

Country Update

Nigeria

(February 22, 2021)

Context and government response:

As of February 22, 2021, Nigeria has registered 152,074 cases of COVID- 19, including 1,839 deaths. In Nigeria, the daily number of COVID-19 cases saw a sharp rise in April 2020, and then stabilized in June 2020, with another increase indicating a second wave of cases in late 2020.

In January 2021, President Buhari signed into law the COVID-19 Health Protection Regulations, which aim to prevent the spread of the virus with measures including restrictions on gatherings, compulsory use of face masks in public places and mandatory compliance with COVID-19 treatment protocols. The regulations will be fully enforced by the Nigeria Police Force and other state authorities, and violations will be punishable as offences under the Quarantine Act.

Participants of a research project conducted by Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center (WARDC) noted “a lack of integration of a gender perspective into the Government of Nigeria’s COVID-19 response and recovery planning at all levels”. A rapid gender analysis by CARE in Northeast Nigeria indicates that although women are included in COVID-19 committees in the region, they are not in decision-making roles, which means that protections for women and girls and gender-sensitive considerations are inadequate.

Summary of impacts:



The impact of COVID-19 on conflict in Nigeria is not easily discernible, and the levels of violence in Nigerian states worst hit by the Boko Haram insurgency overall seem to remain unchanged during the period of COVID-19. During March, April and May 2020, banditry against villages and settlements, as well as farmer-pastoralist communal conflicts, continued in numerous states. While there are various differing accounts on the reported levels of violence and its impact on the civilian population, the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency and other violence related to farmer-pastoralist conflicts has left hundreds of thousands internally displaced persons (IDPs) especially vulnerable to food insecurity during COVID-19 lockdown measures. In IDP camps in Northeast Nigeria, CARE reports that 49% of people have seen reduced access to services since interstate movement restrictions have limited the delivery of humanitarian aid; which has in turn resulted in increased rates of transactional sex and sexual exploitation of women and girls. However, it is important to note that the contraction of the Nigerian economy resulting in worsened hardships for a wide segment of the population may have further longer term impacts on the levels of conflict.

Furthermore, there have been reports of brutality and abuses of power by police forces related to the COVID-19 situation, as the Nigeria Human Rights Commission has documented cases of extrajudicial killings by security forces that were enforcing the lockdown. There have been numerous reports of girls, pregnant women and nurses being harassed, assaulted or raped by policemen that were supposedly enforcing the COVID-19 lockdown.

In October 2020, a series of nation-wide youth-led demonstrations erupted against police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force, as well as the “inadequacies of law enforcement agencies to bring the perpetrators of abuses to justice”. GNWP released a Statement of Solidarity with the #EndSARS Protests, with support from its partner, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)-Nigeria, urging the government to recognize and address the compounded impacts of COVID-19 and multiple conflicts across the country on women and youth participation in decision-making.

A report by UN Women has also noted that the economic recession has had a disproportionate impact on women, as they are over-represented in the informal sector and rely on microenterprises for day-to-day survival. A briefing paper signed by 34 civil society organizations on gender and COVID-19 in Nigeria also notes that numerous forms of sexual-



and gender-based violence (SGBV) have surged during the pandemic, including intimate partner violence, violence against girls and violence against sex workers pushed into more precarious working conditions.

Responses led by women:

In Nigeria, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) has funded local women's civil society organizations to counter the impacts of COVID-19 and sustain their work during the pandemic. Gender Equality, Peace and Development Center (GEPaDC) is working to strengthen women's leadership in COVID-19 prevention through the dissemination of accurate public health information, improved hygiene facilities in targeted IDP camps and advocacy training for women's groups. IYALI Community Development Association (ICDA) is working to build staff capacity in technical areas related to COVID-19 in order to ensure that the urgent needs of grassroots communities can be addressed throughout the pandemic and beyond.

GNWP's local partners, WANEP-Nigeria has also implemented numerous COVID-19 response activities and targeted advocacy on the gender impacts of the pandemic. Their response included the creation of an online survey to document incidences of SGBV for referral and intervention, distribution of food packages, face masks and hand sanitizers to vulnerable communities targeting widows, women and children and a COVID-19 sensitization program to combat misinformation. WANEP-Nigeria also set up a radio program on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Nigeria. The community radio program called "Let's Talk COVID-19 and SGBV" started in July 2020 and provided a platform to educate women on existing policies against SGBV, but also for women to speak about issues related to SGBV and to mobilize service providers.

On October 2, 2020, WANEP-Nigeria, represented by Patience Ikpeh Obaulo, advocated for targeted funding for local women peacebuilders at an Ambassadorial-level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission. WANEP-Nigeria also advocated for increasing access to online platforms for peacebuilders to and local communities and organizations, especially during COVID-19.



Other women-led efforts to respond to COVID-19 have used their existing networks and innovative strategies to continue their work, or expand the scope of their work to include gender-sensitive humanitarian response during the pandemic. The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) partners of the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) have also mobilized to respond to the social impacts of COVID-19. For example, Dr. Fatima Akilu founded a 'COVID-19 Partners in Mental Health' collaboration group for psychiatric, psychological and social work bodies and NGOs to provide free online mental health services across Nigeria. Attah Sisters Helping Hand Foundation (ASHHF) has also worked to document cases of SGBV during COVID-19 and record the testimonies of women and girls in local communities, including 20 cases of rape of minors recorded by the organization's Community Peace Observer's Unit in April and May 2020. However, the organization, like many others, faced challenges in carrying out this work as movement restrictions limited their reach, court systems had halted proceedings, there is an increased burdens of case for all women, especially women leaders, and a lack of access to the internet to continue online activities with communities.

