



## Ngos Adopted Communication Channels Towards Curbing the Occurrence of Gender-Based Violence in Ondo State

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### Abstract

*Gender-based violence (GBV) is an issue of social phenomenon that has affected many people globally. GBV poses a huge challenge to the socio-economic development of Nigeria, Ondo State inclusive. This study investigated the channels of communication adopted by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Ondo State to curb the recurrence of GBV. Adopting the Diffusion of Innovation theory, it investigated how these NGOs leverage media, community outreaches, workshops, seminars and public enlightenment campaigns to disseminate anti-GBV messages towards societal behavioural change among members of the public. Qualitative methods were adopted for this study and a Key Informant Interview (KII) was conducted with officials of selected NGOs to seek information about how they use diverse communication channels to curb GBV among people of Ondo State. Findings show that combined media campaigns as well as grassroots engagement with influencers, opinion leaders, community leaders and media can help curb GBV to a large extent. However, consistent challenges such as cultural norms have affected how anti-GBV messages are received by the public. The study recommended that sustained partnerships by NGOs with the media and critical stakeholders would help reduce, if not eradicate the menace of GBV in the society.*

**Keywords:** NGO, Communication Channels, Gender-Based Violence, Behavioural Change



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## **Introduction**

Gender-based violence (GBV) has become a high issue of global significance that has affected millions of girls and women. The prevalence of GBV in Nigeria is very alarming and Ondo State in the Southwest of the country is no exception. The adverse effects of GBV are enormous which impacts the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of survivors, as this also hinders the socio-economic development of the nation (Isaboke, 2019). To address a pervasive issue such as GBV, there requires a multi-layer strategy and the utilisation of available communication channels effectively plays a crucial role in preventing the occurrence of GBV, as well as providing the right response.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) over the years have emerged as key players in the struggle towards curbing GBV in Ondo State. These NGOs develop a variety of communication channels to raise awareness by educating the public on GBV, as well as advocating for positive policy changes on the issue (Fawole, et al, 2019). This is sometimes achieved through leveraging on both traditional and modern communication channels which NGOs use to reach audiences across demographics, from urban centres to rural communities and their messages are targeted towards ensuring that the message of zero-tolerance for Gender-based violence is comprehensive, meaningful and impactful (Brackenridge, et al, 2010). Through the adoption of strategic channels of communication by NGOs which are not limited to, mass and social media campaigns, seminars, as well as community outreaches etc. each of these communication channels plays a crucial role in information dissemination, attitudinal change and the empowerment of GBV survivors to seek help during the traumatic experience as well recovery process (Raftey, 2022). For instance, community outreach programmes have to do with engaging community leaders and public opinion influencers to raise grassroots support against Gender-based violence. Mass media campaigns, on the other hand, utilize television, radio, social media and print media to reach a broad audience with captivating stories of GBV survivors (Mshelia, 2021).

As a result, this study explores the various channels of communication used by NGOs in Ondo State to reduce the occurrence of gender-based violence, focusing on the efficacy and limitations of these



communication techniques. It also seeks to give insight into areas for improvement and worldwide best practices for reducing the prevalence of GBV. Understanding how NGOs use communication to combat GBV is critical for developing a comprehensive and long-term intervention that can result in a large decrease of GBV in Ondo State and elsewhere.

## **Literature Review**

### **Gender-Base Violence in Perceptive**

Cotter and Savage (2019) define GBV violence as "violence committed against someone based on gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender." Similarly, the definition of GBV is a "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) or as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately" is given in the European Commission's Gender Equality in Sport: Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014–2020 (2014, p. 47). Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as any act of gender-based violence, whether committed in public or private that causes, or is likely to cause, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women (Greene, et al, 2021). This definition also includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty.

Given that GBV is common in both industrialised and developing nations, it is acknowledged as a worldwide human rights problem (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2019; Russo, 2019).The recognition of gender inequality, particularly the historical dominance of men and women and girls' subordinate status in society that serves to maintain an unequal balance of power, makes gender-based violence an important and separate category of violence (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2019; Russo, 2019; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). This male dominance is unique to White males in Western societies since men who identify as racialised, Indigenous, members of sexual minorities, or who have disabilities are also frequently victims of gender-based violence. According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2019), women and girls who belong to equity-deserving groups represent the majority of GBV victims.

Physical, psychological, and sexual abuse are the types of GBV that are most frequently reported (Russo, 2019). Crucially, these GBV types can manifest alone or in tandem with one another. Inherent in both physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect, psychological violence can also exist independently (Wild, et al, 2022). Furthermore, some



writers classify economic violence as a distinct category of violence, citing instances like as embezzlement, underpayment, or blocking a partner's ability to make money (Russo, 2019). There are situations when cyber violence is seen as a distinct kind of violence and times when it is seen as a conduit for other types of violence.

Cyber violence may take many forms, including sending offensive or threatening messages, posting pornographic images without permission, and stalking someone online (Al-Alosi, 2017). The danger of injury resulting from the conduct is just as serious and concerning as actual harm, much like the definition of violence (Coombs, 2022). Furthermore, equal consideration must be given to the possible psychological and bodily consequences, such as sadness or bruising (Cahil, 2019). Numerous instances of gender-based violence, including jokes, media representations, and wage disparities, are ingrained in cultural norms and have therefore normalised, legitimised, and become unnoticeable. These instances also involve structural violence (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This is particularly valid for women, girls, and other equity-deserving group members (Government of Canada, 2022).

#### **The Role NGOs in Curbing Gender-based Violence in Ondo State**

The prevalence of Gender-based violence is a phenomenon that is widespread and affects many people across the world, with shocking consequences for survivors, their families and communities. GBV comprises a wide range of injurious behaviours that are directed at persons based on their gender which includes emotional, physical, sexual and socio-economic abuse (Block, et al, 2022). It is rooted deeply in gender discrimination and inequality that is emboldened by social norms that help to perpetuate power imbalances between the male and female genders. The occurrence of GBV has greatly impacted mostly women and girls (DiersLawson, 2017).

Ondo State is located in southern Nigeria and is not immune to the plague of gender-based violence. Despite governmental efforts to address GBV through law and policy frameworks, the issue has persisted owing to many socio-cultural, economic, and institutional variables. Above all, conventional gender roles, along with patriarchal norms and a lack of effective information on female gender rights among women, have contributed to the persistent prevalence of gender-based violence in the country (Hayhurst & Socorro, 2019). Furthermore, the stigma associated with timely GBV reporting, as well as ineffective victim/survivor support networks, have exacerbated the problem.



Despite these difficulties, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Ondo State have continued to play a proactive role in tackling the incidence of GBV because they saw the critical need for proactive intervention and adequate support mechanisms. These NGOs operate at the grassroots and they provide essential services such as counselling, legal aid, shelter and healthcare for victims/survivors of GBV. Furthermore, NGOs play a key role in awareness and advocacy targeted towards shifting societal attitudes and conducts that condone and perpetuate GBV against young girls and women. Central to addressing the scourge of GBV is communication because the effectiveness of communication strategies is key to raising positive awareness by educating local communities to advocate for behavioural change on the issue.

NGOs in Ondo State over the years have adopted different ranges of communication channels to disseminate information about GBV, mobilise the public and support numerous initiatives for prevention and quint interventions for victims of GBV. The channels adopted range from radio, television, print and social media others are community-based strategies such as seminars, workshops, and grassroots campaigns which have over the years helped NGOs to domesticate local engagement and ownership of Gender-based violence preventive efforts (Menon, et al, 2020). It is reiterated that the selection and use of suitable communication channels are indeed key to the success of NGOs' initiatives (Izzi & Umunna, 2020). However, each communication channel provides unique advantages and reaches different segments of the populace. For example, radio programmes can reach rural communities effectively because of their limited access to other forms of media, while social media appeals more to younger audiences and also amplify information to those in urban centers (John, et al, 2020). The right knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of each communication channel helps NGOs tailor their strategies to the specific needs and contexts of the target audience when embarking on campaigns on GBV.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory adopted for this study is Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation which explains how ideas and practices that are considered new spread in a society from one level to another. Diffusion of Innovation is significant in understanding how communication channels can play a vital role in disseminating anti-gender-based violence messages by encouraging the adoption of new norms. Non-governmental organisations most especially the ones in Ondo State are considered agents of change and the use of



diverse channels of communication to spread awareness to educate members of the public on the issue of GBV is considered a driving force towards an effective behavioural change but the extent this is achieved would be presented in the data presentation and analysis section. The relevance of this theory to this study is that it highlights the significance of reaching different audience segments of the population such as early adopters, laggards and opinion leaders with new information and ideas for facilitating anti-GBV campaigns to reduce the menace it brings to society.

In diffusion and innovation theory, innovation is key as it emboldens an idea or behaviour perceived as new by people or an individual or a group adopting such idea (Dearing, 2009). Regarding GBV innovation might include new behaviour towards gender balance, new policies or support services for survivors. In the context of GBV, communication aids these new ideas regarded as innovations because through it information are transmitted to members of a society. NGOs in Ondo State adopt different communication channels such as media campaigns, community-based outreaches, workshops and seminars to disseminate anti-GBV messages to diverse audience base. However, time is the process through which a new idea is communicated over time in a society before adoption of such is reached. Innovation usually follows a process, starting slowly from early adopters, then it gains momentum among majority before it is later adopted by the laggards and late majority (Kaminiski, 2011).

The social-system which is a collection of interrelated units engaged in combined problem-solving to achieve a common goal is crucial if innovation must spread in a society because a society is nit together by its values. A social system in the context of this study are individuals, organisations, communities and institutions working to reduce GBV in Ondo State. NGOs can for instance identify and engage critical stakeholders such as community leaders, respected members of the society, and influencers who can help them to serve as role models to champion anti-GBV initiatives by making them legitimize information that can help others to adopt new ideas and behaviour about GBV. However, individuals in a social system adopt innovations or new ideas differently and not at the same time. For instance, innovators are venturesome and adopt innovations first, while early adopters respect individuals who adopt innovation early, the early majority deliberate on those who adopt new ideas before the average members of a social system. Others are the late majority that are skeptical about adopting new ideas and the traditional individuals who are the last to always adopt an innovation (Zhang, et al, 2015).



## Methodology

Qualitative research methods and interview design was adopted for this study. Key Informant Interviews (KII) was conducted with 4 officials of Betty Anyanwu-Akeredolu Foundation (BAAF) and Association for the Restoration of the Dignity of Womanhood (ROTDOW) who have participated in the coordination and implementation of the anti-Gender based violence campaigns in Ondo State. These officials we selected based on the criteria that they must be either Chief Executives or not less than a Programme or Technical Advisors in the identified Non-Governmental Organisations they work for and must have spent nothing less than 10 years in such an organisation. They must also be full-grown adults and must be between 30-40 years of age, as this affects their experience on the job. The collection of data was terminated when saturation was reached. The breakdown of the participants is as follows:

**Table 1.0** Distribution of Key Informants in the NGO

S/N	Role in the NGO	Code	Years of Experience
1.	Chief Executive	Informant 1	22
2.	Technical Advisor	Informant 2	18
3	Programme Advisor	Informant 3	13
4.	Programme Advisor	Informant 4	10

**Source:** Researchers' Field Work, 2024

## Data Presentation & Analysis

Data is presented and analysed in this section to achieve the study's aim of investigating various channels of communication that NGOs in Ondo State adopt to limit the occurrence of Gender-based violence by exploring the effectiveness and challenges of these communication strategies. Therefore, based on data generated from interviews with selected NGO officials in Ondo State, responses were analysed using thematic analysis. This was done through themes and sub-themes presented in the model below:

### Theme on Channels of Communication Adopted by the NGOs

The NGOs do not by their mandate have the responsibility to monitor and prevent or curb the occurrence of GBV. They as a matter of urgency needs to communicate cogent steps to be taken which serves as preventive measures to curtail the untoward damage such traumatic experience could a victim or the public at large. However,



due to the prevalence of GBV, NGOs could not have solely shouldered the responsibility of curbing such a social vice without working with other relevant stakeholders to reach the target audience base in local communities. The channels of communication adopted by NGOs to reach this segment of the population are presented in sub-themes indicated below:

### **1. Opinion Leaders**

The NGOs in Ondo State had information that could curb the spread of the GBV and needed effective channels to disseminate such. This makes them exploit every available channel that could reach a wider population, keeping in mind the demographics and topologies of message recipients in society. For such information to have wide acceptability among the individuals in local communities, it must go through those they perceive as reliable and credible, this is where opinion leaders come in to fill the gap. Opinion leaders are those that members of the public rely on for guidance in their daily affairs, whose actions, words or inactions have a direct impact on how they conduct their lives or ought to live their lives. In every society, there are hierarchies and this disposition allows the NGOs to seek those closer to members of the society who rely on opinion leaders for information on any issue affecting the society. One of the Key Informants noted the relevance of opinion leaders to communicating anti-GBV messages when he said:

The people we are talking about are part of the social structure. Opinion leaders are part of the church and community meetings. We also use their leaders who command great influence to speak with them GBV. So, we gather all these people, train them, tell them what to do and what not to do, most especially how to prevent GBV. So that they will go back, and you know when they communicate with them, they will be able to understand because they are all together in the same social structure. Even the vulnerable people in terms of disability and the rest, so the communication during the period we embarked on campaigns was for everybody. So the people we reached were carried along because the opinion leaders played a key role.



### **Relevant Stakeholders**

To achieve communication effectiveness during campaigns for GBV, identifying trusted channels of communication peculiar to certain demographics, and collaborating with other stakeholders like community leaders, religious leaders and influencers in reinforcing the need to take proactive initiatives against GBV campaigns are targeted at specific audiences to expand communication reach was indeed a daunting task for the NGO officials. Critical stakeholders are the pillars of transmitting information in local communities for it to be effective and that is why NGOs rely on them to reach various strata of the population. These stakeholders have direct contact with the target population based on the demographics. This attested to the response of one of the key informants interviewed who noted "We employed different channels, like traditional rulers, chiefs and the Baale of different community because these people are respected and they have a voice within the community so whatever they say people believe. We also engaged religious leaders like pastors, and imams to spread the messages, because people also regarded them highly. In their churches and their mosques, they encouraged the people to comply with such initiatives that prevent GBV from occurring in the society."

Additionally, community influencers are the reverse of opinion leaders. As members of a particular society seek information from opinion leaders, community influencers take deliberate steps to ensure members of a given community follow certain procedures to get things done. Seeking and engaging community influencers on the part of NGOs was deliberate towards ensuring that false information does not overrun their deliberate efforts towards ensuring that the public were not misled during their campaigns against GBV. One of the characteristics considered by the NGOs before engaging any influencers is their track records, which serves as a reliable weapon in addition to the right information they have been armed with to counter lies and half-truths on GBV. Like in situation where the people already perceived GBV as a social norm, you need respectable influencers with huge followership to change such perception. The response of one of the Key Informants gave supports this, when one considers how strong perception can be difficult to change:

Perception is deep rooted, it's very difficult to change. It is important to know that when you try to impose a new message on people to change absolutely from their deep-rooted perception that will be very difficult. The right information you give is

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the power that can cause absolutely change on deep rooted perception of many people. The right information people get, will make them to take the right decision because people will only start doing the right thing, when they are subjected to right information in their local environment.

### **Media**

The mass media are regarded as agents of behavioural change in any civilised society because the public rely on it for relevant information on how to run their daily affairs. Media as an institution is recognised for raising awareness and promoting behavioural change in any given society. According to data retrieved from the interview conducted with the NGO officials, it was affirmed that, one thing about GBV is if there are no information people are bound to whatever information that comes their way on the issue. The NGOs in Ondo State used NGOs to achieve their overall goal to effectively communicate to the public on, preventive measures and available help for victims of GBV. Even though the NGOs made use of other channels of communication to reach the public based on demography available, they still made use of the media as the overall umbrella to disseminate information to every member of the society irrespective of location. This is evident in the response below from one of the Key Informants based on the interview conducted:

The traditional and social media (television, radio, print and online) were heavily invested in openly and were extensively used to communicate NGOs' strategic measures for curbing the menace of GBV. Those who have experienced GBV at one time or the other never expect it, most specially from those trusted most. In that time everybody wanted to push out something about Covid-19 so it was the responsibility of the NCDC together with other partners like NDA to push out the right messages to the public. It was not only our social mobilization officers that did the work, the media also played a very key role most especially TV and radio.

### **Conclusion & Recommendation**

Effective communication is crucial in the comprehensive strategy needed to combat gender-based violence (GBV) in Ondo State. Using a variety of communication channels, NGOs have been at the



front of this fight, helping to raise public awareness, educate the populace, and encourage behavioural change. This study has demonstrated how these NGOs strategically employ social media, conventional media, community outreach, and educational programmes to promote new attitudes and behaviours towards GBV by utilising the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The concept emphasises the importance of integrating innovators and early adopters in driving greater social change by describing how different demographic groups accept innovations at varying rates. NGOs' experience in Ondo State demonstrates that GBV may be effectively addressed by combining media campaigns, interactive social media efforts, grassroots engagement, and educational interventions. To ensure the long-term effectiveness of these projects, challenges such as cultural norms, economic limits, and information accessibility must be addressed on a continuous basis. However, the report makes the following recommendations:

1. Organise regular community events, talks, and workshops to encourage collective action against GBV. These events should provide platforms for discussing problems, exchanging success stories, and developing solutions driven by the local community.
2. Assist local authorities, religious leaders, and influencers in disseminating anti-GBV messages and modelling positive conduct. Their backing might significantly boost the acceptability and validity of new ideas and actions.
3. Ensure instructional materials and campaign messages are easily accessible, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, and in local languages. This allows for a bigger audience to be addressed while also overcoming information hurdles.
4. Establish efficient monitoring and evaluation procedures for communication strategies. Gather and evaluate community comments to constantly refine and modify strategies.

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