**NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, NIGERIA**

**Response of the National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria to the Call by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for Inputs for the SR Sale, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children report to JNGA79 - Existing and Emerging Sexually Exploitative Practices against Children in the Digital Environment - 15 May 2024**

**Introduction**

The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria (“the Commission”) welcomes the thematic report initiative by the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. The Commission recognizes the vast potential of digital technologies to empower children. However, we are deeply concerned by the recent surge in sexually exploitative practices targeting children in the digital environment. This report highlights the gravity of the situation in Nigeria and proposes recommendations to strengthen child protection in the digital sphere.

In the Nigerian context, Nigeria faces a significant challenge in protecting children online. The Child's Rights Act 2003 prohibits the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). However, the Act's reach is limited in the digital age. A 2022 report by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) revealed a 40% increase in online child sexual exploitation cases compared to 2021.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Emerging issues**

The anonymity offered by the internet and the rise of encrypted platforms create safe havens for perpetrators. The Commission is particularly concerned about certain key issues that have come to the fore in recent times.

To begin with, the issue of increased accessibility by the widespread availability of affordable smartphones and internet access in Nigeria has created fertile ground for online predators. Children, particularly in underserved communities, often lack adequate digital literacy and are susceptible to manipulation. This has also made way for self-generated sexual content. Minors are coerced or blackmailed into creating or sharing explicit content of themselves. This not only constitutes abuse but also creates a risk of further exploitation as the material can be disseminated beyond the perpetrator's control.

In addition, with advances in the internet and digital technology, livestreaming abuse has become rampant. This involves the real-time exploitation of children through online platforms. Reports indicate a disturbing trend of live broadcasts depicting child sexual abuse, further traumatizing victims and creating readily available content for abusers.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Legislative framework and challenges**

Nigeria has a robust legal framework to address child sexual abuse and exploitation. The Child Rights Act (2003) criminalizes these acts, and the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act (2015) prohibits the production and dissemination of CSAM.

However, enforcement remains a challenge due to limited capacity. Law enforcement agencies lack the resources and expertise to effectively investigate cybercrimes against children. Additionally, under-reporting is also a challenge. Stigma and fear prevent many child victims and their families from coming forward, hindering prosecution and support efforts.

**The Commission’s efforts**

The Commission is actively engaged in combating these issues. This is because it has a robust complaint treatment mechanism that receives complaints from the public and handles complaints on all human rights issues, including sexually exploitative practices against children in the digital environment. The Commission also provides legal and psychological support to child victims of online sexual abuse through partnerships with relevant stakeholders that provide such support and services.

Moreover, the Commission is actively engaged in advocating for legislative reform. This includes advocating for amendments to and implementation of the Child's Rights Act (2003) to effectively address online exploitation.

The Commission also collaborated with stakeholders by partnering with Ministries, Departments and Agencies like NAPTIP, Law Enforcement Agencies and NGOs to improve the identification, investigation, and prosecution of offenders. In addition, the Commission regularly conducts public awareness campaigns, educating parents, children, and educators about online safety and reporting mechanisms.

**Recommendations**

To ensure a safer digital environment for Nigerian children, the Commission calls for increased investment in law enforcement capacity to investigate cybercrimes against children. The Commission also calls for tech industry cooperationby collaborating with technology companies to develop effective strategies for identifying and removing CSAM, while also promoting age verification and safety features.

In addition, the Commission calls for digital literacy programs. Nationwide digital literacy programs for children, parents, and educators are needed to equip them with the skills to navigate the online world safely. In conclusion, the need for international cooperation cannot be overstated. There is a need for collaboration with international bodies and other countries to share best practices and dismantle cross-border networks of perpetrators.

By prioritizing child protection in the digital sphere, we can create a safer and more empowering online experience for all Nigerian children. The NHRC believes this report provides valuable insights into the Nigerian context and underscores the urgent need for collective action to address this critical issue.

1. National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, *‘Implementation Report 20 22 Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015’*, (2022) available online at <<https://naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/implementataion-report-VAPP-2022.pdf> > accessed on 12 May 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I Nsude and C Onu, ‘*Coverage of Child Abuse in Online Versions of Nigerian Newspapers’*, (June 2023) available on line at <<https://rujmass.com/Journals/2023/002.pdf>> accessed on 12 May 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)