

BASIC RIGHTS COUNSEL INITIATIVE (BRCI)

Strategic Plan

2020 - 2025

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BRCI	=	Basic Rights Counsel Initiative
BTAN	=	Budget Transparency and Accountability Network
CBOs	=	Community-Based Organisations
CENGOS	=	Coalition of Eastern NGOs
CRA	=	Child Rights Act
CRL	=	Child Rights Law
CRS	=	Cross River State
CSOs	=	Civil Society Organisations
FBOs	=	Faith-Based Organisations
FIDA	=	International Federation of Women Lawyers
GBV	=	Gender-Based Violence
MDAs	=	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
M&E	=	Monitoring & Evaluation
NGOs	=	Non-Governmental Organisations
PACT	=	Prevent Abuse of Children Today
PESTLE	=	Political, Economic, Social, Technology, Legal & Environmental
UNICEF	=	United Children Emergency Fund
SBCC	=	Social and Behavioural Change Communication
SCA	=	Safe Child Africa
SCP	=	Safe Child Project
SWOT	=	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats
VAP	=	Violence Against Persons

Introduction

Basic Rights Counsel Initiative (BRCI) is a response to the increasing risks and emerging complex adversities that children face in the Nigerian society. Safety and opportunities remain a far cry for many children and grave forms of abuse colour their growth experience. Millions of children suffer violence every year in Nigeria - approximately 6 out of every 10 children experience some form of physical, emotional or sexual violence before the age of 18¹. One in two children experience physical violence; one in four girls and one in ten boys experience sexual violence; and one in six girls and one in five boys experience emotional violence². Most children do not tell anyone what has happened to them and fewer than five per cent receive the help they need to recover.

In Cross River State (CRS) located in the Southern part of Nigeria, violence against children occur almost on a daily basis and has assumed various forms and dimensions ranging from brutal battery to starvation, neglect, sexual abuse, labour/servitude². In most recent times, child witch branding, stigmatization and torture leading to incapacitation or death has become one of the most serious forms of violence against children (VAC) and has been greatly fueled by misguided religious teachings combined with traditional beliefs and practices. Pastors of a minority of churches in Calabar are frequent perpetrators of witchcraft-related abuses often stigmatizing children and subjecting them to horrific abuse, which at times, amounts to torture³. These abuses are of concern in their own right but also hold grave repercussions for a child's growth and development.

The organization's commitment to responding to these grave forms of abuse and violation of the rights of children has been greatly hindered by the lack of a clear strategic focus together with limited institutional management procedures and corporate governance, which has largely affected her resource strength.

In 2017, BRCI undertook a strategic planning process in order to reposition itself to ably play its role as a leading child protection organization in Cross River State, Nigeria. That process culminated in the development of a strategic plan document which was to run for four years between 2017 – 2021. The process provided an opportunity for BRCI staff & management as well as the governing board to achieve shared understanding of

¹ Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey, by the National Population Commission with support from UNICEF and the U.S Center for Disease Control and Prevention

² British Journal of Education; Vol.3, No.3, pp.34-42, March 2015

³ Report on Witchcraft Stigmatization and Children's Rights in Nigeria by Stepping Stones Nigeria (2010)

BRCI's vision and mission while also assessing BRCI's capacity to effectively deal with child development and women's rights programming. However, during a progress review meeting with new staff and board members of BRCI in October 2020, the organization realized that not much progress has been recorded in implementing the plan due to a few structural issues and decided that the plan be extended to run up until 2025.

This reviewed strategic plan presents a framework for BRCI's future actions for the next 5 years, 2020 - 2025. It focuses on refocusing and strengthening of her programmatic and institutional priorities that will enable BRCI to become more professional, with greater capacity to deliver more impact.

The strategic plan will further be broken down into annual work plans and budgets that would specifically define the issues and designate time-bound activities and partnerships.

Background

Organizational Profile

Basic Rights Counsel Initiative (BRCI) is a non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit-making organization registered as incorporated trustees at the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria on March 3, 2011.

It was however, inaugurated since 2003 by James Ibor Esq. while he was still a student at the University of Calabar. He was keen on using the platform to mobilize people towards the promotion of anti-corruption practices in private and public sphere, promotion and safeguarding of children's rights and elimination of all forms of prejudices against women and the physically challenged.

BRCI was founded in 2009 by Eseoghene Edoja and James Ibor and registered in 2011 with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria, with components of vulnerable women's economic empowerment.

Today, the organization is committed to promoting and safeguarding the fundamental rights of children in Nigeria by providing free legal and psycho-social services to children whose rights have been abused and through advocacy at all levels in order to reduce incidences of violence against children and women in the Nigerian society.

BRCI is currently governed by a six-member board of trustees with its day-to-day management headed by a Programs Coordinator. BRCI currently intervenes in two major ways: provision of child support services and advocacy:

- The Child Support Services is made up of the Safe Child Project (SCP) and the Safe Haven Shelter. While the Safe Child Project focuses on case documentation

& management, the Safe Haven Shelter facilitates foster care placements for children in need and provides an emergency accommodation space for children in need of temporary shelter for the duration before they are rehabilitated or reintegrated with their families or communities.

- BRCI's advocacy plan covers the coordination of the Prevent Abuse of Children Today (PACT) Coalition which is a mobilization platform for policy reviews & action through pressure mounting using petitions, campaigns, media, SBCC materials, specialized reports to human rights bodies, etc.

There are also programming targeted at vulnerable children living and eking a living from the streets of Calabar, Cross River State. BRCI is currently in the process of designing and implementing a more holistic, multi-sectoral intervention aimed at changing negative lifestyles, behaviours and attitudes of these children.

The organization's capacity assessment shows BRCI to be a credible and highly visible child protection organization in Cross River State given the dedication with which it has handled cases relating to child rights violation in Cross River State.

BRCI has documented over 600 child abuse cases and about 100 child rights offences have been successfully prosecuted in courts with offenders facing jail sentences in the state penitentiary. The organization has provided child support for over 300 cases; paying medical bills, providing educational support and feeding support in emergencies and support for household income strengthening. BRCI successfully facilitated the inauguration of family courts in Cross River State in November 2011 as part of efforts towards the implementation of the Child's Rights Law (CRL) in Cross River State. BRCI was the first to file an action and get a judgment in the family court. There is currently ongoing advocacy to revive the defunct family courts through the Prevent Abuse of Children Today (PACT) coalition which BRCI coordinates. But BRCI has only just begun to scratch the surface.

There are serious resource capacity gaps which BRCI needs to strengthen which includes streamlining its focus and having clear-cut vision and mission statements, and improvements of organizational management processes and structures as well as sustainable financial and human resource.

Thus the strategic planning process sought to understand the strategic issues and priorities around child development and women's rights which BRCI wants to concern itself with for the next four years, what strategies and programmes need to be designed to address these issues and how best BRCI can position itself to achieve greater impact. The process has helped to build consensus and raised key recommendations for addressing these observed resource capacity gaps. The key outcomes and conclusions from the process are summarized in the sections that follow.

Overview of the External Environment

With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria represents a complex mix of multiple socio-cultural diversities comprising language, religion, culture and beliefs. Child protection and gender equality remain issues that cut across these diversities as child and women's rights abuses cuts across various cultures and tribes in Nigeria.

In 2003, Nigeria adopted the Child's Rights Act (CRA) to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Child's Rights Act expands the human rights bestowed to citizens in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution to children. Despite this enactment, abuse of the rights of children in Nigeria remains an issue of grave concern. Of the 36 States in the federation, 25 have gone on to further domesticate the Act but sadly even in these states, child rights abuses are rife.

Although Cross River State is one of the leading states in Nigeria to enact laws that promote the wellbeing of girls and women (e.g. laws prohibiting early marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence/maltreatment of widows and inheritance rights to females), implementation of these laws still remain very poor as cases of violence are on the increase. Years of BRCI's intervention in child rights abuse cases reveals the following unpleasant facts:

- 38% of child abuse cases handled by BRCI were sexual abuse related cases, most of which involved minors between the age of 5 to 12 years
- BRCI's experience in handling those cases showed that the culture of silence and victim stigmatization, intimidation and threat as well as the negative attitudes of law enforcement agents and the judiciary were some of the factors militating against successful prosecution of perpetrators
- Despite intense advocacy efforts towards instituting a family court system where cases of child rights abuses can be speedily charged and prosecuted, the state government's laxity on enforcing its operationalization and functionality has incapacitated efforts to run and sustain an effective family court system

It is worthy to note however, that the United Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has been supporting the Cross River State government to strengthen its child protection system. However, a lot more is still needed as government's commitment has not quite matched that of the development partners in the State.

With respect to the abuse of the rights of women, the following considerations are worthy of note.

- Culture, religion, beliefs and socio-economic factors are some of the factors that fuel disparities and violence against girls and women
- These factors also greatly influence gender role constructs and how people with relevant agents of government respond to issues that affect women

- The same influences largely explain policy and community level resistance to empowering women with information on their rights or providing relevant services that respond to their economic and social needs

On the positive side though, a good number of developments in policies are supportive of efforts to empower women and respond to issues of gender-based violence. The State had long since enacted laws prohibiting the practice of female genital mutilation, harmful widowhood rites and female's right to inheritance of properties. There are also concerted efforts to see the State's Assembly pass the Violence Against Persons (VAP) Bill with hopes that this will further draw more attention to the need to put systems in place to address issues of GBV.

Increasing media attention and deliberate efforts of CSOs to address child protection and violence against women also offer a mix of opportunities.

A deeper view into the external environment within which BRCI operates has been further detailed out in a comprehensive PESTLE and SWOT analysis which can be seen in the appendix of this plan.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Vision, Mission, Values & Principles

Vision

A Society with Enhanced Quality of Life for Children and Women

Mission

To facilitate access to justice, equity and economic empowerment for vulnerable children and indigent women through advocacy and partnership with relevant MDAs and non-state actors

Core Values

1. Best Interest of the Child
2. Equity & Justice
3. Good Governance
4. Non-discrimination
5. Promoting secularism
6. Empathy

Target and Beneficiary Groups

These groups are entities and communities that are directly or indirectly impacted by the program activities of the organization, whether primary (vulnerable children and indigent women), secondary (household heads and community leaders), or tertiary (legislators, opinion leaders, state and local government agencies & departments etc). Table 1 below presents a breakdown of BRCI's target beneficiaries by the three broad categories mentioned above.

Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable children aged 0 – 17 years • Indigent women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Guardians • Caregivers • Teachers • Partner NGOs • Grassroot organisations including FBOs and CBOs • The Children's Parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant government MDAs • State legislators • Community and religious leaders • The Nigerian police • Public and private hospitals • The judiciary • National and international donor organisations • Media houses

Priority Goals & Actions

Priority Area 1	Child Rights and Development
Goal	Promoting opportunities for child development and child rights education
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote family-centred care for abused and vulnerable children 2. Promote positive parenting skills in order to reduce incidences of child abuse 3. Strengthening capacity of relevant state institutions and alternative care providers to become more effective in responding to cases of child's rights abuses

Actions/Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide or facilitate access to psycho-social, medical, educational and temporary shelter for child survivors of abuse. 2. Organise sensitization programmes for children, parents and teachers to build effective communication and parenting skills 3. Facilitate capacity building programmes to build skills of relevant state actors and alternative care providers to better respond to cases of abuse against children 4. Provide linkages to sustainable livelihoods & economic empowerment opportunities for indigent women
Priority Area 3	Addressing Gender-Based Violence
Goal	Reduced incidences of gender based violence among children and women
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase awareness on gender based violence within families, communities and relevant government institutions 2. To mitigate impact of gender based violence on survivors by providing or facilitating linkages to alternative care
Actions/Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate awareness creation/capacity building programmes for families, communities and relevant government institutions 2. Support the enactment, review and enforcement of new and existing laws, policies & programmes against gender-based violence 3. Build the capacity of relevant care and government institutions e.g. judiciary, police, medical, communities, etc. to better respond to cases of gender-based violence
Priority Area 4	Promoting Access to Legal Justice
Goal	Promote access to legal justice for abused children and women
Objective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase access to justice for vulnerable children and women 2. To facilitate the improvement of the quality of legal services provided by government
Actions/Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate access to legal justice for child survivors and indigent women 2. Conduct advocacy promoting family court administration

	3. Sensitization and awareness programmes on rights of children and women using the media and community platforms
Priority Area 5	Organizational Capacity
Goal	Enhanced organizational capacity and operations
Objective	To enhance BRCI staff and resource strength for child and women's rights programming
Actions/Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate platforms for learning, celebration of efforts and results 2. Promote partnership engagements for integrated capacity building 3. Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy/plan 4. Establish and implement a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning System 5. Develop and implement resource mobilization strategies 6. Build corporate governance and presence

Collaboration and Partnerships

BRCI has an extensive list of organizations both within the public and private sector as well as within and outside Nigeria which it collaborates and partner with. Table 2 below presents a list of past and present partners of BRCI.

Funders	Government partners	Private sector partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Child Africa (SCA) • ActionAid Nigeria • The Ford Foundation • UNICEF • Born Equal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare departments of Ministries of Women Affairs, Sustainable Development & Social Welfare, Justice, and the Police • Publicly owned hospitals • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) • Society for Youth Empowerment, Development and Rescue Initiative (SYDRI) • Prof Charles Effiong Foundation • International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privately owned hospitals • CSOs e.g. BTAN, CENGOS, etc.
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Over the course of the implementation of this plan, BRCI will make deliberate efforts to proactively reach out to and establish more relevant partnerships and collaborations to advance the work it does on child protection and addressing violence against women. Where necessary, the organization will develop memoranda of understanding to formalize as many of its partnerships as possible while remaining flexible enough to learn and adapt to the changing environment.

Building Organizational Capacity

Resource Capacity

BRCI currently depends largely on resources leveraged from a few national and international organisations with Safe Child Africa remaining the most consistent and long-standing funder of the organization, particularly its child protection activities. While the organization is enthusiastic about possible funding windows that are emerging as opportunities, it has very limited experience with preparing solicited or unsolicited funding proposals with donors and have only been successful with small project grants such as the ones offered in recent times by Ford Foundation and ActionAid Nigeria.

As can be expected, implementation of the activities under this strategic plan will require tremendous amount of financial, material and technical resources. It is for that reason that BRCI included a special training session on proposal writing as part of its review process of this strategic plan. BRCI hopes to leverage on the knowledge gained by staff during this special session to research and respond to new funding opportunities by preparing solicited and unsolicited proposals, while also leveraging on various communication platforms and events to market and promote the work that it does.

Structure & Management

Although BRCI has established a basic organizational structure covering board, management, staff and volunteers, implementation of the structure still needs to be improved upon. The Board of Directors is currently small in size and has not been as active as it should be. During the review of this plan, the management revealed their

effort to expand the board but its important to diversify the technical capacity of the members. The staffing structure is relatively strong at the mid and low level and critical elements of human resource management such as staff JDs, recruitment procedures and compensation planning have been strengthened in the last few years compared to the initial non-formalized recruitment process that was in place. A few critical positions that were hitherto not there such as dedicated monitoring and evaluation as well as finance management have recently been filled, showing that BRCI is positioning itself for greater impact and in meeting the objectives of this plan. While there are conscious efforts to continuously build the capacity of staff through training, BRCI will need to develop a more deliberate training plan for its staff. Also, there is need for BRCI to improve compensation package for its staff to make it more competitive with other organisations especially given the current economic realities. These will be critical to attracting and retaining competent and committed staff especially at senior and experience levels. Improved organizational financing is critical to the achievement of this objective.

Documents to support effective management such as a Personnel/Admin Policy, Accounting Procedures, etc. have been developed but the usage are yet to be fully activated and put to use.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

The organisation's M&E framework will be developed from this strategic plan to cover the four broad strategic priorities and objectives of:

1. Child Rights and Development
2. Addressing Gender-Based Violence
3. Promoting Access to Legal Justice
4. Improving Organisational capacity

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan will enable BRCI to define the approach for documenting progress, lessons and challenges as well as determining the effectiveness, outcomes and impact of activities implemented. This should include provisions for assessing the extent to which the set goals and strategic objectives are being met and how they are moving the organization towards its mission and ultimately, its vision.

It is worthy to note that BRCI has a system in place for daily monitoring of its child development, GBV and access to justice activities to track progress and report on challenges and way forward. However, the organization has never carried out a systematic evaluation of its programmes and it's important for BRCI to begin to look towards this direction, particularly now that this plan is in place and progress of

implementation will need to be monitored and evaluated mid-way and at the 'expiration' of the plan. This evaluation is critical to enabling BRCI evaluate outcomes and document the changes in the internal and external environment that made the accomplishment of its strategic goals and objectives possible or not.

BRCI has a reporting structure in place determining how often the organization reports to its funders with content largely determined by the funders. However, it is pertinent for BRCI to develop its own internal reporting mechanism based on the development of this strategic plan.

One of the outcomes of the review of this strategic plan was to draw up a comprehensive M&E framework outlining the broad activities of BRCI (inputs), immediate results (outputs) with projected outcomes and impact while also identifying illustrative indicators that will track progress. This is shown on Appendix II below. BRCI will need to review and update this table from time to time based on its current realities.

Communication Plan

To enhance strategic communication, BRCI will develop a communication plan to enable it achieve the communication components of its strategic goals and objectives. There is need for BRCI to be more deliberate in its targeting and deploy various communication strategies to promote and market itself while also leveraging it to drive outcomes and stimulate knowledge increase and behavioural change.

A detailed communication plan will enable BRCI to draw up relevant well-targeted content at every point in time in various formats such as leaflets, posters, video, radio programming, etc. and to determine what channels to deploy in reaching the target audience. It is important for BRCI to know how to communicate and share her success stories and lessons learned to enhance its visibility in the development community especially among potential funders. Sharing its lessons learned also positions BRCI to be a leading voice within the space of child rights development and GBV programming in Cross River State and Nigeria at large.

Appendix I

SWOT AND PESTLE ANALYSIS

SWOT

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● In-depth knowledge and understanding of existing laws and policies promoting the rights of children and women● Proven track record and established reference point in child protection programming and access to legal justice for survivors of gender-based violence in CRS● Data oriented and evidence driven● Ability to coordinate and collaborate with state and non-state actors on issues of child protection in CRS● A crop of trained staff/volunteers passionately managing cases of child and women's rights abuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Increasing interest from international and local funding organisations● Solicited/non-solicited donations from philanthropic individuals● Diverse capacity building/training programmes from development partners which helps to build the capacity of BRCI staff/volunteers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing mentorship and consultation for emerging organisations in child protection 	
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under funding Increasing workload with limited staff Need to strengthen board management 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security risk to staff and survivors of gender-based violence posed by perpetrators and their relatives Cases sometimes compromised by parents/guardians of survivors as a result of poverty, fear of stigma or threat to life Psychological/emotional trauma of survivors and staff responding to some grave child abuse cases Legal bureaucracies which slows down or hinder justice Withdrawal or sometimes suspension of funding by existing funders

PESTLE

<p>Political</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack or poor political will of government to facilitate access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence Insecurity and high crime rate in CRS 	<p>Technological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to software applications and media platforms e.g. social media, android devices, video and audio recording devices and gadgets such as drones Leveraging on virtual platforms to coordinate engagements with stakeholders particularly within the reality of Covid 19 pandemic
<p>Economic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing interest from funders in BRCI's programmes A vast workload with limited financial resources 	<p>Legal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of child-friendly laws and the current push for the passage of the violence against persons law in CRS Availability of trained legal personnel prosecuting cases of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor government budgeting and implementation of child welfare programming e.g. education • Poverty and low living standards of families which perpetuates a circle of abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> child abuse and gender-based violence • Legal bureaucracies and corruption which slows down or hinders prosecution process
Social	Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing positive recognition and acknowledgement of the work done by BRCI • Traditional norms, cultures and religious beliefs that impede the rights of children and women • Citizens' ignorance of existence of laws promoting the rights of children and women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling cordial relationship between management, staff and external stakeholders • Hostility threats to survivors and staff from perpetrators and their relatives • Hard to reach communities with difficult terrains where gender-based violence is perpetuated • Outbreak of pandemics e.g. Covid 19

Appendix II

Monitoring & Evaluation Framework (Attached)

BRCI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework			
Goal	Strengthened institutions, laws and policies that promote the rights of children and women		
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Indicators
Staff/volunteers	Building an efficient database on cases of child and women's rights abuses	Existence of a growing database showing violations of rights of children and women in CRS	Number of cases recorded in CRS
BoT members	Advocacy with relevant MDAs in the executive, judiciary, legislative arms of government as well as with community and religious leaders on child and women's rights abuses	A sensitized group of relevant stakeholders within relevant MDAs in the executive, judiciary & legislative arms of government as well as community and religious leaders	Number of advocacy meetings held
Funding	Developing project proposals for funding with relevant donors	Increased number and quality of proposals developed and submitted by BRCI	Number of proposals submitted
Material resources e.g. vehicles, office space, etc.	Building the capacity of relevant institutions e.g. family, judiciary, police, and alternative care centres to better respond to cases of child rights abuse and violence against women	Increased knowledge and consciousness of relevant institutions	Number of capacity building sessions
	Institutional capacity strengthening of staff & BoT members as well as improved organisational structure & management	Increased BoT engagements and staff strength	Number of BoT engagements

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