HOW-TO GUIDE
Setting Up and Running Women, Peace and Security Networks

Conflict, Gender and Women, Peace and Security Networks in Nigeria

Nigeria is currently facing significant levels of instability; the worst the country has experienced since the civil war of 1967-70. Poor governance, systematic and geographical inequalities, structural and cultural violence, unequal representation among decision makers, and violent resolution of conflict due to poor conflict management mechanisms, have all contributed to Nigeria's current ranking as the most violent country in Africa that is not at war as of 2014.

Conflict and insecurity has left women and girls increasingly vulnerable to violence, and exacerbated the harmful traditional and cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality. Nigeria is a deeply patriarchal society in which women and girls struggle to access social, economic and political power that is equal to their male counterparts. This entrenched inequality, combined with a culture of silence around VAWG, inadequate prevention and response mechanisms, and subsequent widespread impunity for perpetrators, means that VAWG is endemic across Nigeria. In spite of the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, there is typically little to no female representation in formal conflict management and peacebuilding processes. This is in spite of the fact that women in Nigeria often play an informal role in resolving conflicts at the household and family level. Girls in particular are consistently excluded from public life and decision making.

The DFID-funded Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) aimed to reduce the impact of violence on women and girls and increase their influence within peacebuilding processes. In 2013, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development (MOWSD) and with NSRP support, launched Nigeria's first National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The NAP ran from 2013 to 2016, and became Nigeria's overarching policy for reducing the impact of violence on women and girls and promoting female involvement in peacebuilding. It focused on 5 pillars: prevention, protection, promotion (of the NAP, including ownership and funding), participation, and prosecution. A refreshed NAP, which includes emergent issues such as countering violent extremism and crisis management, was presented at the 2017 UN Commission on the Status of Women and will run from 2017 to 2020.

Women Peace and Security Networks: Rationale and Purpose

The Women, Peace and Security Networks (WPSNs) were part of NSRP's efforts to support the implementation of the NAP. They were made up of organisations and actors who are working on issues broadly related to the WPS agenda, with the objective of translating Nigeria's NAP from policy into practice. WPSNs had the potential to compliment the work of supply-side actors such as MoWASD, through domesticating and monitoring the NAP at state and community, as well as federal, level.

They were also a means of promoting awareness, networking, information sharing and collaboration between like-minded or thematically related organisations, and provided smaller, more localised or lower capacity organisations with the opportunity to learn from their larger counterparts. The WPSNs therefore served the dual purpose of promoting the NAP's implementation externally, while also building the individual and collective capacity of network members and encouraging improved future WPS-related programming.

Setting Up and Running WPSNs

NSRP established WPSNs in each of its focus states (Bayelsa, Borno, Delta, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, Rivers, Yobe), plus one network at the federal level. The below steps draw on the experiences of NSRP during the setup process, with task owners underlined.

1)   <u>Regional and central programme team</u>: *Initial state-level capacity assessment and stakeholder consultations.* These were coordinated by regional teams in focus states, with support from the central team, who reached out to all civil society organisations known to be working on issues broadly related to the WPS agenda. This was based on institutional knowledge and a mapping exercise of relevant actors by state. The process served to advertise the WPSN initiative and generate the interest of CSOs, while also allowing programme staff to better understand the capacity of CSOs within each state.

2)   <u>Regional/central programme team</u>: *Second round stakeholder consultations.* Following the initial consultations, NSRP invited CSOs who were interested in the WPSN concept to reach out to through their own networks to other relevant CSOs that had not previously been contacted. This helped to widen outreach beyond the project's own network, and to further raise the profile of the WPS initiative. Organisations had the option to sign up to WPSNs following this second consultation round.

3)   <u>WPSNs</u>: *Election of network leadership*. The network members were responsible for electing a convening CSO (responsible for coordinating quarterly network meetings), a chairperson, and a network secretary. The coordinating CSO held their position for the duration of the programme, while it was up to individual networks to determine if and when they would hold elections for the roles of chair and secretary.

4)   <u>Regional/central programme team</u>: *Identification of Network Financial Conduit*. The programme team was responsible for identifying an organisation through whom limited financial support for each network would be channeled. In some cases this was the convening CSO, where the organisation was already known and trusted by NSRP as an implementing partner; in others, it was a different network member, whom NSRP assessed to have the capacity to distribute the funds effectively.

5)   <u>Regional/central programme team</u>: *Training of networks on the NAP and WPS agenda*. In order to fulfil their mandate, network members need to fully understand the NAP's international significance and local relevance. Depending on the existing capacity of network members, the programme regional and central team delivered either a series of sessions to members; a one-off training of trainers to the convening CSO, who would then deliver training to the rest of the network; or provide guidance to the convening CSO, who would subsequently deliver training to the network. The programme team were then available throughout implementation to support networks with additional training and guidance as required, based on their own observations or the requests of WPSNs.

Network Structure and Membership

The WPSNs were designed to have a loose, informal, flexible membership structure. No membership fees were required, and membership fluctuated according to organisations' availability and willingness to engage in meetings and activities.

The rigidity of the networks' management structure varied: in some cases, networks observed a formal management hierarchy, while others were managed in a more fluid and horizontal manner; some networks held regular elections for the positions of chair and secretary, while others continued with individuals elected at formation. WPSNs were not required to formally register, however one chose to register as a legal entity.

Networks typically comprised of around 25 members – a number that organically emerged across the networks, and which proved optimum in terms of achieving both inclusivity and manageability. Any organisation working on areas broadly related to the WPS agenda was eligible to join, with networks typically including a cross-section of the following:

- Community-based organisations
- Civil society organisations, including youth organisations
- Faith-based organisations
- International NGOs
- Professional associations and national umbrella organisations
- Government Ministries

WPSN Activities

Networks planned and implemented activities to improve awareness and understanding of the NAP amongst duty bearers, public officials and communities, and monitored its implementation against the 5 NAP pillars. They also spearheaded efforts to develop and implement State and Local Government Action Plans (SAPs and LAPs). Activities related to 3 mandated areas, and were reviewed and planned at quarterly network meetings:

Domestication: Networks worked with the MOWSD at state level to develop SAPs, which tailored the focus areas and indicators of the NAP to the specific issues of that state. All 8 states now have SAPs in place, while LAPs are in place in Faggae (Kano) and Wase (Plateau). The development of both SAPs and LAPs is included under the 2017-2020 NAP, as is the development of Zonal Action Plans.

Sensitisation: Activities were primarily aligned to four international days: International Women's Day; International Widows' Day; International Peace day; and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence. Activities included community outreach on issues such as intimate partner violence, trafficking and communal violence; awareness-raising visits to Internally Displaced Persons camps; and engagement with security actors to promote women's enrolment in the police and military.

All activities were designed by the WPSNs; the activity descriptions were submitted along with a detailed budget to the NSRP central team. NSRP would then provide guidance where necessary to adjust or realign proposed activities, which would not receive funding without NSRP sign-off.

Monitoring: WPSNs monitored implementation of the NAP (or SAP) against an NSRP-designed framework that reflected the NAP's 5 priority areas.

Programme Support to WPSNs

Financial: This was minimal, in order to dissuade organisations from attending for financial gain and to promote a spirit of volunteerism. Support provided was limited to the following:

- Members' transportation to quarterly meetings;
- Communication costs associated with organising quarterly meetings, provided to convening CSO, including refreshments and stationary; and,
- Funding for networks to use in implementing approved activities.

Training and technical assistance: training was provided to newly formed networks on the NAP and WPS agenda. Central and state programme teams were then available to provide ad hoc guidance to networks as needed. The programme team also provided feedback and guidance on proposed network activities, which required NSRP signoff before receiving funding.

<u>Networking and profile-raising opportunities</u>: all networks received support to attend quarterly state programme meetings, while individual networks were commonly represented at external meetings. For example, the programme supported the Chair of the Kano State WPSN to travel to Katsina to attend and present at the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325.

Lessons Learnt

<u>Loose structure promotes responsiveness and flexibility.</u> By not imposing membership fees, joining deadlines or limits on membership numbers, WPSNs were inclusive, reflected the WPS landscape of their state, and evolved in line with emergent issues. This flexibility means networks could easily support the work of future stakeholders. They have already been adopted by the UN office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS) as members of the Nigeria working group on WPS.

<u>Limited provision of support promotes sustainability, but not necessarily quick wins.</u> Activities were membership-driven, in line with activities prioritised in the NAP/SAP and prospects for continuation after NSRP are high for networks with a strong volunteering spirit. However, the NSRP decision to limit financial support meant the scale and speed of implementation was often reduced where resources were limited.

<u>Benefits of establishing networks go beyond the direct WPSN mandate.</u> WPSNs promoted synergies and cross-working within the WPS space. Smaller organisations were able to learn from larger or higher capacity counterparts, and to gain exposure to activities and actors beyond their previous geographical or mandated reach. WPSNs also promoted joint advocacy horizontally (amongst likeminded organisations within a certain geographical area) and vertically (connecting local programming with state, national and international activities).

Spotlight: Successful Development of State Action Plans

State Action Plans are the primary mechanism through which Nigeria's NAP is localised at the state level. SAPs are critical in terms of translating the overarching goals of the national plan into objectives that are contextually relevant and cognisant of local challenges.

WPSNs were critical in spearheading the roll-out of SAPs in NSRP states. In some cases, networks spearheaded the SAP at all stages, from development and government endorsement to the securing of an allocated budget for its implementation. In states where SAPs already existed, WPSNs acted as a powerful advocacy vehicle for raising awareness of, and financial support for, the SAP. The SAP concept has been incorporated into the refreshed 2017-2020 NAP, and a mechanism such as WPSNs would be an effective means of ensuring this component of the new NAP is effectively implemented.

Summary: Potential Benefits and Key Ingredients of Successful WPSNs

Establishing WPS networks can serve as an effective means of promoting the WPS agenda, particularly at the state level and below. Based on NSRP's experience, the WPS networks have the potential to:

- Help to translate the NAP from national policy to something that is relevant, understood and implemented at state level, including through spearheading the development of contextually-tailored policies in the form of State and Local Action Plans
- Bring together and forge relationships between actors working on the WPS agenda, to build cooperation and collaboration and a sense of shared purpose
- Build the capacity of smaller and more localised organisations, whilst simultaneously raising awareness of the work going on at the lowest grass-roots level amongst larger CSOs
- Raise awareness of the WPS agenda in its broadest sense at a local level

NSRP's experience is that it is critical to take the following elements into account in order to establish and run WPSNs effectively:

- <u>Purpose and strategy:</u> clearly articulated mission statement, paired with flexible approach towards achieving stated goal
- <u>Membership:</u> inclusive, broad, open to all organisations broadly focused on WPS-relevant areas; no (or minimal) membership fees or deadlines for registration
- <u>Technical support:</u> technical support, both in initial training and on an ongoing basis, but channelled through member organisations where possible
- <u>Financial support</u>: minimal, covering only administration/transport costs and activity implementation