

**LESSONS LEARNED**

# **Conflict and Gender Sensitive Practices and Policies of Partner Institutions**



## Introduction and Background

This paper outlines lessons learnt from NSRP's work to embed and support conflict and gender sensitive policies and practices of its partner organisations. It summarises a number of different activities undertaken by NSRP with its partners, and the lessons which were learnt as a result. The briefs capturing these lessons learnt are intended to support development practitioners seeking to collaborate with partner institutions in Nigeria to improve conflict and gender sensitive practices.

Lessons learnt were gathered from interviewing project staff from across the various NSRP outputs, as well as partner organisations. The paper focuses on lessons emerging from the *process*, rather than focusing on the impacts. This is in order to facilitate replication of best practice.

## Conflict and Gender Context in Nigeria

Nigeria is an extremely diverse conflict affected country with 64% of its population living in poverty despite considerable oil wealth. Conflict divisions tend to fall along geographic fault lines—north and south—which also correlate to religious and ethnic groupings. “The country has continued to experience serious and violent ethno-communal conflicts since independence in 1960.”<sup>1</sup>

The impact of increasing instability has in many ways been different for women and girls compared to men and boys in Nigeria. While men and boys have been more vulnerable to forced recruitment or pressure to engage directly in conflict, women and girls' vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence has increased. This is due to a multitude of factors, including a loss of support networks and weakened formal response mechanisms; use of violence against women and girls as a weapon of conflict; and at the hands of men who perceive their masculinity to be under threat and thus become more violent in the home<sup>2</sup>. Traditional gender roles have also shifted: for example, the number of female headed households has increased, as a result of the death or absence of husbands or male relatives.

Gender and conflict sensitivity were embedded throughout the NSRP project lifecycle, from the design and inception phases, through to implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Through weaving gender and conflict sensitivity into the programme from the start, these elements were viewed as core programme components as opposed to add-ons, and emergent gaps or weaknesses in these areas could be addressed rapidly and effectively without fundamentally altering the direction of ongoing activities.

## Review of NSRP intervention and Actions

The NSRP approach has been to build capacity through training, and then support the application of knowledge and skills into policies and practice. This is intended to reduce conflict and violence and support increased participation by women.

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the Center for Complex Operations. PRISM Challenges and Opportunities. Vol 5, No 2. 2015. Lessons from Colombia for Curtailing the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, pg. 95*

<sup>2</sup> *Voice for Change and Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (2016) Masculinities, Conflict and Violence: Nigeria Country Report*



*Figure 1: NSRP's approach*

This approach has involved the following activities:

### **1) Conflict and gender sensitisation training**

NSRP's advisers delivered targeted training for partner organisations on conflict and gender. The purpose of the training was to provide partner organisations with the skills and know-how to implement conflict and gender sensitive practices.

The conflict sensitivity training consisted of a three-day course covering the importance of conflict sensitivity, defining conflict, the Nigerian context, how to perform conflict analysis, understanding context, stakeholder mapping, and applying analysis to the programme cycle. A similar three-day course of training was delivered on gender sensitivity.

### **2) Mainstreaming conflict and gender sensitive practices as part of operations**

A number of steps were taken by NSRP to ensure that conflict and gender sensitivity was incorporated in the practices of partner organisations. This included:

- The incorporation of a section in grant application forms on how the grantee would address conflict and gender sensitivity.
- Sessions at quarterly partner coordination meetings on how partner organisations were implementing conflict and gender sensitivity in their programming, and following on from the training provided from NSRP.
- For peace clubs, providing detailed guidance on the role of girls in peacebuilding within the peace club manual.
- Monitoring of and commitment to maintaining gender balance across those attending training, events, or other participation in partner programme activities.
- Partner organisations are required to conduct conflict analysis and identify how their programme interacts with a conflict environment.

These measures were designed to build on the training provided to partners, and to support partners to adopt gender and conflict sensitivity in practice.

### **3) Influencing partner organisations to adopt conflict and gender sensitive practices through example and leadership**

NSRP itself has adopted a number of gender sensitive approaches within its own operational procedures and procurement processes to ensure inclusivity of women and those with disabilities. This was in order to demonstrate gender sensitive approaches in programming. This initiative was supported by training provided to NSRP staff on conflict and gender sensitivity.

### **4) Direct influencing other donor programmes to adopt more conflict and gender sensitive policies and practices**

NSRP has sought to strengthen the conflict sensitivity of multiple sectors of donor-funded programmes in Nigeria. This was done through training and direct technical assistance for conflict sensitisation for DFID and DFID funded programmes in Nigeria. In addition to brown bag sessions with DFID staff to help build capacity, technical assistance to programmes

included providing conflict and context analysis, conducting conflict sensitive organizational assessments throughout the entire project cycle, and providing a number of trainings such as conflict sensitivity training, training on facilitation skills for multi-stakeholder dialogue, effective communication skills training, negotiation and mediation trainings.

#### **5) Promoting conflict sensitive practices through multi-stakeholder platforms**

NSRP has collaborated with various organisations through multi stakeholder platforms, which have included both civil society and government institutions. While in these instances there was no direct control over the policy and practices of these partner organisations, the platforms were an effective way to advocate and demonstrate conflict and gender sensitive practices. Activities included:

- Requesting male and female participants in events and panels
- Creation of a space for civil society organisations to have a voice in peacebuilding processes
- Being sensitive to the power imbalances between different stakeholders and addressing this in order to promote peacebuilding and dialogue
- Delivering training to stakeholders of multi-stakeholder platforms to promote more gender sensitive practices and highlight the benefits of gender sensitivity in peacebuilding.

#### **6) Research & knowledge to support gender and conflict sensitivity amongst strategic partners**

NSRP's 4.1 output is a research component. One objective of NSRP's research work is to: 'Strengthening the ability of key institutions in the field of conflict, through strategic partnerships, to more effectively prevent and manage conflict and fulfil their mandates and responsibilities in this area.'

The desired outcome is that partner institutions will be better equipped to address stability and reconciliation more effectively in their policies and practices, and thereby make a more coherent and constructive contribution to peacebuilding.

### **Lessons and Recommendations**

Lessons on the above activities were identified by interviewing NSRP staff responsible for delivering each output area, as well as some partner organisations where possible. Interviewees were asked:

- What worked well?
- What challenges did you face & were any of them overcome? How?
- Any suggestions for what could have been done differently if you had to do it again?

The lessons have been categorised according to the area of activity from which they derive, namely:

- Training and influencing activities
- Support provided to partner organisations to implement conflict and gender sensitive practices
- Analysis

## Training and Influencing

**To maximise the impact of gender and conflict sensitivity training, it should be delivered systematically across an entire organisation, rather than to a few individuals within an organisation.** When the aim of training is to influence policies and practices at an organisational level, it is important to focus on the staff body as a whole, since an individual may not be able to disseminate learning across the organisation. Staff turnover may also jeopardise knowledge retention within the organisation more widely.

**Other approaches to ensure gender and conflict sensitivity are embedded and sustained were also found to be helpful.** Dedicated conflict and gender reporting sessions in quarterly partner coordination meetings were useful - albeit not as effective as dedicated training. It was felt that budgeted, half-day mandatory trainings delivered to the partner organisations as a whole were far more effective in building their capacity for gender and conflict sensitive practices. As part of output 4.3, which aimed to conflict sensitise Nigerian Media partners, a mentoring approach was found to be very effective in promoting conflict sensitivity beyond initial training sessions. An approach like this, or the creation of 'champions,' could be an effective approach more broadly.

NSRP deployed conflict advisers in each *region*, but it was felt **deploying individual advisers to individual states would have been more effective.** This would have allowed a more granular tracking of conflict issues, initiatives and for more targeted interventions that were more sensitive of local contexts.

Furthermore, it was felt that employing conflict and gender specialists centrally (as opposed to regionally) alone did not automatically result in conflict sensitive policies and practices amongst partner organisations. The dissemination and uptake of knowledge amongst *organisations as a whole* (as opposed to individual representatives from the partner organisations) is a more meaningful way to build in conflict and gender sensitive practices.

It was also felt that **NSRP should have created a stronger mechanism to capture and track how partner organisations were adopting conflict or gender sensitive practices.** For example, indicators to support this monitoring could have been developed. Furthermore, some partner organisations built on concepts provided in the training and adapted and applied approaches to conflict sensitivity to their own context. However, there was not enough formal capture of these interesting initiatives such as this that resulted from NSRP's training.

**In order to improve gender and conflict sensitivity amongst staff within NSRP, a systematic way to track understanding and uptake of training provided would have been valuable.** In 2014, an (anonymous) assessment was conducted on NSRP staff and their familiarity with conflict and gender sensitive practices. This was then used to design a round of training, and was then followed up by a successive (anonymous) assessment in 2015. The assessments identified gaps and actions to boost NSRP capacity in these areas, however, there was not enough drive to actually implement those actions. In turn this would have more impact on NSRP being able to demonstrate conflict and gender sensitivity to other partner organisations.

**Gender sensitive policies and practices need to take account of local cultural and religious contexts in order to be effective and meaningful. This needs to include awareness raising, sensitisation and community outreach.** Throughout NSRP's work and engagement with various stakeholders, nationally and locally, cultural and religious norms sometimes made it

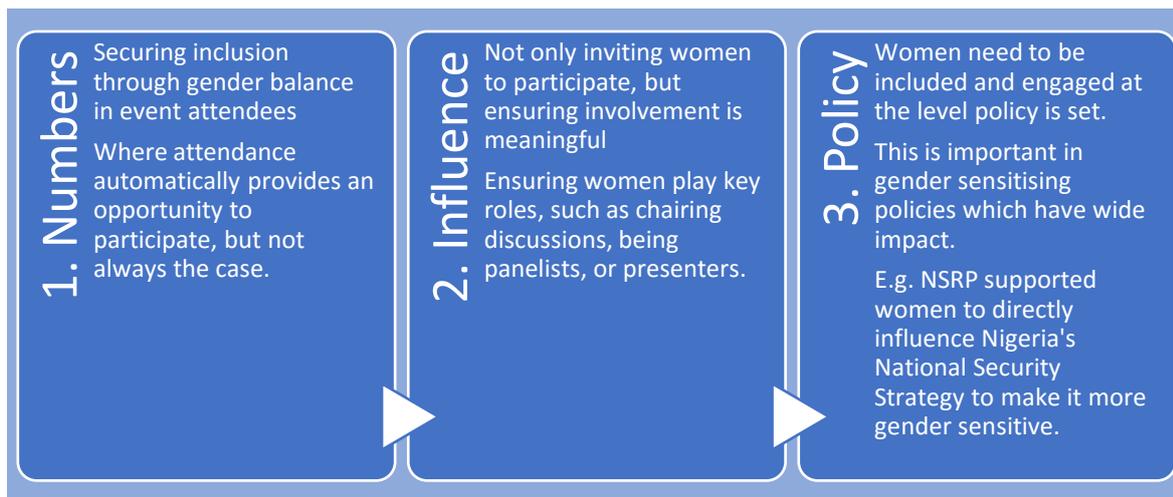
challenging to implement effective and sustainable gender sensitive practices. This challenge was best overcome through tailored dialogue with community leaders about the benefits of adopting gender sensitive practices. In Plateau, NSRP engaged with traditional community leaders to sensitise them on gender inclusion issues. As a result, the community leaders introduced rights for women to inherit and own land, which is an uncommon practice in similar communities.

**Case study:** Federal Women Peace & Security visit to Kuchingoro IDP camp NSRP did a pre-assessment of this IDP camp with two initial visits, rather than just arriving with a Women Peace & Security delegation. This proved to be a very important step in ensuring the visit did no harm in exacerbating conflict and tension in the IDP camp. By using the pre-visits to hold discussions with residents, the team developed a better understanding of the various groups from different conflicts or regions, in addition to the host community. The different groups within the camp were very organised – and the visit identified women’s, men’s, youth leaders in each group. When the formal delegation then arrived for a visit, they were able to meet with each group in recognition of their differing perspectives and priorities. This avoided generating further tension and division by treating the groups as homogenous, or of being perceived as unfairly benefitting one group.

**Gender inclusion practices have the most impact when they are mainstreamed across multi-stakeholder processes.** NSRP’s experience has highlighted that women’s involvement can be most effective where the event itself presents an opportunity for voice and participation.

**Differentiated approaches to women’s participation can be useful in achieving different gender-sensitive processes and outcomes: one size does not fit all.** NSRP organised or hosted events routinely stipulated women’s participation as key speakers: while gender balance does not automatically translate to stronger gender sensitive practices, this approach was nevertheless broadly successful in ensuring women’s voices were heard in important fora. However, whilst gender-balanced panels can be very effective in smaller fora such as panels, or for media appearances (where active participation of just a few selected speakers is foreseen), wider engagement from women in large mixed audiences or gatherings may require a different approach. This is because while women may attend such events, their voice may be more constrained than their male counterparts, and they may remain quiet and not engage. An approach that worked to overcome this constraint was to hold women-only and men-only peace clubs: women felt they were in a safer space to be able to share their thoughts openly.

Based on NSRP’s experience of facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms and events, women’s involvement can be effectively deployed to bring about more gender-sensitive outcomes through three different approaches, as set out in the info-graphic below.



*Figure 2: Involving women in multi-stakeholder platforms: moving from inclusion to empowerment.*

The NSRP experience has found that it is necessary to **influence participation at all three levels for maximum impact**. Gender inclusion must be mainstreamed throughout the process, rather than being treated as a tokenistic ‘add-on’ in multi-stakeholder processes.

**More broadly, intentional approaches to addressing power imbalances help ensure direct involvement of affected communities.** NSRP recognised that not all stakeholders who engage with each other for peacebuilding are on an equal footing. For example, poor communities may find it challenging to engage representatives from big oil companies in an equal manner, as observed during the convening of a multi-stakeholder platform to tackle conflict around oil spills in the Delta. NSRP responded by suggesting the development of terms of reference to which participants were required to adhere. This ensured that marginalised community groups had the same level of say as large oil company representatives in meetings.

## Policy and Practice

**The requirements to report on gender and conflict activities helped keep a focus on implementation of gender and conflict sensitivity in practice, not just in theory.** Creating both the right reporting requirements and space for discussion ensured better uptake of gender and conflict sensitivity in policies and practices of partner organisations. However, in some partner documents, reporting on gender and conflict sensitive practices only goes as far as acknowledging the issues, without evidence of demonstrable action taken. It would have been useful to work more closely with partners to explain what information was needed regarding actions.

**Conducting conflict-sensitive research required careful attention to a wide range of methodological and linguistic issues.** NSRP’s work with partner organisations was designed to result in inclusive and conflict sensitive research: critical issues so that everybody in the community/institute felt included were choice of words, language, timing of visit to communities, selection of interviewees, ensuring participation, and guidance on qualitative and quantitative approaches. Language was a particularly important issue when looking at issues of violence in the North East, where terminology is loaded.

**Case study:** NSRP does not use the term 'Boko Haram,' a label assigned to the group by the media, usage of which has become widespread, including in the UK. Not only does this term perpetuate particular stereotypes of the group that reduces complexity to a simplistic message, but it is deeply resented by members of the group itself. NSRP rather uses the nearest to a neutral term that exists. This is the original name of the group: Jama'atu Ahli Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (which can be translated as 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad') with the acronym JAS as a shorthand. This more neutral term is essential for a peace and reconciliation approach.

**Peer research was an effective way to promote inclusivity and gender sensitivity in policy and practice.** As part of the research output area, NSRP trained women's groups and disability groups to conduct peer research on gender and inclusion. This was effective in empowering communities and providing voice to marginalised groups. It helped maximise the extent to which the research was able to communicate the needs of marginalised groups.

NSRP found that adopting a conflict sensitive lens was new to some people, so while they saw the value in conflict sensitivity, it took time to establish capacity in order to allow partners to adopt the approaches required.

**Case study:** In 2015, Inclusive Friends and NSRP published What Violence Means to Us: Women with Disabilities Speak. This study was designed and conducted by women with disabilities, with technical and financial assistance from NSRP. This arrangement meant women with disabilities led the research process. The women with whom they spoke were more willing and able to talk with 'women like them' which improved the quality of research findings. It also ensured that change started before the report was even completed, with women with disabilities gaining the confidence and skills to conduct research and being seen differently by the communities concerned.

**Replicating successful approaches in States with similar socio-economic context was very effective.** For example, when partners saw successful instances of gender sensitisation in states with a similar socio-economic context, it was easier to promote uptake and replication of such approaches. Nevertheless, when it came to implementation, it was harder to promote uptake of gender sensitivity as compared to conflict sensitivity. This was often due to cultural and religious views and a difficulty in seeing the value of adopting such approaches. However, this was usually overcome by engaging directly and consistently with stakeholders and demonstrating the value of gender inclusion and its role in peacebuilding – the latter being a goal that everyone can get behind.

**According to a separate analysis of NSRP's collaboration with DFID programmes in Nigeria, NSRP's support in adopting more conflict sensitive practices was effective, but depended heavily on a number of key factors including implementing partner buy-in and programming cycles.** Depending on where the project was in its lifecycle affected the extent to which there was appetite or ability to adopt such practices. If the programme was in a phase of programme redesign, it was easier to build in conflict sensitive practices. It appeared that if clear follow-on programming is already secured, programmes are less incentivised to adopt the learning from the conflict sensitivity support into the programme. In contrast, if the programme has been given clear guidance from DFID that the re-design explicitly needs to be conflict sensitive, there is a greater incentive for programmes to adopt the learning from the technical assistance. Lastly, senior management buy-in was crucial for meaningful uptake of the learning, fostering wider staff engagement and ownership with potentially powerful results.

A separate paper reviewing NSRP's technical assistance on conflict sensitivity to other DFID funded programmes details these findings in more detail.<sup>3</sup>

## Analysis

**Regular stakeholder, conflict and power analysis was paramount.** For example, understanding the shifting political landscape around elections, or changes in government institutions and their leadership, can have a direct impact at local and community level. It is also important to understand the interrelation of changes at different scales. For example, a change in government or policy at federal level can impact many communities in a local area. This speaks to the need for integrating multiple levels of political economy analysis.

Such initiatives were made possible by NSRP partners regularly undertaking stakeholder and conflict analysis in the regions in which they operate. This identifies decision makers, enablers, and blockers, etc. It also maps the relationships between these stakeholders. This stakeholder analysis is done quarterly. In the context of a shifting stakeholder environment and conflict landscape, this high **frequency of analysis was found to be very beneficial.**

## Summary of Lessons and Recommendations

It was found that the potential impacts of training partner organisations is far reaching, if supported with the opportunity to implement what was learnt. Most impact was seen where NSRP put into place mechanisms to help continued capacity building, monitoring, and support of partner organisations.

Local context always played a key role in determining the uptake of conflict and gender sensitive practices. Programme implementers need to use approaches such as awareness raising, sensitisation and community outreach to effectively mainstream gender inclusion into policy and practice when working with different stakeholders. Community engagement in particular should be done within the context of local customs and values, along with communication of the benefits of gender inclusion.

An astute and granular political economy analysis of conflict environments also proved to be very effective in establishing and protecting the viability of project interventions.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Impact Assessment: Conflict Sensitivity Technical Assistance,' NSRP, April 2017