

PROJECT TITLE: Combating Child Witchcraft Branding in Cross River State (End Witchcraft Branding and Stigmatization, #EWBS)

DURATION: 24 months

START DATE: May, 2019

CONTEXT

Witchcraft branding is an offence punishable under Sections 210 to 215 of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act, LFN 2004. However, this widespread practice has been seen continuously among many communities especially in the southern region of the country which engage in this criminality without any regard for the law. Unsurprisingly, the majority of victims of this abhorrent practice are children who are easily tagged witches or wizards and, in most instances, are made to suffer emotional and physical abuses which often result in depression, injuries, deformity and even death.

In the last few years, the reported cases of child witchcraft branding recorded in Cross River State increased by an estimated 30%, growing from 218 cases in 2014 to 283 in 2017. In most of these reported cases, the victims experienced severe forms of physical abuse such as burnings, beatings and metal branding. Adults make these children undergo these various forms of torture in order to coerce them into confessing to being witches and/or wizards. The cases which go unreported may be more than this figure.

Child Witchcraft Branding greatly affects the development of the accused children and the society as a whole as it accounts for about 85% of street children in the State. This has a ripple effect on security, mortality rate, HIV prevalence, enrollment of children in schools etc.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The main focus of the project will be to raise awareness on the negative effects of this practice and to advocate for a change in the mindset of traditional and religious leaders. This will be achieved through a detailed advocacy campaign targeted at traditional, religious and social leaders in the State. This will be carried out alongside a far reaching sensitization campaign to reach out to the general populace, especially in rural communities where this practice is still widespread.

Alongside this, police officers and other law enforcement agencies will be trained in order to build their capacity to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of child witchcraft branding and molestation.

OBJECTIVES

1. Reduce the incidence of child witchcraft branding and molestation in Cross River State
2. Increase community members' understanding of the adverse effects of child witchcraft branding and molestation on their development and socio-economic wellbeing
3. Engage Traditional and Religious leaders to act as a first line of defense for children branded as witches

4. Strengthen institutions responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of Child witchcraft branding and molestation in Cross River State
5. Combat the stigma associated with helping children branded as witches or wizards.
6. Facilitate the review of the Cross River Child Rights Law 2009 to include specific and clear provisions proscribing witchcraft branding

TARGET GROUPS

The specific institutions and individuals that will be targeted by this campaign include:

1. Traditional Leaders and custodians of cultural values who will be encouraged to act as a first line of defense for children at risk of being branded witches or wizards.
2. Religious Leaders as most cases of witchcraft branding are as a result of religious beliefs. Religious leaders will be encouraged to change their provocative rhetoric around witchcraft and also to act in the best interest of vulnerable children.
3. Social Institutions including schools and other educational institutions.
4. Government Institutions especially law enforcement agencies responsible for enforcing the Criminal Code and its provisions.
5. Other community influencers who may not hold any specific title or position of authority but are regarded highly in the community.

LOCATION

The project is expected to cover the entire eighteen (18) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Planned activities over the duration of the project include but are not limited to:

- Community Entry to all the 18 LGAs in the State
- Advocacy visits to religious and traditional leaders in all 18 LGAs
- Advocacy and sensitization meetings with community influencers
- Town hall meetings in selected communities across the 18 LGAs
- Anti-Witchcraft branding rally in Calabar
- Training of police officers and other first responders in all 18 LGAs
- Appointment of Anti-Witchcraft branding ambassadors in all 18 LGAs
- Production and dissemination of graphic posters (A3 & A2 sizes) translated into pidgin and other local dialects which will be distributed strategically across the 18 LGAs
- Advocate for and facilitate the review of the Cross River State Child Rights Law 2009

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Some expected outcomes of the project include

- Improvement in the quality of life of children in Cross River State
- Reduction in the number of street children and children at risk of being pushed into the street in Cross River State
- Increased prosecution and conviction of people accused of branding children as witches
- New and amended Cross River State Child Rights Law with clear and specific provisions proscribing witchcraft branding

INDICATORS

- Total number of Child Witchcraft Branding cases reported to authorities.
- Total number of advocacy visits paid to traditional rulers.
- Total number of advocacy visits paid to religious leaders.
- Total number of policy advocacy visits to Government.
- Total number of trainings organized for Police Officers.
- Total number of courtroom advocacy cases.