Osun traditional, religious leaders tasked to expose abusers of women

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Traditional rulers, community and religious leaders have been urged to address the rising cases of violence against women and girls in their respective domains in Osun State.  
  
They were sensitised on how to prevent the scourge of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the state, capitalising on their influential positions at a two-day Capacity Building Workshop for Traditional and Religious Leaders held in Osogbo, capital of Osun State.  
  
The programme, titled “Partnership for Enhanced VAWG Prevention Among Religious and Traditional Stakeholders in Ogun and Osun State, Nigeria”, was organised by the non-governmental organisation Centre for Women’s Health and Information (CEWHIN), with support from the Ford Foundation.  
  
At the separate conversations, the traditional and religious leaders resolved to lead the vanguard against VAWG, sexual exploitation and also sensitise other leaders of thought in the state.  
  
Addressing traditional and religious leaders, including those of the Traditional Religion Worshippers Association of Osun State (TRWASO), Mrs Aduke Obelawo, State Coordinator of the Inter-African Committee (IAC) Nigeria on the Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Lives of Women and Children in Osun, urged the participants to reject and campaign against all forms of SGBV, including rape, wife battering, sexual exploitation, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and other violence towards women and girls.  
  
Speaking on the topic: “Gender and Socialisation and the Impacts on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”, which she described as being very rampant in Osun State and needed to be eradicated, Obelawo urged them to shun all forms of social and gender stereotypes, including using derogatory utterances that debase womanhood and deprive them of their rights.  
  
Obelawo informed the royal and pastoral gathering that “SGBV/VAWG should stop because it doesn’t portray us as people,” adding, “It is not something that should be allowed. Traditional rulers, being custodians of culture and religious leaders, being custodians of faith, have been urged to be in the forefront of this fight against sexual and physical violence against women and girls. Any culture that is not beneficial, we should do away with it.”  
  
“They (monarchs and pastors) should go to their communities and sanitise them. They know those who are criminals within society, who can impact negatively even on the lives of unborn children. The lives of the members of the community and worshipping communities are in danger as we have sexual predators increasing daily. So, our Obas and pastors have been informed to go back to their communities and address these issues.”  
  
The advocate against SGBV expressed concern that the threat of violence is “so alarming that we are afraid of the future. As traditional rulers, religious leaders, Iyalode, and other chiefs in the community, we want them to return to their communities and share all they have learnt here with other stakeholders in their domains and worshipping communities, ensuring they become watchdogs within their society.”  
  
She appealed to the Obas and pastors not to shield perpetrators, saying, “They should not cover criminals of rape and other sexual and gender based violence but ensure that they face prosecution.”  
  
Another speaker, Mr Ayeni Oluropo from Community Advancement Initiative for Self-Reliance (CAI4SR), encouraged the leaders to utilise their positions to reform society as it relates to harmful traditional practices and abuse of persons with disabilities.  
  
In his presentation, Dr Idris Oni, the Head of Department, Islamic Studies, Crescent University, Abeokuta, urged Muslim leaders who were represented from different Islamic societies, to take up their responsibilities of creating awareness of protecting women and female children, especially from the scourge of violent men.  
  
Oni, an Imam, said, “Sexual and Gender Based Violence is now a scourge, and we want these Muslim leaders to join in the efforts to stamp out the culture of rape, sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, emotional, and physical abuse against women. We emphasised that mosque and community leaders should not allow criminals to go scot-free.  
  
They must not take laws into their own hands, but they must ensure that culprits are handed over to security agencies and that justice is served.”  
  
Oluropo also told Christian leaders to expose rapists and ensure abuse is prevented.  
  
Stella Osho, CEWHIN Programme Officer, explained that the aim of the activity is to ensure that traditional rulers and religious leaders can lead efforts to prevent violence and sexual abuse across the three Senatorial Districts that comprise Osun.  
  
The participants discussed and jointly agreed on some proactive measures and action plans that they would implement afterwards.  
  
Their resolutions included promoting financial empowerment for women, ending FGM in their communities and worship centres, exposing sexual predators and women abusers, stepping down from leadership roles in their respective areas, raising awareness about sex education by parents to their children, establishing laws by traditional rulers to prevent VAWG, using social agents to spread positive messages within their communities and places of worship, supporting survivors, setting boundaries, protecting victims, encouraging proper youth involvement, and fostering self-respect for all, especially women.