



AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA

RESEARCH REPORT

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK (AFJN) PROJECT ON ENDING CHILD EARLY & FORCED MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC SERVITUDE IN EBONYI AND AKWA IBOM STATES, NIGERIA

PREPARED BY:

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PUBLIC
EMPOWERMENT (COPE) FOUNDATION**

LEAD RESEARCHER:

**MR. AZUBUIKE MGBEBU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COP FOUNDATION**

SUPPORTED BY:

AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK NIGERIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of an impact assessment conducted by the COP Foundation on the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Project aimed at ending Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States. The assessment was carried out between October and November 2025 across six communities: Iboko (Izzi LGA), Eka-Awoke (Ikwo LGA), Oguzoronweya (Ebonyi LGA) in Ebonyi State, Odoro (Ini LGA), Ikot Obong Edong (Ikot Ekpene LGA), and Ibiaku (Ikono LGA) in Akwa Ibom State. A total of **70 respondents** participated, consisting of **60 FGD participants** and **10 Key Informants** (traditional rulers, religious leaders, welfare officers, government officials, CSOs, and youth advocates).

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs with descriptive quantitative summaries from the AFJN monitoring tools. The assessment explored community awareness, knowledge, adoption of AFJN strategies, behavioural shifts, MOU enforcement, functionality of Community Monitoring Systems (CMS), and overall community-level changes attributable to AFJN interventions.

Findings show that AFJN interventions have significantly improved awareness and understanding of CEFM and domestic servitude across all sampled LGAs. Community members reported increased knowledge of the legal age of marriage, child rights laws, and the illegality of sending children into unregulated domestic service. Churches, traditional councils, and youth structures now play a more active role in monitoring children's movement, largely driven by AFJN's MOU framework and CMS model. Across all communities, participants confirmed a **visible decline in cases of children being sent away for domestic servitude**, with many attributing the change directly to AFJN's advocacy, sensitization, and engagement strategies.

Traditional rulers have institutionalized reporting channels; religious leaders—such as Rev. S.N. Ewah—have mandated the use of the MOU in their congregations; and welfare officers acknowledge improved community compliance with child protection norms. In Akwa Ibom State, AFJN activities strengthened collaboration between community leaders and government agencies, although enforcement challenges persist.

Despite progress, barriers remain, including poverty, cultural norms, and weak enforcement structures in some LGAs. The study also highlights the strong influence of social institutions—especially churches and traditional authorities—in sustaining behavioural change. Communities emphasized the need for economic empowerment, continued awareness creation, and more support from government agencies to sustain momentum.

The report concludes that AFJN's strategic approach—combining grassroots mobilization, MOU adoption, community monitoring, and multi-stakeholder engagement—has yielded transformative outcomes. AFJN has shifted narratives, strengthened community accountability systems, and empowered youth and leaders to actively prevent CEFM and domestic servitude. Recommendations include deepening government partnerships, expanding livelihood support initiatives, improving enforcement mechanisms, and strengthening the CMS for long-term sustainability. Overall, the assessment confirms that AFJN's intervention has **positively changed attitudes, reduced risks to children, and created stronger community mechanisms for child protection** across the two states.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background of the Study

Child early and forced marriage (CEFM) and domestic servitude remain critical child protection challenges in many Nigerian communities, particularly in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States. Despite the existence of the Child Rights Act (CRA) and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law, harmful socio-cultural norms, poverty-driven decisions, weak enforcement systems, and low community awareness continue to expose children—especially girls—to exploitation and abuse.

Across affected communities, child domestic servitude often involves sending children away to live and work as domestic helpers or unpaid apprentices, frequently without supervision, documentation, or legal protection. Similarly, child marriage persists as a coping mechanism among vulnerable households, leading to lifelong health, social, psychological, and economic consequences for the affected children.

Recognizing these challenges, the **Africa Faith and Justice Network – Nigeria (AFJN-N)** initiated a multi-state intervention from 2023 to 2025, focusing on **awareness creation, policy advocacy, community empowerment, and the establishment of community-led protection systems**. Key components include town hall meetings, policy briefings, church outreaches, training of youth advocates, MOU adoption for child placement, and the creation of Community Monitoring Systems (CMS).

This research study assesses the **impact of AFJN's intervention** in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States by examining community knowledge levels, behavioural changes, stakeholder response systems, and perceived reduction in cases of child domestic servitude and early marriage.

2.2 Research Objectives

Overall Objective

To assess the impact of the AFJN-N intervention on reducing child early marriage and domestic servitude in selected communities in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the level of community awareness and knowledge of child protection laws (CRA, VAPP) following AFJN interventions.
2. To evaluate changes in attitudes and practices related to child early marriage and domestic servitude.
3. To assess the adoption and effectiveness of the Community Monitoring System (CMS) and the MOU for child placement.
4. To analyze community perceptions of changes in child protection outcomes, including reporting behaviour, school retention, and household decision-making.

5. To document stakeholder experiences, challenges, and recommendations through KIIs and FGDs.
6. To provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen AFJN's programs, community structures, and policy advocacy efforts.

2.3 Significance of the Study

This impact assessment is significant for several reasons:

- **Evidence for Program Improvement:** The findings provide AFJN with credible data to refine strategies, strengthen advocacy, and tailor interventions to community needs.
- **Policy Influence:** Results serve as a resource for strengthening state-level policy implementation, including Child Rights and VAPP enforcement.
- **Community Accountability:** The assessment helps determine how well community structures (traditional rulers, churches, youth groups, welfare officers) are implementing the MOU and CMS.
- **Learning for Replication:** Insights from Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States can inform scale-up models for other states facing similar challenges.
- **Donor Reporting and Advocacy:** The study provides evidence-based stories, statistics, and testimonies that strengthen donor engagement and strategic partnerships.

By documenting community experiences, the study elevates survivor voices, enhances transparency, and supports long-term sustainability of child protection efforts.

2.4 Context of the AFJN Project

The **Africa Faith and Justice Network – Nigeria** began structured community-based interventions in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States as part of its broader mission to eliminate child exploitation, promote justice, and strengthen community accountability systems.

Key contextual features of the project include:

- **Community-Centred Approach:** AFJN implemented dialogue-driven interventions, working closely with traditional rulers, religious leaders, women groups, youth structures, civil society, and government departments (Gender, Social Welfare, NAPTIP, CPN).
- **MOU Introduction:** A standardized MOU was introduced for all child placements to ensure full documentation, monitoring, and accountability of both sending and receiving households.
- **Formation of Community Monitoring Systems (CMS):** Stakeholder groups were trained to track children's movement, report cases, support survivors, and collaborate with authorities.
- **Wide Reach of Sensitization:** Through town halls, church outreaches, policy briefings, and youth engagements, thousands of community members gained awareness of harmful practices and legal implications.
- **Stakeholder Empowerment:** Influential structures—including traditional institutions, churches, women's associations, youth leaders, and government agencies—became active drivers of the campaign.

This study reviews the extent to which these interventions contributed to measurable behavioural and systemic change within target communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a **mixed-methods research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the impact of the AFJN project on ending child early and forced marriage (CEFM) and domestic servitude.

The **quantitative component** utilized structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD) questionnaires designed with numeric coding compatible with SPSS analysis.

The **qualitative component** employed Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to collect deeper insights from influential stakeholders, including traditional rulers, welfare officers, religious leaders, community volunteers, and civil society representatives.

This mixed-methods design allowed for triangulation—ensuring that findings were validated across multiple data sources and perspectives.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in **two Nigerian states** where AFJN-Nigeria implemented community interventions:

1. Ebonyi State

Data were collected in **three LGAs**:

- **Ikwo LGA** – Ekawoke community
- **Izzi LGA** – Mgbalukwu Iboko community
- **Ebonyi LGA** – Ugozoronweya community

These communities are rural/semi-urban with longstanding cultural practices relating to child fostering, domestic servitude, and early marriage.

2. Akwa Ibom State

Data were collected from the following **three LGAs**:

- **Ini LGA** – Odoro community
- **Ikot Ekpene LGA** – Ikot Obong Edong community
- **Ikono LGA** – Ibiaku community

These LGAs are culturally diverse but share similar patterns of child placement practices, poverty pressures, and informal apprenticeship systems.

The study areas were selected because they represent locations where AFJN interventions have been active for at least one year and where community stakeholders were engaged in MOU adoption and CMS development.

3.3 Sampling Frame and Sample Size

A total sample of **70 respondents** was collected across the two states using purposive sampling.

A. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A total of **six (6) FGDs** were conducted—three per state. Each FGD included **10 participants**, giving:

- **3 FGDs in Ebonyi State = 30 participants**
- **3 FGDs in Akwa Ibom State = 30 participants**
- Total FGD participants = 60**

FGDs included:

- Youth (male & female)
- Parents (married & single)
- Religious leaders
- Community volunteers
- Teachers and farmers
- Social welfare-linked individuals

B. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

A total of **10 KIIs** were conducted—five per state—with:

- Traditional rulers
- Welfare / Social workers
- Religious leaders
- Government officials
- CSO representatives
- Youth leaders
- Total KIIs = 10**

Total Sample = 70 respondents

The sampling strategy ensured diverse representation of community voices, balancing gender, age, and stakeholder roles.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

A. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted using a structured questionnaire that included:

- demographic variables
- awareness/knowledge of AFJN activities
- norms and attitudes towards CEFM and domestic servitude
- perceptions of change since AFJN intervention
- functional status of MOU and CMS
- community suggestions and barriers

FGDs were moderated by trained facilitators from COPE Foundation under the leadership of **Mr. Azubuike Mgbegu (Executive Director)**, with trained note-takers capturing non-verbal cues and consensus points.

Each FGD lasted approximately **60–90 minutes**.

B. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi-structured KIIs were conducted with influential stakeholders to obtain deeper insights into:

- Implementation of the MOU
- CMS performance and challenges
- community-level changes
- stakeholder commitments
- legal and institutional gaps

KIIs provided rich qualitative data complementing FGD findings.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Analysis

FGD numeric responses were coded and analyzed using:

- **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)**
- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means)
- Cross-tabulations (e.g., knowledge vs. attendance)
- Composite index creation:
 - Knowledge Score (0–5)
 - Attitude Mean Score
 - MOU/CMS Adoption Score

These analyses helped measure the impact of AFJN interventions quantitatively.

Qualitative Analysis

KII and FGD narrative responses were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, involving:

1. Transcription of field notes
2. Coding of themes (e.g., awareness, norms, barriers, law enforcement)
3. Pattern identification across stakeholders

4. Triangulation with quantitative data

Themes such as “community empowerment,” “improved reporting,” “reduction in child migration,” and “leadership influence” emerged strongly from the analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** All participants were informed about the study purpose and gave verbal/written consent.
- **Confidentiality:** No names of FGD participants were recorded. KII respondents consented to the use of their titles but anonymized quotes when necessary.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without consequences.
- **Data Protection:** All data were securely stored, with digital files password-protected and access restricted to the research team.
- **Non-Maleficence:** Discussions involving survivors were handled sensitively to avoid emotional distress.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Across the six FGDs (N=60), participants represented a broad demographic spread in age, gender, and social roles:

Age Distribution

- The majority of participants were between **25–55 years**, representing parents, caregivers, community leaders, and youth.
- Younger participants (18–30 years) contributed significantly, especially in Ebonyi LGA and Ikot Ekpene.

Gender Distribution

- Approximately **53% female** and **47% male** across all FGDs.
- Women were more active in discussions on domestic servitude, especially single mothers in Ikwo and Iboko communities.

Occupational Profile

Most respondents were:

- Farmers (approx. 45%)
- Traders (20%)
- Youth/students (15%)
- Church workers/religious leaders (10%)
- Teachers/civil servants (5%)
- Others (5%)

Household Size

- Average household size was **6–8 persons**, higher in rural areas like Ikono and Ikwo, reflecting poverty pressures that influence child placement decisions.

These demographics demonstrate that AFJN’s interventions reached a **diverse and representative segment** of both states.

4.2 Awareness and Exposure to AFJN Interventions

High awareness levels across all FGDs

A combined **88%** of participants (from both states) reported being aware of AFJN activities through:

- Church outreaches
- Town hall meetings
- Policy briefings
- Youth engagements
- Community sensitization through traditional leaders

Participants frequently mentioned that AFJN was “*the only organization consistently talking about domestic servitude publicly.*”

Attendance and Exposure

- **Most participants (62%) attended at least one AFJN event** in the last 3–6 months.
- Church outreaches were the most widely attended.
- Town hall meetings had strong attendance in Izzi and Ikot Ekpene.

AFJN activities recalled by participants

- Adoption of the AFJN Child Protection MOU
- Training on community monitoring
- Dialogue sessions led by traditional rulers
- Awareness campaigns against sending children out as domestic workers

This strong exposure contributed to changes in behaviour and community response mechanisms.

4.3 Knowledge and Attitude Toward CEFM & Domestic Servitude

Knowledge

Across FGDs, participants showed significantly improved knowledge about:

- Minimum legal age of marriage (18 years)
- Laws prohibiting child labour (VAPP Act and Child Rights Law)
- Risks of child domestic servitude
- Reporting channels (NAPTIP, welfare officers, youth advocates)

Over 70% correctly identified AFJN's MOU as a regulatory tool to protect children.

In Ugboodo (Ebonyi LGA), one father said:

"Before now, we didn't know it was illegal to send a child under 12 to work. AFJN explained it clearly, and things have changed."

Attitudes

There was a clear shift in attitudes:

- **Strong disagreement (4.5/5 mean score)** with the belief that poverty justifies child marriage.
- **High agreement (4.7/5)** that communities must prevent risky child placements.
- **Increased willingness to report abuse**, especially in Izzi and Ikot Ekpene.

However, fear of retaliation and weak enforcement still exist in some locations.

4.4 Practices and Community Behavioural Changes

Patterns observed across FGDs indicate **significant positive change**, including:

Decline in sending children out

Participants consistently reported:

- Fewer households now send children to cities for domestic work.
- More children are staying in school.
- Increased scrutiny by traditional rulers before a child travels.

Improved reporting practices

FGDs revealed:

- More community members now report suspicious movement of children.
- Youth advocates are monitoring apprenticeships and church members.

- Welfare officers receive cases more frequently than before AFJN's intervention.

Reduction in abuse

In many communities, participants reported **reduced cases of child beating, overworking, and neglect** because guardians now fear consequences.

A mother in Ikono (Akwa Ibom) said:

“Even if someone maltreats a child now, they know the community can report them. Things are no longer the same.”

4.5 Functionality of the MOU & Community Monitoring System (CMS)

Awareness of the MOU

Across FGDs, **80%+** were aware that their community had adopted an MOU regulating child movement.

Community Adoption

- Ebonyi: All three LGAs confirmed official adoption of the MOU.
- Akwa Ibom: Two LGAs (Ikot Ekpene, Ikono) adopted formally; Ini LGA is “in process.”

Functionality of CMS

CMS was described as:

- **Fully functional** → Ikwo, Izzi, Ikot Obong Edong
- **Partially functional** → Ugozoronweya, Ibiaku
- **Needs strengthening** → Odoro community

CMS structures include:

- Youth advocates
- Church leaders
- Welfare officers
- Traditional rulers' cabinets
- Women/child welfare committees

One youth advocate in Izzi noted:

“Since CMS started, no child leaves this community without documentation.”

Effectiveness Rating

Participants rated the MOU & CMS as:

- **Very effective – 52%**
- **Somewhat effective – 38%**
- **Not effective – 10%** (mostly due to weak enforcement)

4.6 Perceived Project Outcomes & Impact

Clear impacts identified across FGDs and KIIs include:

1. Reduction in child domestic servitude

All six communities reported **visible and measurable reductions**.

2. Increased school retention

FGDs in Ikot Ekpene and Izzi confirmed:

- More girls remain in school.
- Parents now prefer enrolling children rather than sending them away.

3. Stronger child protection structures

MOU + CMS are now active in:

- Churches
- Traditional institutions
- Community groups

4. Strong stakeholder collaboration

FGDs and KIIs confirm stronger linkages between:

- Traditional institutions
- Churches
- Youth groups
- Welfare officers
- CSOs (e.g., OVU Foundation)

5. Greater youth empowerment

Youth groups now play leading roles in monitoring the movement of children.

6. Increased willingness to report

Fear of victimization has decreased significantly.

7. Emergence of champions

Influential individuals became child-protection champions.

Examples:

- Rev. S.N. Ewah (Assemblies of God, Ebonyi LGA)
- Mrs. Alo Elizabeth (HOD Education, Ezza North)
- HRH Eze Oliver Eze Eze (Ekawoke Community, Ikwo LGA)
- Comr. Peter Iteshi (SMO/ chairman GBV task force committee, Izzi LGA)

4.7 FGD Thematic Highlights

Theme 1: Strong awareness of AFJN messages

Participants recalled:

- “Do not send your child to city work.”
- “Domestic servitude is modern slavery.”
- “Document every child's movement.”

Theme 2: Changing norms

Communities now see child marriage and servitude as harmful, not cultural.

Theme 3: Reporting culture

Participants described reporting cases more boldly.

Theme 4: Community ownership

CMS committees are performing monitoring roles:

- checking households
- tracking apprentices
- following up on suspected abuse

Theme 5: Persistent barriers

- Poverty
- Weak enforcement
- Fear of retaliation
- Demand for economic empowerment

4.8 KII Thematic Highlights

1. Leadership Commitment

Traditional rulers and religious leaders affirmed full adoption of the MOU and CMS.

Example (Traditional Ruler, Izzi):

“We now keep a register for every child who leaves or enters this community.”

2. Improved institutional coordination

Government officials (social welfare, education officers) acknowledged:

- Better referral systems
- improved collaboration with CSOs and churches

3. Reduced cases of child trafficking

Akwa Ibom KIIs confirmed:

- Fewer cases of children being taken to Uyo, Port Harcourt, and Lagos.

4. Strong religious involvement

Pastors and church councils now preach against domestic servitude.

Rev. S.N. Ewah said:

“AFJN opened our eyes. Every pastor under me now monitors child movement.”

5. Remaining problems

Stakeholders still highlighted:

- poverty
- Political interference in enforcement
- inadequate welfare resources
- need for further community training

6. Recommended improvements

- Expand CMS with stipends
- Provide economic support to vulnerable families
- Scale up school reintegration programs
- Strengthen the enforcement of the Child Rights Law

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Interpretation of Results

The findings from the FGDs and KIIs conducted across Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States clearly indicate that the AFJN Project has significantly influenced community behaviours, norms, and child protection systems relating to Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude (DS). Interpretation of results across major domains is summarized below:

1. Increased Awareness and Knowledge

Participants demonstrated a strong understanding of:

- legal age of marriage
- dangers of domestic servitude
- reporting channels
- Relevance of the MOU and CMS

This suggests that AFJN's community-centred engagement—including church outreaches, town hall meetings, and policy dialogues—effectively shifted knowledge levels. Awareness was especially high in communities with strong religious and traditional leadership involvement.

2. Shifts in Attitudes and Norms

There was a marked decline in the acceptance of cultural norms that previously supported child marriage or sending children for domestic work. Parents increasingly perceive these practices as harmful. Youth and religious leaders now view reporting as a moral duty.

This transformation indicates **changes in social norms**, which are vital for long-term behaviour change.

3. Strengthened Community Protection Systems

The adoption and operationalization of the Community Child Protection MOU and CMS reflect improved community accountability. Communities now:

- document children who travel
- track apprenticeships
- Monitor homes where child domestic workers live.

These outcomes demonstrate **institutional strengthening**, which is essential for sustaining protections beyond the project's lifespan.

4. Reduced Practice of Domestic Servitude

FGDs across all communities show a noticeable reduction in child migration for domestic labour. Participants attributed this change to:

- AFJN messages
- leadership enforcement
- fear of legal consequences
- improved monitoring

This confirms that the intervention has achieved meaningful behavioural change.

5. Improved School Retention

In both states, community members reported that more children—especially girls—now remain in school. This indicates a positive shift in parental priorities and aligns with AFJN’s core objective.

6. Emergence of Local Champions

Individuals such as religious leaders, traditional rulers, youth advocates, and government officers demonstrated strong commitment, which amplified the project’s reach. Their influence improved the adoption of MOU/CMS and encouraged the reporting of suspected exploitation.

5.2 Comparison with Existing Literature

1. Alignment with Studies on Community Norm Change

Global literature on ending child marriage (UNICEF 2020; Girls Not Brides 2018) consistently emphasizes that *community-driven approaches*—especially involving traditional and religious leaders—are the most effective.

AFJN’s success in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom strongly aligns with these findings.

2. Reinforcement of Findings on Poverty & Domestic Servitude

Research shows that poverty remains a key driver of child domestic labour (ILO, 2021). FGDs supported this, with participants identifying poverty as the biggest reason families previously sent children out.

3. Importance of Legal Awareness

Studies indicate that community awareness of laws significantly increases reporting and reduces harmful practices (NAPTIP & UNODC, 2022).

The AFJN intervention demonstrated this effect: legal knowledge improved, which boosted reporting and deterrence.

4. MOU & CMS Effectiveness Mirrors Best Practice

Community-led monitoring systems are globally acknowledged as effective tools for safeguarding children (World Vision, 2019).

The adoption of MOU and CMS in the studied communities reflects the successful localization of these internationally recognized practices.

5. Youth Engagement Literature

Evidence from youth-led protection initiatives shows that when young people are empowered, communities experience increased vigilance and reporting.

AFJN’s work with CYON youth supports this trend, as youth advocates became central to reporting mechanisms.

6. Gaps Reflect National Trends

Weak law enforcement and fear of retaliation—a theme in KIIs—correspond with documented national challenges in implementing child protection laws, as highlighted by Human Rights Watch (2023).

Overall, AFJN's outcomes are strongly supported by existing studies, indicating the project is well-aligned with global best practices.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Community Action

Based on the findings, several critical implications emerge for both state-level policymaking and community-level implementation:

1. Strengthen Enforcement of Child Protection Laws

While awareness is high, enforcement remains inconsistent. Government agencies, especially social welfare units and NAPTIP, must:

- increase supervision
- ensure offenders face penalties
- provide safe reporting channels

2. Institutionalize the MOU & CMS State-wide

The success seen in Ikwo, Izzi, Ebonyi LGA, and Akwa Ibom LGAs indicates the need to:

- Expand MOU adoption to all LGAs
- integrate CMS into traditional councils and church institutions
- formalize CMS committees through local government resolutions

3. Enhance Community-Based Reporting Channels

Communities need:

- toll-free lines
- youth-led reporting desks
- stronger linkages with police and welfare units

This will reduce the fear associated with reporting.

4. Provide Economic Support for Vulnerable Families

Poverty remains a major root cause. Social protection programs should:

- support widows and single mothers
- improve access to livelihood skills
- Provide conditional education support for children

5. Expand School Retention Initiatives

To sustain gains:

- Local governments should support scholarships
- Community educators should track at-risk children
- churches and CSOs should collaborate to sponsor uniforms/books

6. Strengthen CSO–Government–Traditional Leader Collaboration

The strong collaboration observed must be formalized. Stakeholders should:

- hold quarterly child protection reviews
- Share data on reported cases
- conduct joint awareness campaigns

7. Invest in Continuous Community Sensitization

Behavioural change is not instantaneous.

AFJN and partners should continue:

- church outreaches
- town hall dialogues
- youth campaigns

8. Scale Up to Additional Communities

The intervention model can be replicated in:

- Other LGAs of Ebonyi State
- neighbouring states
- areas with high trafficking prevalence

9. Support Youth Advocacy Platforms

Youth proved critical in reporting and awareness.

States should invest in:

- youth monitoring teams
- training programs
- mentorship networks

6. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

6.1 Conclusion

This impact assessment has demonstrated that the Africa Faith and Justice Network–Nigeria (AFJN-N) Project has made remarkable progress in reducing the prevalence and social acceptance of Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude (DS) in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States. Findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) clearly show that the intervention has:

- Raised community-wide awareness of the legal and moral implications of CEFM and DS.
- Strengthened local structures through the adoption and implementation of the Community MOU and the Community Monitoring System (CMS).
- Empowered youths, religious leaders, traditional rulers, and government officials to play active roles in child protection.
- Encouraged positive shifts in cultural attitudes, community vigilance, and reporting practices.
- Improved school retention rates and reduced the number of children being sent away for domestic labour.

In communities such as Ikwo, Ebonyi, Izzi, Ini, Ikot Ekpene, and Ikono, participants confirmed that AFJN's activities have initiated **significant behaviour change**, leading to reduced child exploitation and enhanced community responsiveness.

Despite persistent challenges—such as weak law enforcement, cultural resistance in some pockets, and lack of economic support for vulnerable households—the project has demonstrated that community-led interventions, when supported by strong advocacy and multi-stakeholder collaboration, can lead to sustainable transformation.

Overall, the AFJN model has proven effective and scalable, with strong potential for replication across additional LGAs and states.

6.2 Way Forward

Based on the findings and lessons learned, the following steps are recommended:

1. Strengthen and Scale the Community Monitoring System (CMS)

- Institutionalize CMS across all communities in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States.
- Train additional community monitors, especially youth and women groups.
- Digitize reporting channels for faster response and documentation.

2. Expand Adoption of the MOU

- Conduct targeted advocacy with traditional councils in remaining LGAs.
- Engage local legislators and LGA chairpersons to support local enforcement.

3. Deepen Community Awareness and Behavioural Change Activities

- Sustain sensitization campaigns through churches, markets, schools, and town halls.
- Use testimonies and survivor stories to strengthen community understanding.

4. Strengthen Legal Support and Reporting Mechanisms

- Build linkages between communities, NAPTIP, police, and social welfare departments.
- Train first responders on child-friendly reporting procedures.
- Advocate for stronger enforcement of VAPP and Child Rights Laws.

5. Provide Economic Strengthening for At-Risk Families

- Promote skills training, livelihood programs, and women's economic empowerment.
- Partner with NGOs and government agencies to support vulnerable households.

6. Enhance Youth Engagement

- Expand youth advocate networks like CYON and other youth associations.
- Provide leadership and reporting training for youth teams.
- Formalize youth desks within community monitoring systems.

7. Continue Multi-Stakeholder Partnership

- Maintain collaboration with religious bodies, traditional rulers, CSOs, welfare officers, and community leaders.
- Establish quarterly joint review meetings to assess progress and challenges.

8. Conduct Further Research

- Undertake periodic assessments to measure progress and refine strategies.
- Commission qualitative studies to better understand remaining cultural barriers.

6.3 Final Note

AFJN's intervention has ignited a transformative movement across communities. People are now more informed, more vigilant, and more committed to protecting their children. With sustained support, stronger partnerships, and continued community ownership, Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States can move decisively toward a future where *no child suffers from early marriage or domestic servitude*.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from FGDs and KIIs across Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the fight against Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude (DS), and to enhance the sustainability of AFJN's interventions.

7.1 Recommendations for AFJN-Nigeria

1. **Scale Up Community Monitoring Systems (CMS):**
Expand the establishment of CMS committees across more LGAs, building on the positive results seen in Ikwo, Izzi, Ebonyi, Ini, Ikot Ekpene, and Ikono.
2. **Support Economic Empowerment Programs:**
Provide skills acquisition, micro-grants, and social assistance to households at risk of sending children into labour or early marriage.
3. **Provide Capacity Building for Community Structures:**
Train traditional rulers, welfare officers, and community monitors on child protection laws and case management.
4. **Strengthen Youth Advocate Networks:**
Continue to engage and train Institutions and youth structures such as CYON, school-based clubs, and community youth groups to sustain reporting and monitoring.
5. **Intensify Community Sensitization:**
Regular church outreaches, town hall meetings, and multi-stakeholder dialogues should continue, especially in communities identified as high-risk.
6. **Deepen Partnerships with Religious and Traditional Leaders:**
Provide periodic orientation, refresher sessions, and advocacy tools to leaders who are now enforcing and promoting MOU implementation.
7. **Support Local Actors with Tools:**
Provide standardized MOU templates, reporting forms, identity badges, and referral pathways for community monitors and advocates.
8. **Document and Share Success Stories:**
Regularly publish community breakthroughs and testimonies to strengthen visibility, donor confidence, and community replication.
9. **Provide Psychosocial Support Referral Linkages:**
Strengthen survivor support mechanisms by connecting communities to available trauma, legal, and health services.
10. **Introduce Economic Strengthening Components:**
Advocate for collaboration with NGOs/MDAs that offer livelihood support programs to reduce poverty-driven child exploitation.

7.2 Recommendations for Government Agencies

1. **Strengthen Law Enforcement on CEFM & Domestic Servitude:**
Ensure active enforcement of Child Rights Laws and the VAPP Act, especially in rural communities.
2. **Improve Response and Referral Systems:**
Welfare officers, NAPTIP, police, and local governments should collaborate to create safe, confidential reporting channels.

3. **Provide Capacity Building for Community Structures:**
Train traditional rulers, welfare officers, and community monitors on child protection laws and case management.
4. **Integrate CMS into Local Government Child Protection Systems:**
Institutionalize community-level monitoring as part of LGA social welfare structures.
5. **Support Economic Empowerment Programs:**
Provide skills acquisition, micro-grants, and social assistance to households at risk of sending children into labour or early marriage.
6. **Increase Budgetary Allocation for Child Protection:**
Allocate funds to GBV Taskforces, welfare offices, family courts, and community outreach programs.

7.3 Recommendations for Community Structures

1. **Institutionalize the MOU:**
Ensure every child leaving the community for an apprenticeship or house help is documented and protected through the MOU.
2. **Strengthen CMS at the Community Level:**
Encourage regular monitoring, household visits, and reporting by community committees.
3. **Promote Collective Responsibility:**
Engage men, women, youth, village heads, and church leaders in ongoing awareness sessions.
4. **Encourage Safe Reporting:**
Provide assurance that individuals reporting abuse will not face retaliation; build trust with community authorities.
5. **Support Children's Education:**
Mobilize families to prioritize schooling and reduce school drop-out rates, especially for girls.
6. **Address Cultural Norms:**
Deconstruct harmful practices through dialogue, storytelling, and public declarations led by respected leaders.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

1. **Conduct Longitudinal Impact Assessments:**
Assess long-term changes in behaviour, reporting patterns, and reduction of CEFM/DS over multiple years.
2. **Evaluate the Effectiveness of CMS Functionality:**
Study how well different community structures carry out monitoring and the factors that strengthen or weaken CMS results.
3. **Explore Survivor Experiences in Depth:**
Carry out in-depth qualitative studies to capture survivor journeys, recovery patterns, and reintegration challenges.
4. **Investigate Economic Drivers of Child Exploitation:**
Examine how poverty, household composition, and livelihood insecurity contribute to child labour and early marriage.

5. **Assess the Role of Religious and Traditional Leaders:**
Determine which leadership approaches generate the strongest community compliance and behavioural change.
6. **Study Replicability Across Other States:**
As AFJN expands, research can compare the outcomes in Ebonyi/Akwa Ibom with those in new intervention states.

8. LIMITATIONS

While this impact assessment provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of AFJN's interventions in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States, several limitations must be acknowledged:

8.1 Limited Sample Size

The research utilized a total sample of **70 participants** (60 FGD respondents + 10 KII informants).

Although adequate for qualitative depth, the sample size limits broad generalizability across all LGAs and communities in both states.

8.2 Time/financial Constraints

The assessment was conducted within a **48-day project window with inadequate funding**, which restricted:

- The ability to conduct broader household surveys
- Extended follow-up visits
- Repeat FGDs for validation
- Wider coverage of additional high-risk LGAs

This may have affected the richness and diversity of the perspectives captured.

8.3 Reliance on Self-Reported Data

Many findings are based on participants' recollections and perceptions. Self-reported data can be affected by:

- Social desirability bias (telling the facilitator what they believe is "correct")
- Recall bias
- Fear of mentioning sensitive issues, particularly cases involving respected community members

These factors may influence accuracy.

8.4 Limited Quantitative Measurement

Due to the qualitative-heavy methodology (FGDs & KIIs), numerical measurement of impact—such as changes in case reporting rates, prevalence estimates, or school attendance—could not be verified through administrative data from:

- Welfare offices
- NAPTIP
- Police
- Local governments

Such quantitative validation would have strengthened the findings.

8.5 Variability Across Communities

Communities differ culturally and socio-economically. As a result:

- Some communities (e.g., Ikwo & Izzi) had stronger awareness due to AFJN's earlier presence.
- Newer areas (e.g., some Akwa Ibom LGAs) showed weaker understanding of the MOU/CMS.

This uneven baseline affects comparability across sites.

Their perspectives could have further enriched the findings.

8.6 Absence of Child Respondents

Ethical and safety considerations did not allow the participation of minors in FGDs or KIIs. Therefore, the research relies entirely on adult perspectives—parents, community leaders, teachers, welfare officers, and religious institutions.

8.8 Incomplete Administrative Records

Some communities lacked:

- Updated child movement registers
- Written MOUs
- Case documentation
- CMS activity logs

This made it challenging to verify claims about the adoption and enforcement of MOUs and CMS.

Summary of Limitations

Despite these constraints, the assessment still provides credible, triangulated evidence of behavioural change, improved awareness, and increasing community adoption of child protection mechanisms across the two states.

9. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

9.1 Conclusion

This impact assessment demonstrates that the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) project has made **significant progress** in addressing Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and Domestic Servitude in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States. Through policy briefings, community dialogues, church outreaches, stakeholder engagement, and the introduction of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** and **Community Monitoring System (CMS)**, the project has successfully enhanced community awareness, shifted harmful social norms, and strengthened community-based mechanisms for child protection.

Key findings show that:

- Awareness of the dangers and illegality of CEFM and domestic servitude has increased substantially.
- Community leaders—including traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth leaders, and welfare officers—are actively championing child protection efforts.
- Communities such as Eka-Awoke, Ibiaku, Ikwo, Ndibia, and Odoro have **adopted and begun implementing** the MOU and CMS.
- Participants across FGDs and KIIs reported visible reductions in child trafficking, early marriage, and unsafe child placements.
- Youth, faith structures, and social welfare actors now play a more coordinated role in reporting and monitoring child welfare issues.

Although challenges remain—including weak law enforcement, poverty, cultural norms, and inconsistent documentation—the project’s influence has laid a strong foundation for systemic change.

Overall, the AFJN intervention is fostering **community ownership**, promoting **sustainable protection structures**, and empowering communities to defend children’s rights.

9.2 Way Forward

To strengthen and sustain the progress achieved, the following strategic directions are recommended:

a. Scale Up Community Engagement

Expand MOU and CMS implementation to additional LGAs in both states, prioritizing high-risk communities with recurring cases of child exploitation.

b. Strengthen Local Enforcement Mechanisms

Work closely with NAPTIP, the Ministry of Gender, traditional institutions, welfare officers, and security agencies to ensure:

- Consistent enforcement of the Child Rights and VAPP Laws
- Community-level reporting channels
- Accountability for perpetrators

c. Build Sustainable Community Ownership

Support communities to:

- Maintain functional CMS committees
- Keep proper child movement registers
- Train youth, teachers, and faith leaders as monitors
- Conduct periodic community barazas on child protection

d. Empower At-Risk Households

Address the economic drivers of child servitude by linking vulnerable families to:

- Livelihood support programs
- Skills training
- School support and scholarships
- Faith-based welfare programs

e. Strengthen Advocacy and Policy Influence

Use evidence from this impact assessment to advocate for:

- State-wide adoption of MOU and CMS in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom
- Annual state budget allocations for community child protection
- Integration of CMS into local government structures

f. Improve Data and Documentation Systems

Encourage LGAs and communities to maintain:

- Child movement registers
- Case reporting logs
- MOU copies
- Monthly CMS activity records

This will support future research, programming, and policy formulation.

g. Continue Monitoring and Follow-Up

Given that behaviour change is incremental, AFJN and partners should:

- Conduct quarterly monitoring visits
- Continue stakeholder engagement
- Provide refresher training sessions
- Facilitate inter-community learning exchanges

h. Conduct Future Research

Broader future research could include:

- Longitudinal tracking of child protection outcomes
- Quantitative prevalence surveys
- Comparative assessments between adopting and non-adopting communities
- Child-focused research (with ethical safeguards)

9.3 Final Remark

The fight against Child Early and Forced Marriage and Domestic Servitude is far from over, but the progress recorded across the communities in Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States demonstrates that **change is possible** when communities, religious institutions, government, and civil society work together. The evidence from this assessment affirms that AFJN's community-driven approach is yielding measurable, sustainable results.

A strengthened, coordinated, and well-resourced continuation of these interventions will ensure that **more children grow up safe, protected, educated, and empowered**—free from exploitation and full of hope for a better future.

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11. APPENDICES

This section contains supplementary materials that support the findings of the study, including research tools and sample transcripts. These appendices provide deeper insight into the methodology and evidence behind the report's conclusions.

Appendix 1: FGD Tools / Discussion Guide

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide Themes:

1. **Introduction & Consent**
 - Purpose of the study
 - Confidentiality assurance
 - Voluntary participation
2. **Community Knowledge & Perception**
 - Understanding of child early/forced marriage
 - Perception of domestic servitude
3. **Awareness of AFJN Interventions**
 - Exposure to AFJN activities
 - Relevance and usefulness
4. **Changes Observed**
 - Behavioural and cultural shifts
 - Case reporting patterns
 - MOU & CMS implementation
5. **Barriers & Challenges**
 - Social, economic, and cultural barriers
6. **Recommendations from Participants**

(Full version attached separately.)

Appendix 2: KII Tools / Interview Guide

Key Informant Interview (KII) Themes:

- Role of the respondent in the community
- Knowledge of AFJN activities
- Observed changes since interventions
- Functionality of MOU & CMS
- Existing support systems
- Gaps and recommendations

(Full version attached separately.)

Appendix 3: Completed FGD Summaries (Ebonyi State)

A. Izzi LGA – Iboko Community

(10 participants)

- Increased awareness about the dangers of child servitude
- Traditional rulers enforcing the MOU
- CMS partially functional
- More parents are keeping children in school
- Persistent poverty & fear of reporting cases remain challenges

B. Ebonyi LGA – Ogozoronweya Community

(10 participants)

- Significant reduction in children sent for domestic work
- Youth are more empowered to report
- Church leaders actively promoting the AFJN message
- Need for more livelihood support for vulnerable families

C. Ikwo LGA – Eka-Awoke Community

(10 participants)

- Strongest adoption of AFJN MOU
- Traditional rulers' influence shifted community norms
- The child registration system is now active
- Women reporting high levels of awareness

(Full transcripts in attached Word file.)

Appendix 4: Completed FGD Summaries (Akwa Ibom State)

A. Ini LGA – Odoro Community

B. Ikot Ekpene LGA – Ikot Obong Edong Community

C. Ikono LGA – Ibiaku Community

Each FGD included:

- Increased awareness of child trafficking risks
- Schools & churches partnering in advocacy
- Reporting is still low due to weak enforcement
- Poverty remains the primary driver of domestic servitude
- Positive reception to AFJN methodology

(Full narratives provided in the uploaded FGD document.)

Appendix 5: KII Summaries (Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom States)

Includes responses from:

- Traditional Rulers
- Religious Leaders (e.g., Rev. S.N. Ewah)
- Government/SSA Community Engagement
- HOD Education & Social Welfare
- Youth Leaders & CSOs (e.g., Emmanuel Nwojiji)

Highlights:

- Traditional rulers now champion MOU enforcement
- Religious leaders are powerful advocates
- Government officials recognize the project's impact
- CSOs highlight need for sustainability funding
- Welfare officers appreciate the CMS but request more logistical support

(Full KII transcripts are attached as a separate appendix.)