

Violence against women: Group woos men

By JULIANA FRANCIS

After many years of fighting on behalf of women, who are constantly abused and brutalized by men, Project Alert, a non-governmental organization (NGO) has decided to involve men in its battle.

The Executive Director of the Project Alert, Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma explained that since men are usually seen as perpetrators of violent acts against women, it had become necessary to involve them so that they could become part of the solution.

Tagged "The Male Involvement Project," she insisted that the involvement of men in the project would go a long way to end violence against women in Nigeria.

She said: "As we all know, violence against women or gender based violence is a major human rights issue. It is also a public health issue, which increases women's vulnerability to HIV pandemic. It (violence against women) is both a cause and consequences of HIV infection and as such, a driving force behind the epidemic. It is for these reasons that we believe it is important to work with men/boys towards eliminating violence against women/girls."

Effah-Chukwuma explained that though, the organization had, in the past, focused on empowering, educating and providing support services to women, it did not address the role of men and boys, except as perpetrators of the violent acts. This, she said, was not to say that the organization wanted to stop doing what it had been doing, but, "instead, we want to take it to another level. We want to actively involve men in the campaign."

She said that the project would be about helping men/boys recognize that keeping silent on the issue of violence against women makes them accountable for such violence. The project, according to her, would aim at encouraging men/boys to take responsibility for gender based violence, by working to eliminate the underlying causes of male violence, which included definitions of masculinity and cultural norms and beliefs.

Effah-Chukwuma added: "The project aims to inspire more men and boys to take a stand against violence against women and be actively involved in promoting healthy and vibrant relationships. That way, men/boys will move away from being part of the problem to being part of the solution."

The Project Alert boss said she was aware that not all men are violent against women/girls, explaining that some men/boys were opposed to all forms of violence against female.

"However, most of them are not speaking out publicly. We need to not only get these men involved but also expand the number of men actively taking action in their communities to end violence against women."

She said one of the ways to ensure that the project succeeds would be to hold a seminar with people, who have the platform or structures through which they could spread the