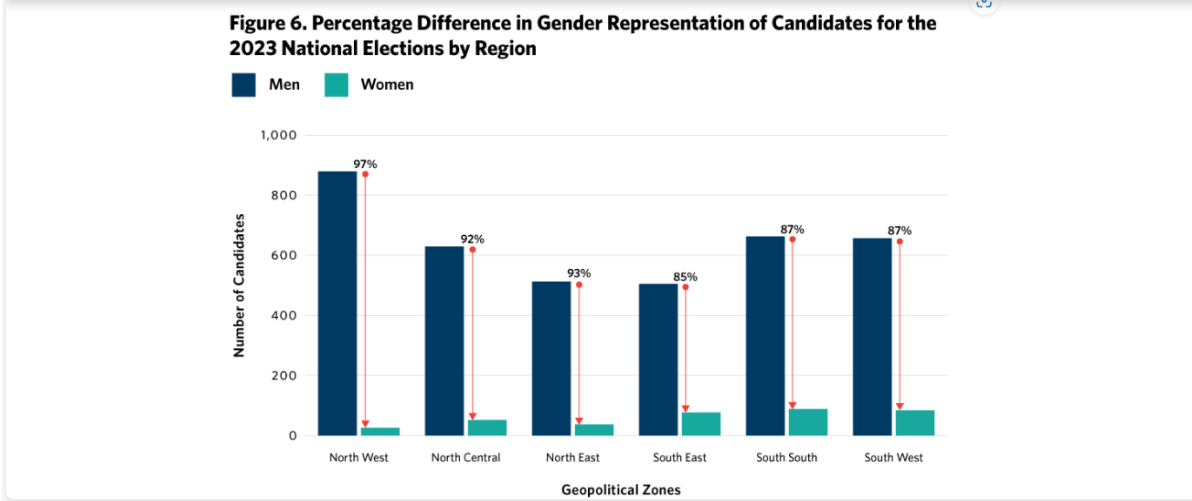
Political godfatherism, a pervasive phenomenon in Nigerian politics, presents a substantial barrier to female candidates. These influential figures, predominantly male, often overlook women, questioning their perceived strength and viability as candidates. The consequence is a restricted pool of nominees and elected female officials, especially within the larger political parties. This systemic bias perpetuates gender inequality in political representation, limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, political violence remains a pervasive and troubling issue, further diminishing the prospects for women in politics. The spectrum of violence ranges from physical assaults aimed at coercing women to resign or withdraw from political life to sexual violence, including harassment

² A term used primarily in Nigeria to refer to wealthy and powerful figures who exert political influence behind the scenes while often remaining out of the limelight

and assault. Psychological violence, such as threats, character assassination, and online abuse, adds another layer to the challenges faced by women in politics.

According to Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Women’s representation in Nigerian politics has been on a downward slide since 2011, and the 2023 elections in Africa’s largest economy confirmed the expectations of poor outcomes for women. The number of women in Nigeria’s National Assembly has fallen by 19 percent compared to the last assembly, with women now occupying 3 percent of seats in the Senate and 4 percent in the House of Representatives.



Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s analysis on Nigerian women participation in politics

VSI's initiatives are tailored to address the unique challenges women face in political participation. By empowering women through Participatory Leadership and Political Education, VSI envisions a future where women not only participate but thrive as influential leaders in political spheres. Through these transformative approaches, VSI contributes to dismantling gender-based barriers and advancing a society where women play a central role in shaping the political narrative, fostering a more equitable and representative democracy. VSI remains at the forefront, advocating for change and fostering an environment where women actively contribute to the political discourse.

These are the initiatives in which VSI actively engaged to fulfill its mission centered around the theme of Political Participation:

On the 7th of February, 2023, VSI played a pivotal role at the Spaces for Change event. The focus of this launch was to delve into the challenges faced by women in civic spaces within West Africa.

There were instances of gender-based violence and discrimination, emphasizing the need for women to play a more significant role in shaping civic spaces. VSI underscored the organization's core value of gender equality and its ongoing programs empowering women to actively participate in decision-making processes. The program pushed for a call to action, urging women to overcome patriarchal barriers and engage more actively in civic spaces.



VSI's Representative Mary Udoh (second from left) at the Spaces for Change's Book Launch

March 6th, 2023, witnessed a collaborative effort between WARD-C and VSI in organizing an outreach program specifically tailored to sensitize women on the importance of peaceful and non-violent elections. Held in garage Ikorodu, a bustling commercial hub, the program aimed to engage women traders and passersby in conversations about the detrimental effects of election-related violence. The outreach team, carrying banners promoting peaceful elections, empowered women with knowledge about the negative impacts of election irregularities. The success of the program was evident as women reported increased awareness of the importance of non-violent elections and a heightened understanding of the adverse effects of election irregularities. The outreach team

emphasized the crucial role women play in maintaining peace during elections and encouraged their active participation in the electoral process.



VSI at a market outreach demanding transparent elections at Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria

On March 7th, VSI's Project Director represented the organization at an event organized by advocates for health and rights of women and youth's initiative. The workshop critically examined the low representation of women in politics, noting the persistently low numbers in both appointive and elective positions. The Project Director received a certificate of appreciation for VSI's outstanding work in supporting women's rights, advocacy, and addressing gender-based violence in Nigeria. This recognition underscores VSI's commitment to empowering women in all spheres of public life.

On the 9th of May, VSI collaborated with Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), and the MacArthur Foundation to organize a public hearing on the impact of violence and corruption in the 2023 elections. This collaborative effort, including the Affirmative Action Initiative for Women (NCAA), aimed to gather thoughts from civil society organizations, traditional rulers, and young persons, with a specific focus on the experiences of women. The event provided a platform for participants to share valuable insights and opinions, contributing to the creation of a comprehensive regional communique. This document serves as a powerful testament to VSI's

dedication to promoting transparency, fairness, and accountability in electoral processes, with a particular emphasis on amplifying the voices of women in the political sphere. The regional communique was presented at a well-attended press conference, further emphasizing the importance of women's participation in shaping the electoral landscape.



VSI at the Public Hearing on the impact of violence and corruption in the 2023 elections

How These Activities Help Women's Political Participation :

1. Awareness and Education: By participating in events and outreach programs, VSI aims to increase awareness among women about the importance of their participation in civic spaces and elections. This knowledge empowers them to make informed decisions and actively engage in the political process.
2. Breaking Barriers: The events address barriers such as violence, godfatherism, and patriarchal attitudes, providing a platform for women to discuss these issues openly. This open dialogue helps in breaking down these barriers, enabling women to envision a more inclusive political landscape.
3. Advocacy for Gender Equality: VSI's advocacy efforts at various events and workshops underscore the organization's commitment to gender equality. By actively participating in

discussions and presentations, VSI advocates for the increased representation of women in political positions.

4. Capacity Building: Through the program, VSI empowers women with knowledge about the negative impacts of election irregularities. This capacity building helps women become more active participants in the electoral process, equipped to report acts of violence or irregularities.

5. Amplifying Voices: The collaborative efforts, such as the public hearing, aim to amplify the voices of women. By providing a platform for them to share experiences and opinions, VSI contributes to creating a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges women face in the political sphere.

6. Inspiring Action: The call to action in various events encourages women to overcome challenges and actively engage in civic spaces and elections. VSI inspires women to take an active role in shaping the political discourse and advocating for their rights.

5. Partnership and Movement Building

Strategic partnerships and movement building are integral to Vision Spring Initiatives' (VSI) theory of change. Forming alliances and collectively mobilising with other civil society actors significantly enhances our impact and bolsters efforts to advance gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights. NGOs around the world have increasingly recognized the importance of collaboration and partnerships to address intricate issues affecting women and girls.

In 2023, VSI actively expanded our strategic partnerships across local, national, and international levels. Joining solidarity networks, collaborations, and campaigns allied to our vision.

Notable partnerships formed and strengthened include:

National Partnerships

- UMUADA Leaders in Abia State: Collaborated to increase their capacity to respond to gender-based violence and foster women's leadership through targeted human rights workshops. We equipped these influential female community leaders with legal knowledge, crisis response tactics, and community mobilization strategies.

- Vision Spring Initiatives forged collaborations with various government agencies to implement the 'We Lead' project in Nigeria. Among these vital partners were traditional rulers, religious leaders, and the Ministries for Women Affairs in Ogun, Oyo, and Ondo states. The commendation received from these agencies serves as a testament to the recognition and appreciation of VSI's impactful work. Not only did this acknowledgment highlight the effectiveness of the partnership, but it also acted as an endorsement, encouraging Vision Spring Initiatives to extend its support to additional programs within the specified states.

- National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA): Partnered with NEMA Lagos chapter with support from Global Fund for Women to organize disaster management and response training for leaders in flood-prone Majidun community in Ikorodu. By increasing their preparedness, we collectively enhanced the community's climate resilience.



National Emergency Management Board (NEMA) Representative at VSI's Medical Outreach

- Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI), partnered with Nigeria Sex Workers Association (NSWA), to orchestrate a significant event - the National Town Hall Meeting. This gathering was aptly titled the "National Advocacy Summit," focusing on addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) needs of vulnerable women and girls. The collaboration between VSI and NSWA for this crucial summit underscores the shared commitment of both organizations to advocate for and prioritize the well-being and rights of women and girls across the nation. This town hall meeting served as a pivotal platform for engaging in substantive discourse, fostering advocacy, and strategizing ways to meet the specific SRHR needs of vulnerable populations. Through this joint effort, VSI and NSWA aim to drive positive change, promoting inclusivity and comprehensive support for women and girls who are often marginalized or face unique challenges in accessing essential reproductive health services and rights.

Regional Partnerships

- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Network: Joined this member-based network active in over 50 countries which leverages collaborative advocacy to promote non-violence, women's inclusion in peacebuilding, and positive conflict transformation. This expands our community engagement and activism scope.



VSI becomes a member of GPPAC

- Spaces for Change: Actively contributed during experience sharing and peer learning events organized by this civil society hub defending civic space across Nigeria. We spotlighted our work

empowering marginalized communities and received solidarity messages for VSI's work in this area.

International Partnerships

- Trust Law: VSI Became an official member of the Thomson Reuters Foundation's Trust Law network which connects 2000+ NGOs worldwide with pro bono legal assistance and key resources to drive social change. Our membership in Trust Law broadens our access to legal expertise, empowering us to navigate and address discriminatory laws and policies on a global scale.

Notably, the Trust Law network is an official partner of the We-lead project, providing organisations like ours with invaluable legal support to effectively implement the project. This collaboration ensures that we have the necessary legal assistance to navigate challenges and drive meaningful change through the We-lead project.

Administration and Finance

Vision Spring Initiatives had an exciting year and was able to bring on board new partners which boosted its work.

EMpower joined the organisation and provided support for VSI's sexual and reproductive health and rights support for sex workers. Through consultations, the organisation was able to identify and partner with brothels in Ikorodu area of Lagos state. Selected sex workers had received advocacy-in-practice training during which they indicated interest to quit sex work. A total of 40 sex workers were trained on financial well-being and sexual and reproductive health and rights decision making. At the end and based on the level of commitment of the trainees, a total of 10 were selected for economic support.

The girlimpact project was also supported by EMpower and the organisation engaged 2 schools training more than 200 girls and a few boys.

The Global Fund for Women renewed its support to VSI, supporting its SRHR intervention in flood affected areas providing supplies such as Dignity kits to girls in hard-to-reach communities.



VSI Medical Outreach at Majidun Community, Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria

OSIWA supported VSI's work on building capacities of UMUADA to challenge stereotypes and contribute to ending sexual and gender based violence in Enugu and Anambra states.

Nigerian Women Trust Fund also supported similar training where more than 100 UMUADA were trained to support police and other law enforcement agencies to ensure that violence against women is challenged and perpetrators held to account. This project was implemented in Abia state.

Spaces for Change supported the organisation to host trainings with CSOs in 4 states; Enugu and Anambra states and Ogun and Oyo; the training was aimed at building awareness on challenging shrinking civic space which negatively impacts the work of CSOs in Nigeria.

HIVOS continued to support the organisation towards advocacy for the promotion of SRHR knowledge amongst young persons living with HIV, with disabilities and girls in hard-to-reach communities.

Staff matters

To ensure that Vision Spring Initiatives adequately carries out its task, a few staff members came on board.

Aanuoluwapo Owoseeni came on board as SRHR personnel. Aanu holds many years of experience and has contributed to ensuring that young women are empowered using her personnel life experience to create change.

Oluwatosin Mayor-Olabiyitan also joined the organisation as a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. Tosin is well grounded in Monitoring and Evaluation and has supported the organization in documenting its impact.

Mojirola Jolaoso joined as an intern- Her background is in Psychology and she has been very proactive in supporting all program activities.

VSI's volunteers continue to support the organisation and contribute to all positions when called upon. VSI is proud of the more than 30 women who have continued to dedicate their time and skills to support the organization.

Vision Spring Initiatives held series of virtual and face-to-face meeting with its board. The board supported staff evaluation and created fund raising working group. It also reviewed its Board Policy. The organisation enjoys robust input from its board and are grateful for the over-sight function they provide.