

PROJECT REPORT | 2024

SRHR & CLIMATE JUSTICE:

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Prepared by:



**Vision
Spring
Initiatives**

www.visionspringinitiatives.org

hello@visionspringinitiatives.org

ACRONYMS

SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

VSI - Vision Spring Initiatives

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

GFW - Global Fund for Women

PP - Period Poverty

STIs - Sexually Transmitted Infections

NEMA - National Emergency Management Agency

LAWMA - Lagos Waste Management Authority

CSE - Comprehensive Sexuality Education

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

SGBV - Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

SRH – Sexual and Reproductive Health

RH – Reproductive Health

GLOSSARY

Period Poverty: Refers to the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, adequate sanitation facilities, and menstruation-related education, often resulting in social exclusion and health risks for individuals who menstruate.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Encompasses a range of issues related to sexual health, reproduction, rights, and responsibilities, including access to contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, and reproductive healthcare services.

Menstrual Hygiene Management: Involves access to menstrual products, facilities, and education necessary to manage menstruation in a healthy, hygienic, and dignified manner.

WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene): Aims to improve access to clean water, and sanitation facilities, and promote good hygiene practices, including menstrual hygiene management.

Gender-Based Violence: Refers to any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.

Sexual and Reproductive Health: Focuses on the well-being in all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, encompassing issues such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and maternal health.

Non-Governmental Organization: A non-profit organization that operates independently of any government, typically for social, cultural, or environmental purposes.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: A term used to describe any act of violence that is perpetrated against an individual's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships.

Reproductive Health: The state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system, including access to healthcare services that support reproductive choices.

SRHR Education: Comprehensive sexuality education that covers a range of topics related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including menstruation, contraception, STIs, and consent.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A curriculum-based approach to teaching about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality.

About Vision Spring Initiatives

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) is a duly registered (RC 908183), non-governmental, not-for-profit human rights organization partnering with strategic stakeholders to achieve developmental rights of children, young people, and other persons made vulnerable by laws, policies and practices and supporting their attainment of these rights using a multipronged and cross-sectoral approach.



OUR VISION

A society where gender equality and social justice become part of everyday life



OUR MISSION

To provide our constituents: women, girls, and minority groups practical tools for self-development, voice, and actions through research, education, advocacy, and movement building.



OUR THEMATIC AREAS

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

- Gender Justice (Central and the core of VSI programming)
- Education and Research
- Participatory Leadership/Political Education
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- Movement Building and Partnerships

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 collaborate with like-minded organizations for strategic partnerships on achieving gender equality.
- To engage with strategic stakeholders and demand the implementation of laws and policies that guarantee the rights of women, girls, and minority groups

OUR TARGET BENEFICIARIES

- Children
- Young people Women
- Minority groups
- Those made vulnerable by laws, policies and practices.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Vision Spring Initiatives would like to extend a sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the realization of this project. Their support, expertise, and encouragement were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition and completion.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff and volunteers of Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) for their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment to supporting vulnerable communities, especially during times of crisis. Your passion and dedication have been instrumental in driving forward our mission to empower women and girls in Nigeria.

Special recognition goes to Oriyomi Abayomi, a volunteer whose invaluable contributions and selfless dedication have played a pivotal role in the success of our initiatives.

We extend our deepest appreciation to our esteemed funder, Global Fund for Women, for their support and belief in our vision. Your partnership has been instrumental in enabling us to implement impactful programs and make a meaningful difference in the lives of women and girls affected by crises in Nigeria.

We also extend our gratitude to every ally, supporter, and collaborator who has stood by us in our efforts to address the intersectional challenges faced by women and girls. Your solidarity and support have been invaluable, and we are grateful for your continued partnership as we work towards a more equitable and just society for all.

Honoring the Strength and Courage of Flood-Affected Young Women and Girls

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the courageous and resilient young women and girls who have been affected by the devastating floods in Nigeria. Your strength, resilience, and unwavering spirit in the face of adversity inspire us every day.

We are profoundly grateful for your dedication and willingness to share your experiences and stories with Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI). Your voices are powerful reminders of the challenges and realities faced by women and girls in crises, and they serve as a driving force behind our commitment to advocate for change and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

Your bravery in the face of hardship and your willingness to stand up and speak for your rights is a testament to your unwavering determination and resilience. It is an honor to work alongside you as we strive to build a brighter and more hopeful future for all women and girls in Nigeria.

Your contributions are invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in us.

Together, we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that your voices are heard, your rights are respected, and your needs are met, both now and in the future.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Setting the Stage: Understanding Period Poverty and Natural Disasters in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the stark reality of period poverty intersects with the devastating impact of natural disasters, amplifying the challenges faced by women and girls across the nation. Over 37 million Nigerian women and girls find themselves unable to afford sanitary pads, hindering their ability to pursue education, employment, and daily activities. This dire situation is compounded when calamities such as floods strike, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and exacerbating existing gender disparities.

In recent months, parts of Lagos and Kogi states have been ravaged by severe flooding, displacing communities, destroying livelihoods, and disrupting essential services, including healthcare facilities. The aftermath of these disasters leaves young women and girls particularly susceptible to heightened risks of sexual and reproductive health complications, gender-based violence, and exploitation.

In response to this urgent crisis, Vision Spring Initiatives, with support from Global Fund for Women, implemented vital emergency response interventions. The initiative was aimed at bolstering the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young women and girls affected by floods. Through comprehensive strategies, including the provision of critical SRHR services and awareness campaigns, distribution of relief materials such as dignity kits, and the promotion of community resilience via emergency response training, we endeavor to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of this crisis.

This publication sheds light on the intersectionality of period poverty and natural disasters while highlighting the crucial role of targeted interventions in safeguarding the well-being and dignity of women and girls in Nigeria.



Significance of the Issue: Exploring the Intersectionality of Gender, Economic Hardship, and Environmental Crises for Women and Girls

We would like to highlight why this issue matters so much. We are looking at how being a girl or a woman, dealing with financial struggles, and facing natural disasters all come together to create even bigger challenges.

First off, let us talk about how being a girl or a woman can make things harder. In many places, especially rural communities in Nigeria, girls and women do not have the same opportunities as boys and men. This means they might not have as much say in important decisions or access to things they need, like proper healthcare. When it comes to dealing with periods and surviving disasters, these inequalities can make their daily living and life even tougher. Moving to financial aspect, when people do not have a lot of money, it affects everyone, but it hits girls and women particularly hard. They might not be able to afford necessities like sanitary pads, which can make dealing with periods a real struggle. And when disasters strike, not having enough money can make it even more difficult to recover and rebuild.

Considering natural disasters like floods, peoples' lives can turn upside down in an instant. Homes can be destroyed, people can get sick, and violence can increase. For girls and women, who are already facing challenges because of their gender and financial situations, the impact of these disasters can be even more severe as they are mostly at the receiving end.



Purpose of the Publication: Highlighting the Need for Targeted Interventions

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This publication explores the devastating consequences when period poverty and natural disasters collide in Nigeria. It emphasizes how targeted interventions are essential to safeguard the health, hygiene, and dignity of women and girls during these crises. The report likely highlights the disruptions natural disasters cause, such as floods destroying sanitation facilities or displacing people from homes with menstrual supplies. It underscores the importance of targeted interventions that consider these disruptions and ensure continued access to menstrual hygiene products and proper sanitation facilities, even in the most challenging circumstances.

This documentation urges institutions to adopt inclusive programming, prioritizing both equitable protection and the empowerment of vulnerable women in Nigeria.

Disclaimer: This publication is the sole production of Vision Spring Initiatives with support from Global Fund for Women. Vision Spring Initiatives hereby states that all views expressed in this publication are not those of Global Fund for Women.

Stories of Resilience

Narratives from Women and Girls Affected by Period Poverty and Natural Disasters

How do you manage menstrual hygiene, and what products do you use?

We don't use sanitary pads because we cannot afford it and we understand our parents' financial situations so we don't even bother asking them. The only way we manage our period is by using a rag and washing it well before we use it again, but when there is flooding, this issue might be exacerbated and we sometimes result in turning over the unstained part of our menstrual rag or wash it with muddy water.

Are you aware of any available sexual and reproductive health services in your community? If yes, mention the SRHR services you use.

We are not even aware that something like SRHR exists because we don't have any other knowledge besides the one we get from the walls of our community. So, I will say, that we do not have any sexual and reproductive health services in Ganaja village aside from the few ones we get from over-the-counter chemist shops in our community which are menstrual pain drugs, condoms, and infection (STIs) drugs.

The Impact of Period Poverty on Women and Girls in Nigeria



Where do you typically seek information about sexual and reproductive health?

We seek information about sexual and reproductive health mainly from our peers who are likely more exposed than we are since we barely have access to a health clinic in our community, so, we treasure the information our friends share with us, especially regarding sex and infection treatment. However, we welcome other sources of information about sexual and reproductive health, provided it is comprehensive and correct.

Have you or anyone you know witnessed or experienced any form of sexual or gender-based violence before? Probe further to document violent experiences during flood situations.

The only form of sexual and gender-based violence we know of was the one that happened during the flooding (and that was because it was made public), and we heard justice was being served.

Normally, we experience molestation from our male counterparts, especially during the flooding crisis, but there is nothing much we can do about it. Even our parents are eager to see us off to our husbands' houses because they cannot afford to cater for us all again.

What preventive measures do you think would be effective in reducing the risk of sexual and gender-based violence in your community?

We believe the government should take our safety and health seriously. We don't usually go to school when flooding occurs, and we're stuck with molesters in the same room. We need separate shelters for girls and boys, as we believe staying in the same room with them would foster increased molestation and sexual abuse/coercion.

Challenges and Coping Strategies

Insights from Community Leaders, NGOs, and Healthcare Providers

How has your community been affected by flooding, and have you noticed any specific challenges faced by young girls?

The consequences of flooding have been profound, encompassing financial strains, difficulties in accessing food, sanitation challenges, and increased risk of waterborne illnesses transmitted by flies and mosquitoes, particularly affecting pregnant women and girls. Displacement is a common occurrence, leaving us homeless. Tragically, some of our girls are subjected to sexual exploitation in exchange for necessities. Education is disrupted as flooding forces us to relocate to higher ground, often cramming multiple families, predominantly with young girls, into limited shelter space. In response, we've had to re-purpose dry schools as makeshift camps to accommodate our community members.

-Community leader



Increase in sexual and reproductive health complication



Gender-based violence



Exploitation of women and girls

In your opinion, how supportive is the community in addressing the safety and protection needs of young girls during floods?

The village king has been engaging in a series of discussions with the Kogi state governor, focusing on the community's flooding issues and their socioeconomic impact. Additionally, one of our community leaders temporarily converted his football viewing center into a shelter during the floods, but it proved unsustainable and unsafe, as men and boys harassed young women and girls mistaken for refugees. On a positive note, Vision Spring Initiatives, the sole NGO providing comprehensive support, has implemented dual interventions addressing both health and safety concerns in our community. Through NEMA training, our leaders have gained crucial insights into flood response protocols, ensuring everyone understands their roles, fostering accountability, and enhancing efficiency.

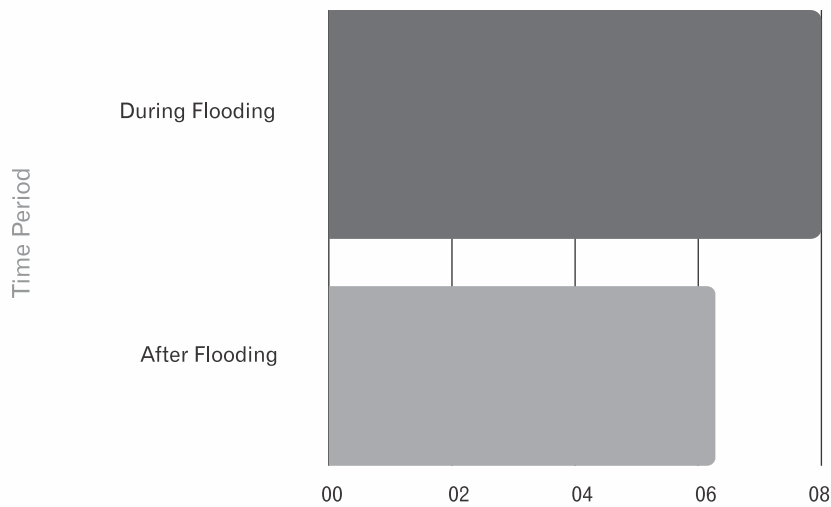
Are there community-led initiatives or programs aimed at preventing sexual or gender-based violence among young girls in your community?

The concept of gender-based violence was unfamiliar to us until now. Vision Spring Initiatives stands as the sole organization that has addressed issues like sexual violence within our community, introducing us to this previously unknown term. Their educational sessions on sexual violence, security, and the well-being of our girls have been invaluable, providing crucial awareness and knowledge to our community.

Are SRHR services readily available for young girls in your community, especially in the aftermath of flooding?

There is nothing like SRHR services in our community, but we are open to receiving and accepting any initiatives that provide sexual and reproductive health and rights services. In our community, few gender-based violence cases have been reported, but we are receptive to any initiative that aims to improve the reporting of these cases when they occur. We welcome and are open to receiving any efforts focused on promoting awareness and preventing gender-based violence within our community.

Decrease in School Attendance Due to Flooding



What support services, if any, are provided for survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)?

We have security personnel assigned to guard shelters during floods, but unfortunately, some of them succumb to bribery from perpetrators. In one distressing incident, a young girl was raped, and the perpetrator was apprehended by civil defense officers. We promptly sought medical attention for the victim, ensuring she received proper treatment at the hospital.



TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

SESSION A

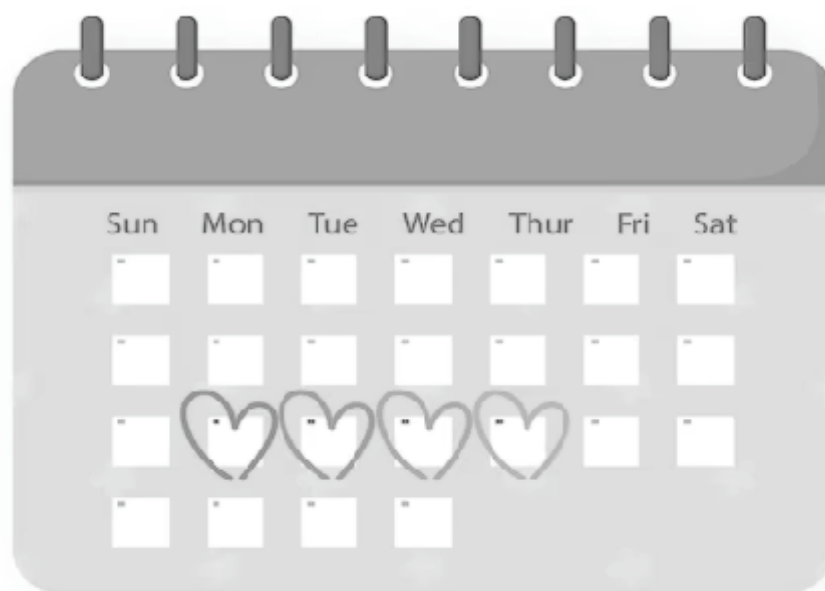
Menstrual Hygiene And Nutrition

The participants underwent a sensitization session focusing on maintaining hygienic menstruation practices. Emphasis was laid on the fact that sanitary pads should be changed at least 3–4 times a day during the monthly period, regardless of the flow intensity. This awareness aims to ensure proper menstrual hygiene and minimize health risks.

During an open discussion, it became evident that economic limitations led some girls to adopt unhealthy eating habits, impacting their menstrual health. Lack of necessary nutrient intake was identified as a contributing factor to malnutrition, prompting a realization of the importance of proper nutrition for menstrual well-being.

The young women and girls shared their use of pain relief methods that might not be conducive to female reproductive health. In response, a medical professional guided suitable pain relief options for managing menstrual discomfort, addressing concerns related to the well-being of their reproductive organs.

Do You Know Your Period?



A typical Period lasts between 3-7 days

VSI encouraged participants to reduce their consumption of carbonated drinks, highlighting the associated health risks for young women and girls. They were advised to adopt healthy eating habits, including the incorporation of vitamin supplements, green vegetables, and fruits, and maintain a balanced diet at least three times a week, considering their current financial constraints. VSI also covered important aspects of menstruation, discussing the typical duration (3 to 7 days) and flow intensity. Participants were urged to report any form of abnormalities or issues to a medical practitioner at a hospital or clinic, to foster proactive health management.

The session addressed variations in period frequency, noting that some young women and girls experience more than one period during a single cycle. This phenomenon may be attributed to stress, poor nutrition, inadequate hygiene and sanitation practices, or an underlying medical condition. Highlighting these factors aims to promote a better understanding of menstrual health and hygiene among the participants.

Lagos state participants shared various methods of disposing of their sanitary pads, revealing a range of practices:

- 1. Disposing of refuse bins or drainages during heavy rain:** Some participants admitted to disposing of their pads in their refuse bins or drainages, especially during heavy rain. They believed that the rain would wash away the pads from the drainages by the time the rain stopped.
- 2. Washing blood off pads and disposing in the refuse bin:** Another method mentioned was washing the blood off the sanitary pads before disposing of them in the refuse bin. This suggests an attempt at hygiene but may still pose environmental challenges.
- 3. Flushing in the water closet:** Some participants reported flushing their sanitary pads in the water closet. This method, however, can lead to blockages and other plumbing issues.
- 4. Removing nylon part before flushing:** A few of the girls described removing the nylon part of the pad to prevent water closet blockages and then flushing off the remaining cotton part. This indicates a partial awareness of the potential issues with flushing the entire pad.
- 5. Washing blood off, removing the nylon from the sanitary pad, and flushing in the water closet:** Some participants mentioned washing the blood off the pad, removing the nylon part, and then flushing the cotton part in the water closet. This method combines several practices but may still pose challenges.



Kogi state participants in Ganaja village have no access to sanitary pads as it is seen as a luxury to the young women and girls of Ganaja village, and the only form of sanitation they can access and afford are cloth rags, which they are not able to properly maintain since most of the young women and girls have less than three rags that they use for their menstrual period. They are openly susceptible to infections, especially during flooding where their water has been contaminated, and they have little or no access to clean water to maintain menstrual hygiene.

The session highlighted that only a small percentage of participants practised safe and hygienic ways of disposing of their sanitary pads in Lagos, while a huge percentage of participants in Lokoja could not achieve proper menstrual hygiene due to sanitation restrictions caused by flooding. The majority engaged in improper and potentially unhealthy disposal methods. The session aimed to assess menstrual hygiene attitudes and propose possible solutions to address these behaviors, emphasizing the importance of adopting safety.



SESSION B

Sexual Abuse And Exploitation

Sexual abuse is a prevalent issue in communities experiencing displacement caused by events like floods and unforeseen incidents. The heightened vulnerability resulting from such circumstances particularly exposes young women and girls to increased risks of sexual abuse and exploitation. In these displaced communities, individuals, especially the most vulnerable, may find themselves subjected to coercive situations where they are forced into exploitative relationships through favors or emotional blackmail. This disturbing trend underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to protect the rights and well-being of young women and girls in these challenging situations.

Issues raised by the participants during the discussion for Lagos state.

- **Verbal and sexual abuse by male counterparts:** Participants expressed concern about experiencing verbal and sexual abuse from their male counterparts. The perpetrators often use threats, such as harming or withholding benefits, to prevent the victims from speaking out about the abuse. This power dynamic contributes to a culture of silence and fear.
- **The challenge of opening up due to victim-blaming culture:** The girls pointed out the existing victim-blaming culture in Nigeria, which hinders them from opening up about their experiences. This culture places blame on the victims rather than holding the perpetrators accountable, creating a barrier for the survivors to seek support or justice.
- **Exploitation by older men in the community:** The participants highlighted a disturbing trend where older men in their communities exploit them. These men promise to fulfill their needs in exchange for the girls becoming their sexual partners. This manipulation creates a cycle of abuse and dependency.
- **Unsafe abortion practices and victim blaming:** It was brought to the organization's attention that some girls resorted to unsafe abortion practices when impregnated by men. Tragically, the victims are blamed for not taking emergency pills immediately after the sexual ordeal, perpetuating a culture of victim-blaming rather than addressing the root causes.
- **Deceptive tactics leading to rape and sexual abuse:** Participants shared instances where they were deceived by men who pretended to send them on errands. These deceitful individuals would lure them into apartments or shady places under the guise of providing money for the errands, only to subject them to rape and sexual abuse.

Proposed Solutions for Sexual Abuse



Open communication



Walking in groups



Engagement with the Gender Desk at Police Stations



Educational Empowerment

Issues raised by the participants during the discussion for Kogi state.

- There is a heightened risk of exposure to sexual abuse and violence especially during flooding. Once a young girl is married off to a suitor, she is to bear every form of abuse in the union. This statement highlights a concerning aspect of some cultural practices in the Northern part of Nigeria where young girls are married off and subsequently subjected to various forms of abuse within the union.
- The least sexually active age of young girls in Ganaja village is 9 years.
- Perceived superiority fostering increased teenage pregnancy: The high rate of teenage pregnancy stems from a misguided perception among teenagers that it elevates their status above their unmarried peers. This belief could be influenced by various factors such as societal norms, lack of comprehensive sex education, and the desire for validation or attention.

The collective experiences narrated by the participants underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address not only the immediate safety concerns but also the deep-rooted cultural and systemic issues contributing to the vulnerability and victimization of these young women and girls.

Solutions proposed by Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) aimed at addressing the challenges raised by the participants are as follows:

- Encouraging open communication: VSI emphasized the importance of young women and girls speaking out about the abuse to a trusted family member. The goal is to enlist the support of someone who can advocate on their behalf and escalate the case to higher authorities, fostering a culture of transparency and support.

- **Group movement for safety:** Recognizing the challenges of night walks, VSI suggested that young women and girls should move in groups when necessary to enhance their safety. Additionally, they were advised to refrain from running errands for men in their community, particularly when it involves leaving open spaces, as a preventive measure against potential risks.
- **Engaging with the Gender Desk at police stations:** The participants were encouraged to visit the gender desk at the community police station to report any form of abuse they have faced or anticipate facing. This proactive approach aims to address the underreporting of sexual abuse and violence cases in the community. Reporting offenders was highlighted as a means to ensure the detention and arrest of perpetrators, ultimately reducing the prevalence of abusers in the community. **Promoting comprehensive protection:** VSI underscored the importance of educating young women and girls about protection against both unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The focus was shifted from just fearing pregnancy to emphasizing broader sexual health, thereby empowering participants with the knowledge to safeguard their overall well-being.
- The increased risk of sexual abuse and violence during flooding is a critical concern, as natural disasters can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and strain resources for protection and response. It's essential to implement measures such as early warning systems, safe shelters, and community education to mitigate these risks and ensure the safety and well-being of affected populations.
- Adolescent marriage underscores the urgent need for legal protections, education, and support systems to safeguard the rights and well-being of the participants (vulnerable young women and girls).
- Addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy requires multifaceted approaches including education, access to contraceptives, and fostering positive peer influences.

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These solutions provided by VSI demonstrate a holistic approach, encompassing individual empowerment, community engagement, and collaboration with law enforcement to create a safer environment for young women and girls, while also addressing the root causes of sexual abuse and exploitation.



SESSION C

Bodily Autonomy

- The sensitization workshop unveiled a significant gap in awareness among young women regarding their bodily rights. Many of these women struggle to discern instances of abuse from harmless play, showcasing a concerning lack of knowledge about their bodily autonomy. This deficit in understanding poses a serious risk, potentially leading to a surge in recurring forms of abuse, whether or not these young women are cognizant of the mistreatment. Such a situation can have detrimental effects on their sexual and mental well-being.
- During the workshop, participants were provided with comprehensive education on various forms of abuse that they might encounter. They were equipped with strategies on how to respond effectively when faced with such situations. Of particular concern was the tendency among these young women to overlook or dismiss verbal abuse, failing to recognize it as a form of mistreatment that should not be tolerated. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for empowering these individuals to safeguard their bodily autonomy and overall well-being.

Benefits of Family Planning



Reproductive Autonomy



Better Health Outcomes



Improved Quality of Life



Feedback from the participants highlighted the following for Lagos state and Lokoja

- **Body-shaming:** Both their male and female peers engage in body-shaming them, creating an environment that perpetuates negative attitudes towards the physical appearance of young women.
- **Verbal harassment:** Participants reported encountering silly and sexually provocative verbal comments from men, contributing to an atmosphere of discomfort and disrespect.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Some older men in the community leverage sexual gestures as a means to obtain favors from these young women, exploiting their vulnerability.
- **Coerced submission in relationships:** Disturbingly, participants shared experiences of yielding to their romantic partners, especially in matters related to sexual intercourse. Despite expressing a lack of desire to engage in sexual activities at times, they reported being coerced by their partners, even against their will.
- **Physical abuse:** Instances of physical abuse were recounted, including older men slapping their buttocks while passing by or inappropriately brushing against their breasts under the guise of determining the authenticity of their physique.
- **Reproductive control:** A significant concern emerged as participants revealed a lack of control over their reproductive choices. Many young mothers among them expressed frustration about being unable to decide on the number of children they want. The issue extended to the constraints imposed by their partners and health clinic instructions, as these young mothers sought to adhere to guidelines recommending a specific number of children with designated spacing. This lack of agency over family planning decisions was particularly distressing for the participants.

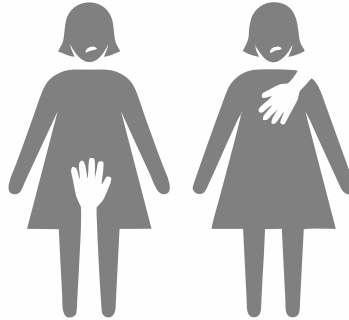
Solutions suggested by Vision Spring Initiatives include:

- **Body-shaming:** VSI encouraged the participants to remember their worth is not defined by their appearance, and further told them to embrace their uniqueness and focus on qualities that make them special. Also, surround themselves with positive influences and seek support if struggling with body image issues.
- **Verbal harassment:** The response that VSI gave was, "You deserve to be treated with respect and dignity at all times. Don't hesitate to speak up if someone makes inappropriate comments or harasses you verbally. Seek help from trusted adults or authorities if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable."

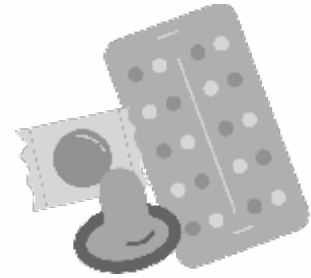
Sexual exploitation: "Your safety and well-being are paramount. Trust your instincts and avoid situations where you feel vulnerable or pressured. If you experience any form of sexual exploitation, remember it's not your fault, and seek support from trusted individuals or organizations who can help you."



Body shaming



Sexual Exploitation



Reproductive Control



Verbal Harassment



Physical Abuse



Coerced submission

Coerced submission in relationships: "In a healthy relationship, your feelings and boundaries should be respected. Don't feel pressured to do anything you're not comfortable with, especially when it comes to intimacy. Communicate openly with your partner about your needs and seek support if you feel coerced or pressured in any way."

Physical abuse: "No one has the right to harm you physically. If you experience any form of physical abuse or harassment, prioritize your safety and seek help immediately. Reach out to trusted adults, friends, or authorities who can provide support and assistance such as the gender desk in the police station nearest to you."

Reproductive control: The participants were informed that their reproductive choices are theirs alone to make, and VSI is just there to help them make informed choices. They were further urged to not let anyone dictate or control their decisions about family planning and to also seek information and support from healthcare professionals and organizations that respect the autonomy of young women and girls and provide access to comprehensive reproductive health services.

The goals of the solutions preferred by VSI for the issues the participants face are to empower them, ensure their safety and well-being, educate and raise awareness, prevent harm, provide support and intervention, and advocate for systemic change towards a more equitable society.



SESSION D

Access To SRHR Information And Services

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) played a crucial role in raising awareness among young women and girls by providing age-appropriate and high-quality Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information tailored to their environmental conditions and status. VSI also took the initiative to educate them about various contraceptive methods, outlining the details of how and where these services could be accessed.

As part of the sensitization process, participants were actively encouraged to engage in open discussions and compile a list of contraceptive methods they were already familiar with or currently using.

This exercise served a dual purpose:

- First, it facilitated an inclusive and informative dialogue around contraception,
- and second, it provided valuable insights into the existing knowledge base of the participants.

By encouraging the sharing of experiences and information, VSI aimed to enhance the overall education and understanding of the participants regarding contraceptive methods, fostering a more informed and empowered community.

Discussions from the session:

After the session, discussions were initiated by asking, "What contraceptive methods do you know about?" It became apparent that the term "contraceptives" was not well understood by young women and girls, rendering the message unclear. Recognizing this, VSI opted to use the term "family

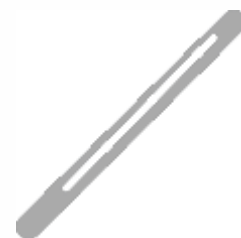
planning methods," a phrase that resonated more effectively with the participants. This adjustment elicited intensive engagement, with some sharing personal experiences and others expressing familiarity through prior knowledge.



Pills method



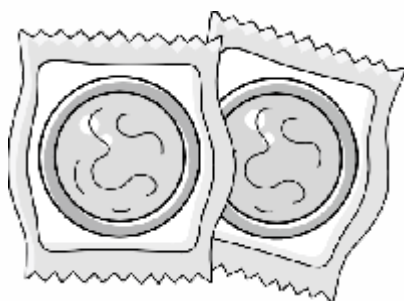
Injectables



Implants



intrauterine devices (IUDs)



Condoms



Fertility Awareness

- The conversation delved into demystifying misconceptions surrounding family planning. Participants disclosed concerns such as the belief that it could lead to weight gain, abnormal bleeding, painful and heavy periods, cessation of periods, hormonal imbalances, and other perceived side effects. These apprehensions were traced back to misinformation instilled in them, contributing to a fear of potential consequences.
- In response, Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) emphasized the importance of seeking medical advice before adopting any family planning method. The facilitator underscored that those experiencing adverse effects likely either bypassed medical consultation inaccurately addressed inquiries during consultations, or had pre-existing health issues before starting family planning.
- To empower the participants with knowledge about their rights, VSI asked whether they were aware of their right to access family planning methods, irrespective of marital status. The uncertain response prompted further sensitization on their rights regarding family planning. VSI clarified that both married and single women can opt for family planning. For married women, encouragement was given to involve their partners in the decision-making process. However, for

those facing resistance from their partners, participants were advised to prioritize their health needs and consult with a doctor for guidance.

- Concerns were raised by young mothers who expressed that their husbands opposed the idea of them using family planning, despite having achieved their desired number of children. VSI acknowledged these concerns and reiterated that effective forms of family planning that prevent both sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies include abstinence and the use of condoms during unprotected sexual encounters.

This session aimed to equip the participants with comprehensive information and empower them to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive health.



SESSION E

Medical Checkup And Consultations

During the medical testing session, VSI in collaboration with medical professionals in the chosen communities conducted a range of tests to assess the health status of over 100 young women and girls in each community. Firstly, they measured the blood pressure of the participants to check for any potential cardiovascular issues. This is important because high blood pressure is a major risk factor for many serious health problems even though it is majorly common among adults, including heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. The participants were also tested for malaria, due to the flooding crisis in their communities.

In addition to these tests, medication was administered to those who needed it. For instance, some of the participants were prescribed antimalarial drugs to treat malaria infections while others were given multivitamins that contain vitamin C tablets and blood capsules. The medical team worked closely with each participant to ensure they received the appropriate treatment and care.

Finally, the medical professionals provided one-on-one consultations to young women and girls who had concerns or questions about their health. This was an opportunity for the participants to discuss any symptoms they were experiencing, ask about preventative measures they could take, and receive guidance on managing existing health conditions. The medical personnel were able to offer advice and support, as well as refer individuals to specialists if necessary.



SESSION F

National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Training on Emergency Response for Community Leaders, Healthcare Workers and Community-Based Organizations.

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI), in collaboration with NEMA Lagos and NEMA Abuja, on the 31st of October, 2023, and 31st of January, 2024 organized an intensive training on flood response and disaster management for the residents of Majidun communities. During this session, VSI reiterated its unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the residents in these communities.

The training, facilitated by representatives from NEMA, focused on flood response and disaster management. Residents were enlightened about the various types of floods and were provided with crucial safety measures to follow during flood emergencies.

Key discussions during the training included:

- 1. Drainage maintenance:** Residents were urged to regularly check and clean their drainages to prevent clogging by leaves and debris, which can impede the proper flow of water. Keeping drainages clear was emphasized as paramount to reducing the risk of flooding.
- 2. Waste disposal:** Proper waste disposal practices were emphasized, with a strong recommendation to utilize the services of the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) for regular waste disposal. Open waste dumping in gutters, canals, drainages, and rivers was strongly discouraged.
- 3. Evacuation and safety measures:** Residents were advised to evacuate to higher grounds or new locations during flooding. Safety measures: such as not swimming or driving in floodwaters, were highlighted, as the current during heavy flooding can be dangerous.
- 4. Emergency reporting:** Facilitators stressed the need for residents to seek help from relevant agencies during emergencies. They encouraged residents to dial the emergency number 767 to report incidents promptly.
- 5. Community sensitization:** Residents expressed the need for grassroots sensitization and training on flood response and disaster management. Vision Spring Initiatives was applauded as a collaborator that significantly addressed this need.
- 6. Advocating for the Health and Safety of Young Women and Girls During Flooding:** In times of flooding, the vulnerability of young women and girls to various forms of abuse escalates. Recognizing this critical issue, representatives from the Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) urged and encouraged community leaders and healthcare workers to prioritize the protection of this vulnerable demographic.

Amidst the chaos and devastation caused by flooding, young women and girls often find themselves at heightened risk of exploitation, harassment, and abuse. Displacement, overcrowded shelters, and disrupted services exacerbate their vulnerability, making it imperative for community leaders and healthcare providers to address their specific needs.

VSI representatives emphasize the importance of implementing proactive measures to safeguard the health and safety of young women and girls during flood emergencies. This

includes establishing safe spaces within evacuation centers, ensuring access to essential hygiene products, and providing psychosocial support to mitigate the trauma they may endure.

Protecting the health and safety of young women and girls during flooding requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society.

7. **NEMA also urged community leaders to evacuate people and properties from high-risk areas and advocated for the construction of flood-proof structures.** Notably, NEMA Lagos visited the most affected Majidun Itwolo community and pledged to revisit with palliatives and flood relief items in subsequent visits, with VSI continuing its collaboration.

This educational initiative is expected to enhance individual and community resilience in recovering from flood events, protecting properties, and reducing vulnerability, especially of young women and girls. During the training, VSI called on the Lagos State government for intervention in building bridges across river channels and preventing approvals for constructing houses on waterways. Lastly, residents were encouraged to watch out for each other and engage in head counting after flooding disasters for effective response and recovery efforts. Through collaborative efforts with local stakeholders, VSI aims to advocate for policies and initiatives that prioritize the unique needs of young women and girls during flooding and other emergencies. By amplifying their voices and advocating for their rights, we can ensure that they are not forgotten or overlooked amidst the chaos of disaster response.



GAPS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE WORKSHOPS

There is no police station or human rights commission department where cases of gender-based violence could be easily reported. They have only civil defense officers present in Lokoja. NEMA Training - Lokoja, Kogi state.

There are only two government-owned hospitals in which the community members have to travel far distances to access healthcare. The hospitals are Kogi State Specialist Hospital and Federal Medical Centre. NEMA Training - Lokoja, Kogi state.

Participants have little or no knowledge about the terms sexual and reproductive health rights and gender-based violence. SRHR Workshops and NEMA Training - Lagos and Kogi states.

Young girls have poor access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services which fostered their uninformed decision-making regarding their body and rights. SRHR Workshops and NEMA Training - Lagos and Kogi states.

The only known form of SRHR is condom, menstrual painkillers, and sexual infection treatment drugs. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states.

High unreported cases of sexual and gender-based violence are experienced by girls and young women in the community. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states.

CALL TO ACTION

Mobilizing Support

Urging Stakeholders to Prioritize the Needs of Women and Girls in Disaster Response and Recovery Efforts

Participants suggested that VSI sensitize and educate their parents on the SRHR information shared with them as they cannot exercise the rights and information they are empowered with without the permission of their parents. SRHR Workshop - Kogi state.

Provision and construction of comfortable and accessible shelters by governments for children, young women, and girls during flooding as they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence. NEMA Training - Lagos and Kogi states.

Inclusion of youth-friendly healthcare services in the available government-owned hospitals in the community to facilitate and improve medical help-seeking behaviors of young women and girls,

especially in the area of their sexual and reproductive health. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states.

Fostering Change

Encouraging Collective Action and Advocacy for Gender- Responsive Policies and Programs

Creation of support groups where young women and girls can come together monthly to share experiences, exchange learnings and address pressing issues amongst themselves, especially concerning the SRHR of young women and girls in the community. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states.

Alternate establishment of community micro gender-response units in the community by comprehensively training individuals to sustain the impact of the Global Fund for Women interventions by supporting Vision Spring Initiatives. SRHR Workshops and NEMA Training - Lokoja, Kogi state.

Continuous Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and gender-based violence sensitization of the applicants through workshops. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states

Building Resilience

The government should endeavor to establish a police station and human rights commission departments in the community to respond to cases of gender-based violence that arise in the community. NEMA Training - Lokoja, Kogi state.

Creation and establishment of pad banks: These pad banks would provide young women and girls with access to branded sanitary pads at a very subsidized rate over a certain period (could be a year or more) and would be often monitored under the directives of Vision Spring Initiatives. This initiative aims to increase the access of vulnerable and marginalized young women and girls to necessary menstrual health needs and it also aims to foster collaboration between NGOs and private institutions. SRHR Workshops - Lagos and Kogi states.



Need for Police Stations



Human Rights Commission Departments



Establishment of Youth-Friendly Healthcare Services



Creation of Support Groups.

	Project Summary	Indicators	Target	Method of Data Collection	Risk/Assumption
Goal/Impact	To mitigate the adverse impacts of flooding on women and girls in Lagos and Kogi State, Nigeria	45 young girls in Lagos and 100 young girls in Kogi were empowered with comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education	200 young girls	Feedback from participatory focus group discussion	All young girls' commitment fully guaranteed
Outcomes	1. Increased knowledge on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) among young women and girls affected by flood	197 young girls have increased knowledge to make informed choices regarding their SRHR	200 young girls	Feedback from participants, Focus group discussion, Testimonials	All young girls participate fully in the SRHR training
	2. Increased capacity of community leaders and health care workers to provide medical aid and support to survivors during flooding	18 community leaders and health care workers in Lagos and 20 in Kogi state are aware of where and how to report cases of sexual violence during flooding	40 stakeholders		All stakeholders' commitment fully guaranteed
	3. Increased capacity of community leaders and health care workers in Lagos and Kogi states on flood resilience and recovery	18 community leaders and health care workers in Lagos and 20 in Kogi state know flood response, rescue and emergency relief (in collaboration with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Lagos and Kogi)	40 stakeholders		All stakeholders' commitment fully guaranteed
Outputs	1. Distribution of dignity kits (sanitary pad, mosquito net, Dumbo slipper, bathing soap, washing detergent, perfume, toothbrush, and tissue paper) to 35 young girls in Majada, Lagos state and 100 young girls in Lakosa, Kogi state	1. 105 young girls were provided with dignity kits in Lagos and Kogi states	200	Feedback from participants, Testimonials	All young girls participate fully in the SRHR training
Activities	1. SRHR education Workshops for young women and girls affected by flood in Lagos and Kogi states	1. 147 young women and girls attended the SRHR education workshop	200 young women and girls	Attendance list, participants records	All young girls participate fully in the SRHR training
	2. Medical consultation sessions for young women and girls in Lagos and Kogi states	2. 192 young women and girls were reached with medical consultation services in Lagos and Kogi states	200 young women and girls		All stakeholders' commitment fully guaranteed
	3. Flood emergency response and mitigation training for community leaders and health care workers in Lagos and Kogi states	3. 38 community leaders and health care workers reached in Lagos and Kogi states	40 stakeholders		

Commitment to Action

Urging Stakeholders to Prioritize the Needs of Women and Girls in Disaster Response and Recovery Efforts

Vision Spring Initiatives reaffirms its unwavering commitment to taking action to address the pressing issues of period poverty and disaster resilience, not only in Nigeria but also on a broader scale.

Firstly, we pledge to continue our efforts to raise awareness and advocate for policies that prioritize menstrual health and hygiene, ensuring that girls and women have access to affordable and sustainable menstrual products. We recognize that addressing period poverty requires multifaceted approaches, including education, distribution programs, and policy reforms, and we are committed to working tirelessly to advance these initiatives.

Additionally, we reaffirm our dedication to strengthening disaster resilience among vulnerable communities, particularly women and girls. We recognize the importance of building capacity and empowering communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters effectively. Through targeted interventions, training programs, and community engagement initiatives, we will strive to enhance disaster preparedness and promote resilience-building efforts.

Furthermore, we acknowledge the interconnectedness of these issues and the importance of adopting holistic approaches that address the root causes of gender inequality, economic hardship, and environmental vulnerability. By fostering partnerships, mobilizing resources, and leveraging innovative solutions, we are committed to creating sustainable change that improves the lives of girls and women not only in Nigeria but also globally.

In conclusion, we affirm our commitment to action and pledge to continue our efforts to address period poverty and disaster resilience, recognizing them as essential components of our broader mission to empower women and girls, promote gender equality, and build more resilient communities worldwide.

Looking Ahead

Envisioning a Future of Equality, Dignity, and Resilience for Women and Girls in Nigeria

In addition to our existing initiatives, we are excited to announce that we will be establishing support groups for vulnerable young women and girls in the affected communities. These support groups will serve as safe spaces where they can freely express their concerns, share experiences, and offer recommendations for addressing issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), menstrual hygiene and health, and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Through these support groups, we aim to provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration, empowering participants to become agents of change within their communities. By fostering peer support and solidarity, we hope to create a supportive environment where girls and women feel empowered to advocate for their rights, access essential services, and implement practical solutions to address their unique needs and challenges.

Furthermore, these support groups will serve as hubs for information-sharing and capacity-building, providing participants with valuable knowledge and skills to navigate issues related to SRHR, menstrual hygiene, and SGBV effectively. We will work closely with community leaders, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that these support groups are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all participants.

REFERENCE

Vanguard Nigeria. April 2024. Period poverty: Millions of women bleed in silence as prices of sanitary pads hit the roof. We need a massive campaign NOW for a decent minimum wage! <https://www.vanguardngr.com?p=2378221>



 www.visionspringinitiatives.org

 hello@visionspringinitiatives.org