

## **Ford Foundation and Open Society Initiative for West Africa Launch New Fund to End Sexual Violence in West Africa**

*With \$3.75 million in seed funding, **Kasa!** hopes to raise \$10 million in total to support sexual violence survivors and feminist and women's rights organisations over the next five years*

**Lagos, Nigeria (December 2, 2021)**—Today, the [Ford Foundation](#) and [Open Society Initiative for West Africa](#), announced their commitment of \$3.75 million to launch **Kasa! Ending Sexual Violence in West Africa**, a bold five-year initiative to boost feminist action and advocacy against sexual violence in West Africa. Focusing primarily on Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, **Kasa!** (meaning 'speak' in the Twi language) will be a fund hosted by the [African Women's Development Fund \(AWDF\)](#) to strengthen and support women's rights organisations to raise awareness of sexual violence as a violation of human rights and rally support to combat it.

In West Africa, insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic meltdown and growing inequalities have led to increased sexual violence particularly against women and girls. Violence is Africa's shadow pandemic with more than 30 percent of women and girls between ages [15-49](#) having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime in Nigeria alone. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world and undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of women and girls. Worldwide, an estimated [one in three women](#) will experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime, yet it remains tolerated in many societies and shrouded in a culture of silence.

Limited resources and attention to the challenge by development partners and government continue to undermine progress particularly in the areas of prevention and response — despite the increased rate of sexual violence in West Africa and the efforts of feminist and women's rights organizations to address the problem.

**Kasa!** will provide resources for feminist and women's rights' organizations to support, scale up and synergise their efforts in the prevention and response to sexual violence. The foundations are encouraging other donors to rethink their funding strategies for more comprehensive and coordinated support for GBV programming that moves policy to implementation and provides explicit earmarks and indicators for progress.

"Feminists across West Africa have spoken out against sexual violence for decades," said AWDF Chief Executive Officer Françoise Moudouthe. "**Kasa!** will honour and boost their voices, and create new synergies for collective action."

**Kasa!** is seeded with \$3.5 million from the Ford Foundation and \$250,000 from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), with the aim of raising a total of \$10 million within the next five years. The funds will support programming and advocacy of feminists and women's rights organisations to prevent sexual violence affecting women throughout West Africa. The regional initiative will support women and girls affected by or at risk of

sexual violence by addressing the deep-rooted drivers of this crisis. Through multi-year grants, advocacy campaigns and collaboration with various partners, the fund aims to achieve positive attitudes and behaviours towards women's bodily integrity, support new and existing responses to emergencies, provide support to survivors and their families and amplify the voices and actions of women's rights organizations at the forefront of ending sexual violence. Additionally, the funds will support advocating for boys and men to respect the rights and bodily integrity of women and girls.

**"Kasa!** is an ambitious multi-year initiative leveraging the current global outcry against sexual violence to address the widespread and deeply ingrained sexual violence crisis in West Africa," said Olufunke Baruwa, Program Officer in the Office of West Africa, Ford Foundation.

Baruwa adds: "There is no greater threat to a woman's agency than violence. As a leading donor supporting efforts to end gender-based violence, the Ford Foundation is further demonstrating its commitment to supporting action and advocacy to counter attitudes, narratives and behaviours that perpetuate sexual violence."

**Kasa!** will focus on a three-pronged approach of prevention, accountability and support (including post-rape care and comprehensive sexual violence services). The fund will make grants primarily to local organisations, as well as a few key women-led national and regional organizations. Because sexual violence is a culture, not an event, ending it requires a long-term and strategic approach that addresses the culture of impunity over the bodies of women and girls. Therefore, the goal of **Kasa!** is to increase awareness and mobilize action to counter existing narratives, attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate sexual violence.

According to Mikang Longjan, Program Coordinator at OSIWA: "This initiative is an opportunity to raise public awareness about violence, stimulate community action and provide care and support for survivors through campaigns and advocacy to target entire communities and institutions in the sub-Saharan region. Ultimately contributing to support interventions that protect women and other historically marginalized and vulnerable groups."

To learn more about **Kasa!**, please visit [www.awdf.org](http://www.awdf.org) and follow the conversation on social media at @awdf01 on Twitter, African Women's Development Fund on Facebook, @the\_awdf on Instagram with the hashtags: **#Kasa #SpeakOutAgainstSexualViolence** and **#EndSexualViolence**

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### **ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION**

The Ford Foundation is an independent, non-profit grant-making organization with assets currently valued at \$16 billion. For more than 85 years it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

### **ABOUT THE OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR WEST AFRICA**

The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), established in 2000, is a grantmaking and advocacy organization focused on equality, justice, democratic governance, human rights and knowledge generation. It is part of the global network of Open Society Foundations spread across 37 countries around the world. OSIWA fosters citizen participation in building a region that is freer, more vibrant and more tolerant using various tools including grants, advocacy, litigation, partnership building, dialogue, strategic communication, research and technical assistance. We believe in the agency of people and that citizen participation is the cornerstone of democracy. OSIWA works across ten countries in the sub-region from Dakar (Regional office), Abuja (Country Office), and Freetown (Mano River Office).

### **ABOUT THE AFRICAN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Established in 2000, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is a feminist grantmaking foundation that supports local, national and regional women's organisations working towards the promotion and realisation of women's rights and recognition of African women's leadership in all spheres of life. As Africa's first women's fund, AWDF plays a pioneering role in of both feminist movement-building and philanthropy on the continent.