Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

How Women's Peace Groups Help Advance Gender, Peace, and Security in Nigeria

MARCH 2024

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Executive Summary

Conflicts in Nigeria have become increasingly complex over time due to a number of contributing factors, including limited socio-economic opportunities and resource-based and identity-based conflicts. The interconnected nature of these conflict drivers and the exclusion of women, youth, and other marginalized groups complicate response and peacebuilding efforts. Effective implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda at the local level can advance locally-led, gender responsive, and inclusive peacebuilding efforts, specifically through the meaningful inclusion and leadership of women. As Nigeria is currently developing its third National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on the WPS agenda, valuable lessons regarding the integral role of women's groups in addressing WPS priorities and gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding efforts should be considered. The experiences of the women's groups established by Mercy Corps through the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) Program, a peacebuilding program implemented in the northwest and north central regions of Nigeria, provide such valuable knowledge.

To identify the lessons from CIPP's women's groups, Mercy Corps conducted a mixed-methods research study in 2023 focusing on the program's Women's Critical Discussion Groups (WCDGs) and Women Peacebuilding Councils (WPCs). The study identifies novel evidence and lessons that could contribute to the development and impact of Nigeria's third NAP and the country's overall gender, peace, and security (GPS) efforts, particularly at the community level. In addition to the unique approach and contributions of the WCDGs and WPCs to community-level peacebuilding, the study's findings identify three distinct ways in which strategies utilized by the WCDGs and WPCs expand GPS efforts at the community level, specifically: (1) women's groups fill important gaps that other peace and security actors cannot fill; (2) effective GPS efforts prioritize youth engagement and intersectionality; and (3) collaboration and support from other peace and security actors, particularly male actors and security agencies, contribute to their success. These findings lead to valuable recommendations for government and GPS actors developing Nigeria's next NAP (such as the mobilization and allocation of sufficient resources for women's peace groups) and for civil society actors focusing on GPS (such as the development and support of new or existing women's groups, and the importance of connecting peacebuilding programs to other sectors).

Introduction

Nigeria faces a growing complexity of intracommunal and intercommunal conflicts in its northern regions, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast region, conflicts between herders and farmers in the North Central region, and banditry in the Northwest region. The drivers of these conflicts are complicated and relate to multiple dimensions of a person's identity, including ethnicity, livelihood, religion, and one's status as indigenous or a settler.[1] Women and children in particular suffer a number of consequences in these conflicts, including internal displacement and poor food security.[2]

Youth are particularly vulnerable to suffering the consequences of this violence. Young men, for example, often become targets of gang-related violence since they are assumed to be gang members. Additionally, young women face gender-based violence (GBV) and many have become widows, thus faced with the challenges of sustaining a household. The recurring violence has negatively impacted educational and livelihood opportunities for youth, including the closure of schools, which will significantly impact their personal and professional development and growth.[3]

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

The interconnected nature of the root causes and drivers of these conflicts and the exclusion of women, youth, and other marginalized groups further complicate responses and peacebuilding efforts. Yet global evidence shows that "women's participation [in peace processes] increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20%."[4] While women's political representation has increased in other countries in the Sahel, such as Mali (29% of seats held by women in national parliament in 2022) and Niger (26% of seats), this is not the case in Nigeria where women's political representation has decreased since 2011 (4% of seats).[5] Harmful gender norms have slowed down Nigeria's progress on gender, peace, and security (GPS)[6] due to prevalent patriarchal gender norms that interfere with women's political participation and lead to their discrimination and marginalization in peace processes at the local, state, and national levels.[7] Gender and gender norms shape one's access to and control over resources, and the ability to fulfill one's rights. As such, gender also influences the drivers and impacts of conflict, meaning that the experiences of women and girls in conflict settings and peacebuilding greatly differ from those of men and boys.[8] Additionally, women's intersectional identities further influence their access to and participation in politics, decision making, and peacebuilding experiences as their gender

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[1] Sheely and Hakiman, 2021.

[2] Joint Shadow Report of CEDAW Committee, 2017.

[3] Sloan, et al, 2023.

[4] UN Women, 2015.

[5] The World Bank, 2023; Nkereuwem, 2023.

[6] Recognizing that women are not a homogenous group and the social and political ecosystems in which women exist, Mercy Corps has decided to take 'a Gender, Peace, and Security' approach to the WPS agenda. This approach recognizes the intersectional identities of diverse women around the world and how these will shape their priorities, values, and perspectives regarding peace and conflict. It also acknowledges the importance of understanding and transforming gender norms, supporting positive masculinities, and creating enabling environments for people of all gender identities to live freely, safely, and peacefully.

[7] Donli, 2020.

[8] UN Women Nigeria, 2020.

intersects with their different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic identities to produce particular barriers, opportunities, and expectations.

> ## OVERVIEW OF PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITIES WITHIN CIPP

- *Training local leaders to improve mediation skills*
- *Early Warning-Early Response (EWER) mechanisms*
- *Conducting inter-ethnic, inter-faith, intra-faith, ethno-religious, and policy dialogues*
- *Designing and airing gender responsive social media campaigns and radio programming*
- *Working with parents and teachers to recognize risk factors in young people and promote equitable practices*
- *Creating/Strengthening women's peacebuilding councils and initiatives*
- *Mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm through capacity building for civil society organizations (CSOs) and community peace structures*

Advancing the country's implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is a way to effectively strengthen the critical role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, which is often neglected, and to address Nigeria's growing conflicts and insecurities. Women, like their male counterparts, should be viewed as powerful agents of change who can significantly contribute to peace and security efforts within their communities.[9] Advancing the WPS agenda would also directly support the main goal of Nigeria's National Gender Policy, which is "to build a just society devoid of discrimination, where the needs and concerns of women, men, girls, boys, and other vulnerable groups are mainstreamed equitably into all sectors of national development."[10] Inclusion of these groups in peacebuilding and peace processes is a critical step in broadening space for inclusivity in peace processes, specifically by better addressing their concerns and embedding their meaningful participation in decision making processes in the long-term. This can also begin to address perceptions and experiences of inequalities and marginalization that are often at the root cause of conflict in Nigeria.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, passed in 2000, underscores the importance of women's meaningful participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and decision making and highlights the impact of conflict on women and girls. Through women's participation and representation, the needs of women and girls can be directly incorporated into peace negotiations, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding efforts.[11] Several countries, including Nigeria, have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to address the objectives of UNSCR 1325. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs provides oversight for the implementation and reporting of the WPS agenda in Nigeria, and it is through this Ministry that the Nigerian government develops its NAPs.

In 2013, Nigeria localized UNSCR 1325 through its first NAP. A second NAP was launched in 2017, building on the gains of the first NAP, while reviewing the changes in contexts and the emerging trends relating to

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[9] Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, 2017.

[10] Federal Ministry of Women and Gender Affairs, 2021, page xviii.

[11] United Nations Security Council, 2000.

conflict and the protection of women's rights and support for their participation in peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, and the prevention of wartime sexual violence. Currently, Nigeria is working towards developing its third NAP.

Nigeria's NAP is unique due to its localization at the state and local levels. Specifically, the development of State Action Plans (SAPs) and Local Action Plans (LAPs) are informed by community-level action plans, highlighting the importance of sub-national plans for UNSCR 1325.[12] Since the launch of Nigeria's second NAP, 11 States have localized the WPS agenda with a SAP, while five Local Government Areas (LGAs) have also published their LAPs.

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

Despite national efforts and the strengths of UNSCR 1325, one criticism of the resolution is its lack of focus on *community*-level peacebuilding. Previous Mercy Corps research in the Sahel region also highlights the lack of evidence and learning from community-level WPS programs.[13] While civil society plays an integral role in advancing the WPS agenda, particularly in areas less filled by state and national level actors,[14] the formal and informal roles of women-led peacebuilding groups developed *by* and *within* communities need to be further explored. To highlight the work of the Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) Program, Mercy Corps conducted a research study that provides illustrative evidence about the critical contributions of women's peace groups to GPS and peacebuilding efforts.
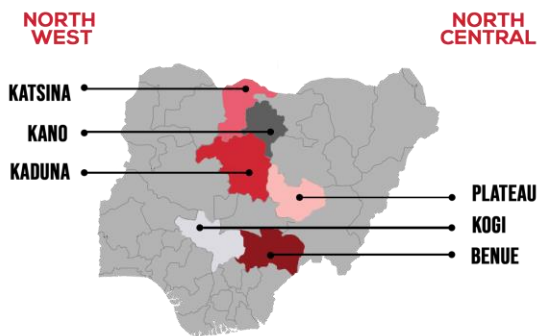
Map 1. CIPP Intervention States

Implemented in six states in Nigeria's Northwest (Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina States) and North Central (Kogi, Benue, and Plateau States) regions and funded by USAID, CIPP is a unique peacebuilding program in that it reflects and provides an integrated response to the evolving nature of violence in the target areas. This includes a more intentional approach to engage diverse women in conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peacebuilding processes, specifically through two women's groups created under CIPP – the Women's Critical Discussion Groups (WCDGs), and the Women Peacebuilding Councils (WPCs). The WCDGs are community-based and connected to a weekly radio peace program that aims to deepen the ability of women to engage in peacebuilding, conflict mitigation, and the prevention of violent extremism by strengthening their capacity to discuss conflict issues in a strategic and solutions-focused way. The WPCs are based at the local-government level and provide a platform for diverse women from the community, local, and state levels to collaboratively identify and offer strategies for addressing conflict prevention and mitigation needs and preventing violent extremism in a supportive environment. The women in these two groups have substantive roles and leadership in peace processes in their communities. Their activities include peace and conflict resolution education and awareness, mediation of disputes, providing

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[12] Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, 2017.

[13] Radhakrishnan, Santara, and Sheely, 2023.

[14] Newby and O'Malley, 2021.

early warning indicators of violent conflicts, and advocating for greater attention to women's peace and security issues, including breaking down social and political barriers to ensure their involvement in peacebuilding decision making processes.

It is important to note that throughout the work of CIPP, the principles of "Conflict Sensitivity"[15] and "Do No Harm"[16] were used to design and implement all activities to avoid conflict between the intervention activities and the culture of the communities, and to mitigate the risk of backlash against women peacebuilders, as well as leverage opportunities to maximize the impact of the program's peacebuilding outcomes. Several assessments and evaluations were conducted at the start of the project, including a gender assessment, to understand the context and cultures of the intervention communities, including gender-based constraints and opportunities, and to inform the program design and implementation of activities. The Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy for CIPP incorporates relevant US government policies on gender

Key Study Findings

- **Unique characteristics** differentiate the Women Critical Discussion Groups (WCDGs) and Women Peacebuilding Councils (WPCs) from other women's groups, specifically:
  - The **diversity** of their membership and the value placed on inclusion.
  - The **variety of peacebuilding activities and services** provided that target all segments of the population, including parents, families, government actors, CSOs, traditional leaders, and religious leaders, and that promote social cohesion and trust.
  - The **mentorship opportunities** available to their members with other women's groups and with other women in leadership positions.

- **Three key successes** of the WCDGs and WPCs showcase their unique contributions to peacebuilding, specifically:
  - The specialized **interest-based negotiation and mediation (IBNM)** skills women learned and implemented in their mediation work.
  - The **strategic use of the media**, especially the radio, to expand peacebuilding education and awareness.
  - The **Parenting for Peace Initiative** developed to engage parents and youth influencers and promote a multistakeholder partnership in preventing youth engagement in risky behaviors.

- **Lessons** from the experiences of the WCDGs and WPCs that can **inform Nigeria's next National Action Plan (NAP)** are:
  - Women's groups **fill important gaps** that other peace and security actors cannot fill, such as helping young women and men who drop out of school and increasing the visibility of women peacebuilders by advocating for their inclusion and leadership opportunities, but more resources and designated offices for the groups would strengthen this work.
  - **Collaboration and support** from other peace and security actors, particularly other male actors and community leaders, contribute to the success of these women's groups, but opportunities to include women members in male-only groups, like the Traditional Council, should be explored.
  - Effective GPS efforts **prioritize youth engagement and intersectionality**, including engagement with at-risk youth and their parents and other youth influencers, though some believe these activities should engage youth at an even younger age.

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[15] Conflict sensitivity means considering the interaction between the program intervention and the wider context to ensure a program does not exacerbate tensions between groups.

[16] Within conflict sensitivity is the principle of Do No Harm, which "is a core principle that Mercy Corps staff applies in all of its work. The Do No Harm (DNH) approach aims to understand the interaction between the program intervention and the wider regional and country context by asking two key questions: 1) what are the impacts (unintended or intended) of the program, and 2) how can we increase positive impacts and decrease negative impacts? DNH can and should be applied by program staff during the start of any program and referenced throughout the life of said program. DNH utilizes a contextual analysis that looks at the dividers and tensions within an area as well as the connectors and local capacities for peace." Source: Mercy Corps. (2016). Mercy Corps' Peace and Conflict Sector Approach. Mercy Corps. Page 12. Retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/PeaceAndConflictSectorApproach.pdf.

equality, women's empowerment, and social inclusion, as well as the principles of the WPS agenda that promote inclusivity and women's leadership in peace processes.

This study identifies novel evidence and lessons from a Nigerian peacebuilding program that could contribute to the development of a high-impact third NAP in Nigeria and the country's overall GPS efforts, particularly at the community level. By highlighting the unique approach and contributions of the WCDGs and WPCs established under CIPP, this report presents three distinct ways in which the work of the CIPP women's groups demonstrates effective strategies at the community level to expand GPS efforts, particularly through collaborative efforts with existing peace and security actors. Considering these findings, the report then provides recommendations for civil society, policymakers, and other stakeholders in Nigeria as they develop the country's next NAP and strategize further GPS efforts at the local, state, and national levels.

Recommendations from the Findings

For Government and GPS Actors Contributing to Nigeria's Next NAP
- **Mobilize resources** for women's groups to lead in the development of community-level action plans.
- Within the LAPs, SAPs, and NAP, incorporate **strategies for accountability** for monitoring progress on implementation, such as regular documentation and reporting by the NAP implementing actors on their activities.
- **Prioritize youth engagement** with both young women and young men as an integral component of addressing current and future threats to WPS and GPS.
- **Allocation of sufficient resources** for the implementation of the NAP, including knowledge exchange around gender mainstreaming in peace and security processes.

For Civil Society Actors in Nigeria
- **Include community-level women's groups** in the regional meetings to plan the NAP.
- Encourage the **development and support of women's groups** to participate in community, state, and national level governance structures and processes, including by providing women's groups with funding and mentoring opportunities.
- **Promote education and awareness** on the value of women's groups and gender inclusion in peacebuilding by highlighting the expertise of women's groups in community-level conflict management, the importance of transforming harmful gender norms by addressing power imbalances, gender inequalities, and toxic masculinity, and by strengthening collaborations between local/grassroot women's groups and national/regional peacebuilding mechanisms.
- **Connect peacebuilding to other sectors**, especially economic opportunities.

Methodology

This was a mixed-methods study that aimed to understand how lessons from the CIPP program's women's groups can further advance Nigeria's GPS efforts, particularly at the community-level. The main research question for this study follows: *How do community-level women's peace groups help to advance gender, peace, and security efforts in Nigeria?* Objectives for this study include: understanding the role that women and women's groups play in community-level peacebuilding; understanding how collaboration among stakeholders affects peacebuilding and addresses the root causes of violence; and understanding the factors that strengthen the work of women's groups to achieve their desired outcomes. The Mercy Corps

Nigeria Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) team collected primary data from June 2023 to August 2023 in CIPP's six states of operation with a cross-selection of potential beneficiaries sampled from 11 LGAs, as listed in Table 1 below.

State	LGAs	
Benue	Buruku	Makurdi
Kaduna	Kaduna North	Kajuru
Kano	Kano Municipal	Nassarawa
Katsina	Katsina	
Kogi	Dekina	Lokoja
Plateau	Barkin Ladi	Bassa

TABLE 1. STUDY SITES: 11 LGAS WITHIN SIX STATES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used for this study. For the quantitative data collection, 100 surveys were administered using tablets in each of the six states (600 total) with households living in communities served by the WCDGs (90 surveys) and WPCs (10 surveys).[17] For the qualitative data collection, focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted. Two FGDs (one with members of the WCDG, and the other with members of the WPC) were held in each of the six states for a total of 12 FGDs, and eight KIIs in each of the six states for a total of 48 KIIs. The purposive sampling of the KIIs included leaders from the WCDGs, leaders from the WPCs, and representatives from the government, civil society, and other women's associations. Table 2 below summarizes the study methods and sampling.

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[17] Appendix B provides a profile of the survey respondents.

Method	Quantity per State	Selection Criteria	Total for 6 States
Survey	100	• 90 households within WCDG communities • 10 households within WPC communities	600
Focus Group Discussions	2	• 1 FGD with WCDG members • 1 FGD with WPC members	12
Key Informant Interviews	8	• 2 leaders of WCDGs • 2 leaders of WPCs • 4 representatives from other stakeholders: government agencies (LGAs and/or state levels), religious networks, civil society organizations, women's associations	48

TABLE 2. STUDY METHODS AND SAMPLING

All study participants gave verbal informed consent before data collection began. During the informed consent process, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants along with their role and responsibilities during the data collection. Participants were also ensured that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained and that their participation is completely voluntary and can end at any time. Data collection occurred in private, secure locations to ensure confidentiality for the participants. The collected data was anonymized so no identifiable information could lead back to any of the study participants and was stored in secure locations (either at a secure location within the Mercy Corps Nigeria offices, or on a password protected drive). The data collection team also ensured the implementation of Mercy Corps' safeguarding and Do No Harm principles throughout the study.

Characteristics of the WCDGs and WPCs

"The WPCs and WCDGs comprise [of] Christian and Muslim women collaborating to sustain peace in the community. They educate other women in having a voice and actively participate in peacebuilding. The WPCs and WCDGs have impacted the lives of [a] significant [number of] women, men, and youth in the community. They carry out activities such as dialogues, sensitization on peaceful coexisting… and conduct conflict sensitivity activities towards peaceful electioneering processes."

- Community Leader, Kano State

Before discussing the specific lessons from the WCDGs and WPCs that can inform Nigeria's GPS agenda, it is important to understand the unique characteristics of these women's groups within their communities. Previously, it was common practice for the communities where CIPP operates to sideline women from both formal and informal peacebuilding efforts. However, unlike other women's groups in Nigeria and the region overall, the WCDGs and WPCs have been able to *break down social norms and barriers* that restricted women from participation in peacebuilding. Through CIPP's support, the women's groups designed and self-facilitated conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. By doing so, the WCDGs and WPCs have become leaders within their communities in promoting peacebuilding and addressing threats to youth.

The CIPP program and the WCDGs and WPCs implemented unique strategies and approaches to break down social barriers and norms, which can serve as valuable models and guidance for the formation of other women's groups. Specifically, the approaches taken within CIPP were to ensure *diversity and inclusion* among the membership of the WCDGs and WPCs, provide a *variety of peacebuilding activities and services that were historically not led by women*, and foster *collaboration and mentorship* between and across the WCDGs and WPCs and with other influential women already in leadership positions.

Diversity and Inclusion

An essential feature of both the WCDGs and WPCs is their diverse membership with women from different ages, ethnicities, religions, education levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. When assembling the WCDGs and WPCs, an important criterion for all of the groups was ensuring the diversity of the members in order to accurately represent the communities they serve. Specifically, it was a deliberate effort to include Christians and Muslims, different ethnic groups, and people with disabilities (PWD) from within the communities.

Given the diverse nature of the groups, the members were hesitant to speak freely during the first couple of group meetings. Their low confidence was also related to their lack of, or limited, experience in peacebuilding and their perceived low status in the community. However, over time after some weeks of engagement and through continuous mentorship and capacity building trainings, the women started to gain confidence and interact more among each other, which led to improved trust and greater collaboration in identifying and addressing issues facing their communities.

The figures below highlight the diversity in ethnicity (Figures 1, 2, 3) and religion (Figure 4) among women's groups members in both the WCDGs and WPCs who participated in the study's FGDs. The states of Kaduna, Kogi, and Plateau had the most diverse membership of the six states in their WCDGs and WPCs (Figures 1, 2, 3).[18] Through this diversity, the WCDGs and WPCs not only better reflect the communities they serve, but they physically demonstrate the possibility and benefits of inter-ethnic and inter-religious collaboration towards peacebuilding.

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

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[18] Appendix A contains figures showing the ethnicities of the WCDGs and WPCs members in the states of Benue, Kano, and Katsina.

Figures 1, 2, 3. Ethnicity of WCDG and WPC Members in FGDs in Kaduna, Kogi, and Plateau
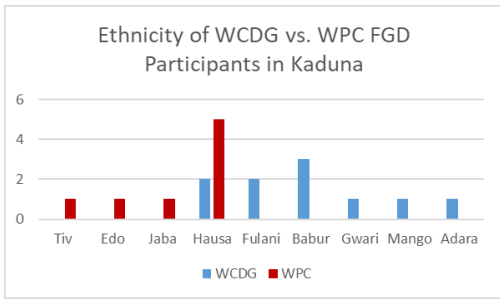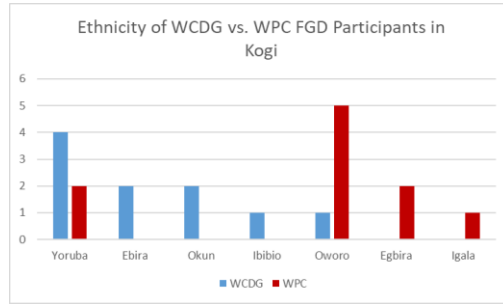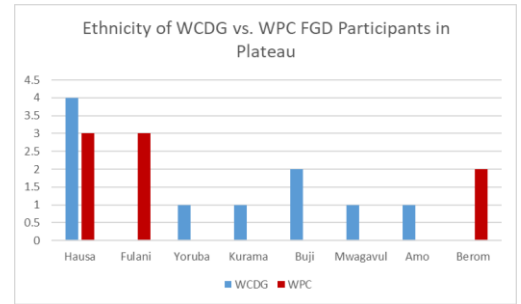

Figure 1. Kaduna State

Figure 2. Kogi State

Figure 3. Plateau State

> *"As you can see us here, there are Christians, and there are Muslims. There is no segregation, there is no difference. If we meet like this, we meet like sisters. So that is the most important thing that makes us different from other groups."*
>
> — WPC Member, Focus Group Discussion, Kaduna

Study participants felt that the diversity of the women's groups themselves contributes to fostering social cohesion and trust within their communities by acting as a bridge among certain divided ethnic and religious groups. Several study participants considered the diversity of these women's groups as one of their greatest strengths, which also differentiates them from other existing peacebuilding entities. One key informant, a community mobilization leader, explains that "all the members of the women structures are women… from various backgrounds and experiences. Each member brings her own unique qualities and strengths to the group, making it a diverse and dynamic team. Together, they work hand in hand, leveraging their individual strengths to address issues related to peace, security, and gender in the community."[19]

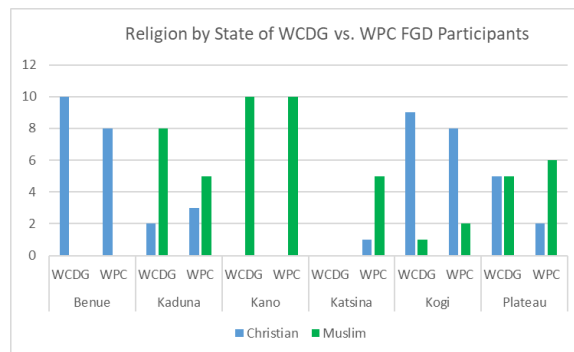Figure 4. Religion by State of WCDG and WPC Members in FGDs [20]

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[19] KII 006, Kano.

[20] While two FGDs with women's groups members were conducted in each state, only one FGD in Katsina collected demographic information from the FGD participants.

Variety of Peacebuilding Activities and Services

In addition to their diversity, the WCDGs and WPCs are also unique given the variety of services and activities they implement in their communities. Along with conflict resolution and mediation services, these women's groups also prioritize the importance of education and awareness for all community members on issues related to GPS. These include conflict management and conflict resolution training and awareness raising sessions on issues such as peacebuilding, childhood development, and the dangers of risky behaviors like substance use. A WPC member in Katsina explains the importance and impact of these activities: "We have conducted many sensitizations, which has resulted in [helping] to improve community members' understanding of one another. Our communities are now living peacefully amongst themselves despite challenges they face… [and] now know the importance of peacebuilding and its link to community development."[21]

Survey Responses on WCDG Activities and Efforts

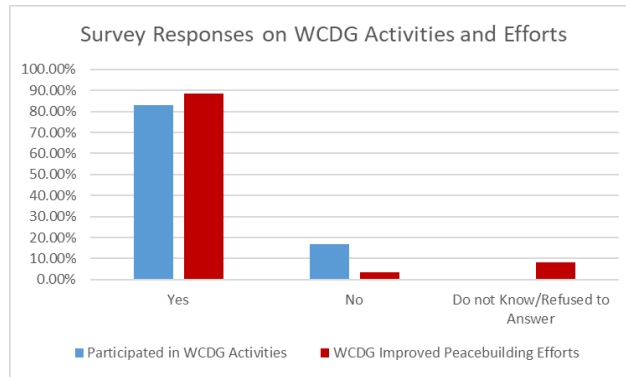■ Participated in WCDG Activities ■ WCDG Improved Peacebuilding Efforts

Figure 5. Participation in WCDG Activities and Perception of Improved Peacebuilding Efforts (Survey)

Community members from households served by the WCDGs in this study expressed the same enthusiasm for engaging in these activities and the impact on their communities' peacebuilding efforts, as illustrated in Figure 5 above, with 82.9% of respondents having participated in WCDG activities and 88.6% believing the WCDGs have improved community peacebuilding efforts. Other stakeholders expressed similar sentiments in KIIs about the positive effect of the women's groups on peacebuilding efforts in these communities, as illustrated in the below quote from a religious leader.

> *"There was a time [when] Muslims in this community could not walk freely in the areas where the Christians [lived], and the Christians too could not walk freely in areas dominated by Muslims… but since the arrival of these women's groups to this community and the activities that they carried out where Christian and Muslim women are seen together in the meetings and rallies… [the women's groups have] greatly improved the level of interactions between the Christians and the Muslims in the community."*
>
> — Religious Leader, Kaduna

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[21] WPC Member, FGD, Katsina.

When mediating conflicts, the WCDGs and WPCs mostly handle certain types of conflicts. Specifically, survey respondents expressed that both the WCDGs (47.4%) and WPCs (54.0%) are approached more often about conflicts involving personal disputes, as shown in Figure 6 below. Even though other disputes at times may be brought to the WCDGs and WPCs, the women's groups mostly receive requests to resolve conflicts within the home, family, or between friends/neighbors. A member of a WPC explains this during a FGD: "We usually resolve conflicts within the homes, mostly husband and wife. We also mediate [between] neighbors and other community members. We also mediate within [a] group of friends who have a misunderstanding."[22] Previous research in Nigeria shows that interpersonal conflicts can become intercommunal conflicts when the identity of the conflict parties from different ethnic or religious groups becomes the dominant framing of the conflict.[23] Consequently, women's groups like the WCDGs and WPCs are important conflict resolution structures that can prevent personal disputes from mobilizing into larger religious, ethnic, or political conflicts.
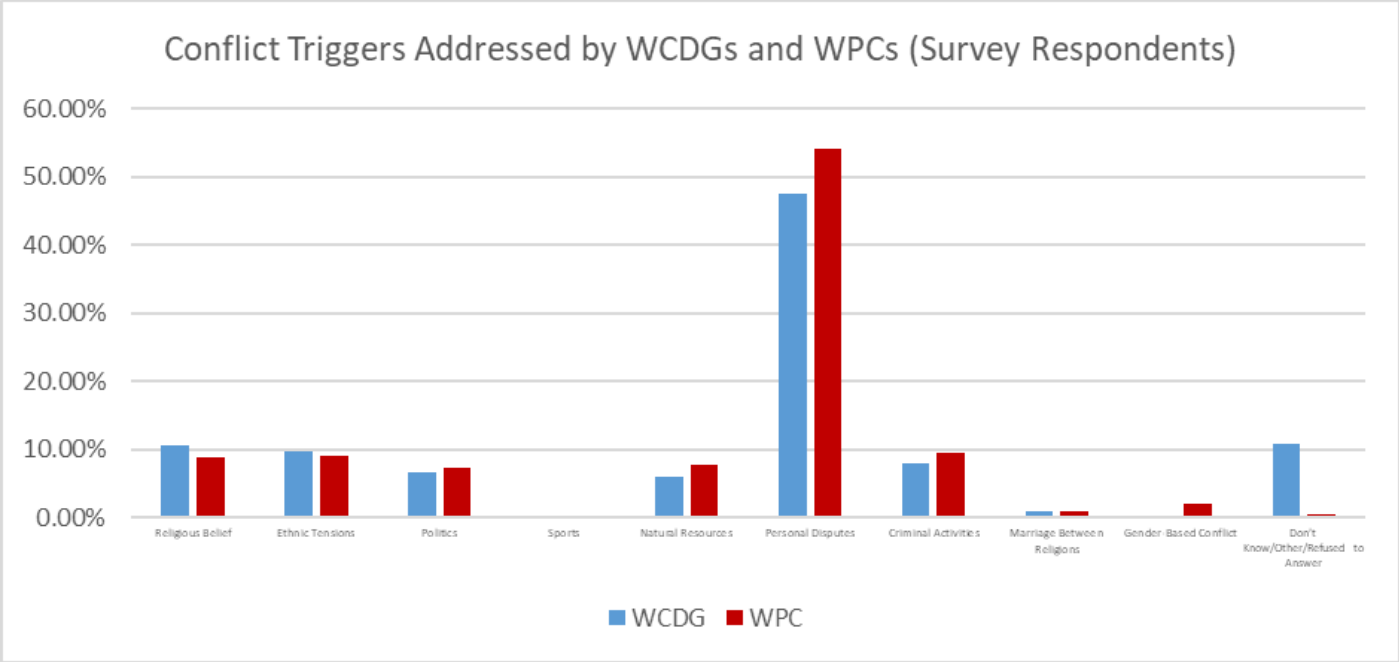

Figure 6. Conflict Triggers Addressed by the WCDGs and WPCs (Survey)

However, it is important to note that the WCDGs and WPCs are trained to mediate and resolve *community-level* disputes as well. Specifically, CIPP supported the women with tools to conduct gender-responsive conflict analyses, which then informed the community peace action plans the women's groups developed and implemented. For example, women from these groups have helped resolve community disputes around farmland encroachment and farmer-herder conflicts. Specifically, members of a WPC representing the communities of Ologba and Egba organized an intercommunity dialogue session and played an active role in the mediation of conflict between the farmer-herder communities in Kogi state.[24] The challenge is that

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[22] WPC Member, FGD, Kaduna.

[23] Lichtenheld and Ogbudu, 2021.

[24] Mercy Corps Nigeria, 2022.

community members do not always approach these groups with community-level conflicts, even though the women have the skills to address them.

> *"They have been successful because they have resolved so many issues in our community which would have escalated to something big or communal conflict. Most members [of the group] have been empowered with capacity [and training] to manage conflicts."*
> — Member, Conflict Mitigation and Management Regional Council (CMMRC), Katsina

Mentorship Opportunities

Unlike other women's groups, the WCDGs and WPCs have a unique relationship that contributes to their success. As previously discussed, the WPCs are organized at the local government level and include women who have higher positions in society and are already influential, such as academics, CSO leaders, entrepreneurs, female traditional title holders, media personalities, and even politicians. Additionally, the women within the WPCs are themselves a diverse group from different education levels, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnic and religious groups. Consequently, they have lived experiences with breaking down barriers in order to attain their current positions, along with experiences in policy influencing and advocacy.

> *"What we do as WPC has made community women and girls… look up to us as their role models."*
> — WPC Member, Focus Group Discussion, Kano

As a result, the members of the WPCs act as mentors for the women within the WCDGs. Through this relationship, the WPC members share with the WCDG members their experiences getting to their current positions, their connections to peace and security stakeholders, and guidance on peacebuilding and professional development. Specifically, the WPCs were essential in helping the WCDGs break down existing gender norms and barriers that have historically prevented women's involvement in peacebuilding at the community level. Even though some of the WCDGs experienced resistance from traditional stakeholders within their communities, women within the WPCs connected the WCDGs with their respective traditional councils in order for the WCDG members to advocate for their groups and have their voices be heard within the traditional community-level structures. The support of the WPCs has greatly contributed to strengthening the impact and reach of the WCDGs.

Successes of the WCDGs and WPCs

Several activities and examples from the work of these two groups demonstrate their unique contributions to peacebuilding that can serve as models for other women's groups. This section highlights three specific activities illustrating innovative approaches to peacebuilding implemented by the WCDGs and WPCs.

Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation Training

A key activity within CIPP involving the women's groups was training on interest-based negotiation and mediation (IBNM) to improve local leaders' mediation skills. A diverse set of local leaders were selected to partake in this training, which brought together women leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and youth leaders. Through this training, women leaders, including those within WCDGs and WPCs, acquired critical conflict resolution and mediation skills that contributed to the reduction of conflicts within their communities, particularly inter-

CIPP Training Recognized by US Government

CIPP's approach to training women mediators in interest-based negotiation (IBN) was highlighted in the 2022 US Congressional Report on Women, Peace, and Security as a promising way to support women's participation in conflict resolution.

personal and domestic conflicts. Additionally, the engagement with local leaders through the IBNM training enabled women leaders to strengthen their relationships with and support from other peacebuilding stakeholders within their communities.[25] As illustrated in the above box, these efforts within CIPP were also recognized by the US government.[26]

> *"I have given an instruction to the community members here to give attention to the peace building activities of WPC/WCDG in addressing conflict situations. After the training of the WPC and WCDG in IBNM and other numerous training[s] from CIPP, women have been taking [the] lead in several peace building activities."*
>
> — Traditional Leader, Benue

The Media

Utilizing the media was a key approach that amplified the women's voices and helped them gain further recognition among the community and with stakeholders. Media professionals, who were also members of some of the WPCs, aided these efforts. With the vast geographic reach of the radio, the WCDGs used this medium to expand their peacebuilding awareness and education efforts. Specifically, the WCDGs were linked to radio programs that were broadcasted weekly on local radio stations in the six states where CIPP operates. The content of the radio programs focused on inclusive peacebuilding awareness and fostering understanding among different ethnic and religious groups, as well as women, men, and youth. The radio program component of CIPP was made possible through collaboration with the African Radio Drama Association (ARDA), one of the consortium's implementing partners for the program. ARDA produced and broadcasted the episodic programs, which included guest appearances from the WCDGs and WPCs.

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[25] For more information about the impact of the CIPP IBNM training, please see: Reardon, C., Wolfe, R., and Ogbudu, E. (2021) Can Mediation Reduce Violence? The Effects of Negotiation Training for Local Leaders in North Central Nigeria. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps.
[26] U.S. Congress, 2022.

> *"What makes [the group] different is the engagement of women in conflict resolution and management. Women are involved in this discussion that were majorly seen as a man's role in the community. The group is taking on task[s] that were considered not a female role in communities in northern Nigeria."*
>
> — Member, Community Peace Observers, Katsina

Parenting for Peace

A unique program implemented by the women's groups within CIPP is the Parenting for Peace initiative, which aims to help children develop resilience to violence, extremist groups, and other risky behaviors and challenges. Parenting for Peace does this by engaging both women and men in different capacities, including parents and youth influencers, and supporting families, community institutions, and governments to provide supportive and safe environments to children by using positive parenting practices, gender-equitable norms, and conflict sensitivity. The model highlights the need for everyone – family, community, and government – to be involved in creating a non-violent environment for children, and that the role of both the father and mother is vital in child rearing. This model is unique because it recognizes that all members of society have a role to play in parenting, not just parents, including government, youth influencers, religious leaders, traditional leaders, teachers, and social workers.[27]

Advancing GPS Priorities in Nigeria: Lessons from the WCDGs and WPCs

Given their impact and contributions to community peacebuilding, the experiences of the WCDGs and WPCs in CIPP provide several valuable lessons that can inform Nigeria's larger GPS efforts and the development of its next NAP. While the findings from this study are specific to the communities and women's groups involved in CIPP, these learnings can contribute to larger discussions within Nigeria about the impact of women's groups on peacebuilding at the community level. Specifically, the work of the WCDGs and WPCs demonstrates that: 1) women's groups fill important gaps left by other peace and security actors; 2) collaboration and support with other peace and security actors contribute to the success of women's groups; and 3) focusing on the intersectionality of youth and youth engagement is key to GPS efforts. These three themes will be discussed further below, along with relevant lessons learned from CIPP to further strengthen each.

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[27] Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2023.

Women's Groups Fill Gaps from Other Actors

As demonstrated through the work of the WCDGs and WPCs within CIPP, women's groups hold a valuable role in society that fills gaps left by other peace and security actors. For example, these women's groups are more capable of managing and resolving conflicts that other actors cannot address as effectively. The study's survey found that women predominantly play a role in resolving domestic conflicts within the household (94.0%), as seen in Figure 7 below. Given community confidence in handling these types of domestic, personal conflicts, women's groups are better positioned to assist in these situations as opposed to other peace and security structures that may not have the capacity, resources, or interest to address household-level conflicts. For example, a WPC member explains how her group helped a father whose

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

son was not attending school: "A man came to us and… reported his child of truancy [being absent] from school. We reached out to the child to understand why he is absconding from school, [and he said]... that there are over 300 pupils in his classroom, and he barely understands his teachers whenever [a] lesson is ongoing due to the large number [of students] in his class. We advised him to go to school as that is the only school his father can afford. He resumed school after our talk with him."[28]

- Domestic/Household
- Intra-Communal
- Inter-Communal
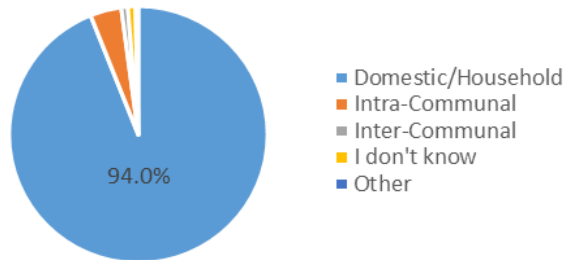- I don't know
- Other

94.0%

Figure 7. Types of Conflicts Women Play a Role in Resolving (Survey)

In addition to their role in interpersonal conflict resolution efforts, some women have privileged access to certain parts of the community given their other roles in society. Specifically, their roles within the family as wives and mothers and in society as teachers and educators give them additional platforms from which to further spread GPS messages related to peacebuilding and anti-violence. A member of the WPC in Katsina, who is also a teacher, explains this strategy: "Some of us [who] are teachers take advantage and use our lesson period in the classroom to teach… conflict management and conflict resolution skills to our students. We also promote peaceful coexistence by encouraging students to live in peace regardless of their ethnic

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[28] KII 001, Katsina.

and religious affiliation."[29] Other peacebuilding and security actors would not have this same type of access to youth, especially given the gendered nature of certain occupations like teachers. With classrooms increasingly viewed as "important site[s] of transformation for peace,"[30] members of women's groups have access to a unique peacebuilding space within the education system, more so than other peace actors.

> *"No other community structure is doing this [type of work] in the community."*
> — Religious Teacher, Kano

Along with women's specific roles in society, the study found that women's groups have certain skills that make them more approachable to community members than other peace and security actors like traditional leaders or police officers. Additionally, the women's groups in CIPP do not charge a fee for their services, which makes them even more approachable and affordable for those from varying socio-economic backgrounds. A WPC member explains this further: "We are different because we offer free services and mediate and resolve conflicts satisfactorily without being bias[ed] or refusing to say the truth… our leaders collect money from people before they attend to their issues, but we do not do that."[31] As a WPC member in Katsina explained, "we love peacebuilding [and] peaceful coexistence, and we provide these services free and with passion."[32]

CIPP Lesson Learned: To strengthen this work and reach even more members of the community, several study participants explained that the women's groups would benefit from more resources. Specifically, a designated office space for the women's groups in their communities would help them reach more people by having a specific location where community members can find members of the women's groups. A WPC member in Kano explained the need for office spaces and financial resources: "[The] WPC… would have grown beyond now if not for some of the challenges we face, like we do not have an office where people can always come to get our services. With an office, people can always find somebody there to attend to them despite our tight schedule. A lot of times, people suffer to even get our members on the phone, but with an office, they can easily reach us whenever the need arises. Secondly, we need financial support… so that we can continue to effectively work as a team."[33]

Collaboration and Support from Actors Influence Success

Women's groups deliver unique peacebuilding contributions to their communities, yet their work would not be as effective without the collaboration and support from other peace and security actors. Such actors include community elders, religious leaders, security agencies, and other government actors who have traditionally been the dominant peace and conflict actors relied upon by communities. As indicated in Figure 8 below, the study found that community trust is the most important factor that contributes to the success of both the WCDGs (63.7%) and WPCs (53.9%) in CIPP. To gain the community's trust, the women's groups

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[29] WPC Member, FGD, Katsina.

[30] Kirk, 2004, page 53.

[31] WPC Member, FGD, Plateau.

[32] WPC Member, FGD, Katsina.

[33] WPC member, FGD, Kano.

work with the existing peace and conflict resolution actors in their communities instead of trying to provide competing services. Specifically, the groups' male engagement approach mobilized support for women's leadership and mitigated the risk of backlash against women peacebuilders, since many of these other actors are male.
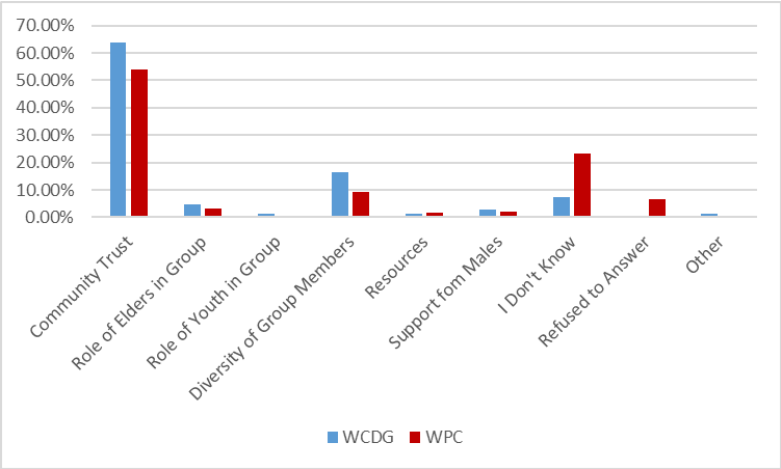

Figure 8. Enabling Factors for WCDGs and WPCs in Peacebuilding (Survey)

The WCDGs and WPCs demonstrate several ways to effectively collaborate with other peace and security actors. One way is by having the other actors directly participate in community dialogue, mediation, and peacebuilding activities and events organized by the women's groups. Such direct participation provides a visual endorsement to community members that the work of the women's groups is important and respected by dispute management structures and other peace and security actors at the community and state levels. A representative from the Makurdi LGA in Benue explains the importance of this collaborative relationship: "The structure of the women's group is such that the community elders find it very interesting and easy to partner with them and… participate in their peace events, which make[s] a large impact."[34]

In addition to attending events, another form of collaboration is by harnessing the community reach of these other actors in order to further spread peacebuilding messages. A key component of the work of the WCDGs and WPCs is education and awareness raising on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These activities also focus on the importance of avoiding violence and other dangerous behaviors, like criminal activity, that could threaten peace and security. Even though the women's groups spread these messages through different events and campaigns, community members who do not accept the women's groups may avoid their activities and messages, despite the good intentions. By utilizing the reach of other actors, the peacebuilding education from the WCDGs and WPCs can still spread to skeptical community members. A religious leader in Kano describes this collaboration through a specific example in which the WPC in his community asked for his assistance in awareness raising: "They [the women's groups] collaborate with us, the religious leaders. We help them pass some key messages to the community. Let me give you [an] example: there is one ATM machine… when [a] person came to withdraw money, they [a group of boys] acted like they wanted help, [and then] they used the opportunity to change the ATM card and scam the

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[34] KII 004, Benue.

person. WPC informed us about the situation, [and] I passed the message during prayer[s] [that] those evil acts [must] stop there and then."[35]

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

Within the communities they serve, the WCDGs and WPCs also play an important role as an intermediary between community members and other peace and security actors. As discussed previously, the women's groups are often viewed as more approachable than other actors and can address certain conflicts better than other actors. This leads conflict resolution actors to refer specific types of cases to the women's groups for assistance, as an Islamic religious teacher explains: "It's often domestic conflicts; we actually [hand] over all those kinds of conflict issues to them [the WCDGs and WPCs] and they [resolve] them peacefully."[36]

However, not all types of conflict are brought to the women's groups, even though they have the mediation skills to address them. As a result, their collaborative relationship with other stakeholders is critical for expanding community peacebuilding efforts since the women's groups can refer conflicts or signs of conflict to other relevant peacebuilding actors. A WPC member in Kano explains that "all [of] the[se] collaboration aims [are] for promoting peace… [including] reporting early warning to relevant stakeholders."[37] As explained by a WPC member in Katsina, the women in these groups encourage community members to share any early warning information they learn about potential conflicts with them so appropriate conflict prevention steps can be taken.[38] This illustrates the unique position of the WCDGs and WPCs as performing a "dual-level collaboration," as termed by a community mobilization leader in Kano, with both the community level and state level by serving as an intermediary for the management of certain conflicts.[39]

> *"The support we received from other peace building structures is the thing that is contributing to the success of our work."*
> — WPC Member, Benue

CIPP Lesson Learned: Steps can be taken to strengthen these collaboration efforts even further between the women's groups and other security actors. For example, opportunities to include women members in male-only groups, like the Traditional Council, should be further explored. A WPC member in Benue explained how this would strengthen collaborations and better voice the concerns of marginalized groups in their communities: "One thing I will keep hammering on is that the women need to be made members of the

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[35] KII 002, Kano.

[36] KII 002, Kano.

[37] KII 001, Kano.

[38] WPC Member, FGD, Katsina.

[39] KII 006, Kano.

Traditional Council. That is the best way we can collaborate. Let a few women of character and sound judgment be selected into the council so that we can have a voice… on issues affecting our communities." [40]

Effective GPS Efforts Prioritize Youth Engagement and Intersectionality

The work of the WCDGs and WPCs demonstrates the critical importance of the intersectionality of youth and youth engagement, thereby prioritizing youth in order to contribute to the country's broader GPS efforts. As previously discussed, the persistent conflicts and violence in Nigeria have a particularly damaging effect on the next generation given the negative impacts on education and livelihood opportunities.[41] Young women and young men regularly face several challenges and insecurities in Nigeria, all of which can further threaten GPS efforts.

Photo Credit: © Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps

Some of these insecurities affect both young women and young men. For example, many study participants discussed substance use as a particularly dangerous behavior among both young women and young men. A WPC member explains this further: "There are some youth that are into drugs, both males and females in my area, [and] one of the girls smokes publicly without respect for anyone."[42] However, other insecurities and risky behaviors are more prevalent among young men than young women, and vice versa. Many of the study participants discussed how young men are more likely to engage in violence (including political violence and gang-related violence) and theft, all of which can relate to substance use. For young women, the study participants discussed engagement in prostitution as a serious concern, along with substance use.

Given the diversity of risky behaviors practiced among youth, several study participants voiced concerns about these behaviors leading to further insecurities in their communities. For example, a WPC member in Kano said that "the issue of theft is associated with drug abuse."[43] In order to deter youth's involvement in risky behaviors, or to help them change such existing behaviors, the WCDGs and WPCs tend to engage with youth by *encouraging livelihood opportunities and skills training for youth* and by *promoting education and awareness for youth and families*.

The WCDGs and WPCs strongly believe in providing all youth with opportunities to be productive members of society and make positive contributions to their communities instead of threatening GPS efforts. In particular, providing livelihood opportunities through a positive source of income generation is a critical approach. A WPC member in Kaduna explains this further: "Youth were able to start something on their own, because they were not doing anything, so there is always conflict between them. [But] because of our

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[40] KII 001, Benue.

[41] Sloan, et al, 2023.

[42] WPC Member, FGD, Plateau.

[43] WPC Member, FGD, Kano.

intervention, they were able to start something; some are selling clothes, some are selling food, and small businesses to keep them busy."[44]

In addition to providing them with income-generating opportunities, the WCDGs and WPCs prioritize education and awareness through their youth engagement. Formal education for all youth has always been a priority for these women's groups. As a civil servant and member of the WPC in Katsina explains, "Education is a key [to] success for every child. Education can take you to the position you are not expecting."[45] A way the WCDGs and WPCs contribute to these education efforts is by supporting families that may have trouble keeping their children in school. A WPC member in Kaduna explains how some of the group's limited funds are put towards these efforts: "We even use our little funds to settle… problems, like when children are out of school, we usually use [some funds] to take them to… primary school [and] we register them... We take them there and do [whatever is] necessary."[46]

Along with formal education, the WCDGs and WPCs also focus on educating youth about the importance of peacebuilding, non-violence, and avoiding risky behaviors. However, the types of education and awareness activities often depend on the target youth group and the specific behaviors and/or insecurities they face. For example, elections in Nigeria have historically experienced violence, and an assessment conducted before the 2023 elections "found that threats such as political intimidation, harassment, abductions, kidnapping and ritual killings may impede women's participation in the 2023 election process as voters,

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps Nigeria

candidates, election observers, election officials, and security officers."[47] Since young men have been the main perpetrators of political violence in Nigeria, the WCDGs and WPCs prioritized peace and conflict sensitivity education and awareness, especially for young men, in order to deter election violence and security concerns during the 2023 elections. A civil servant and WPC member in Kano explains this strategy: "We engaged with boys in our peace event activities like sensitization during [the] election period. Youth boys were the major players during [that] activity. They got our message clear… [that's why we] had peaceful election[s] in our community."[48] This tactic during the 2023 elections demonstrates the women's groups' impactful engagement with young men and boys, also supported by Figure 9 below.

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[44] WPC Member, FGD, Kaduna.

[45] KII 001, Katsina.

[46] WPC Member, FGD, Kaduna.

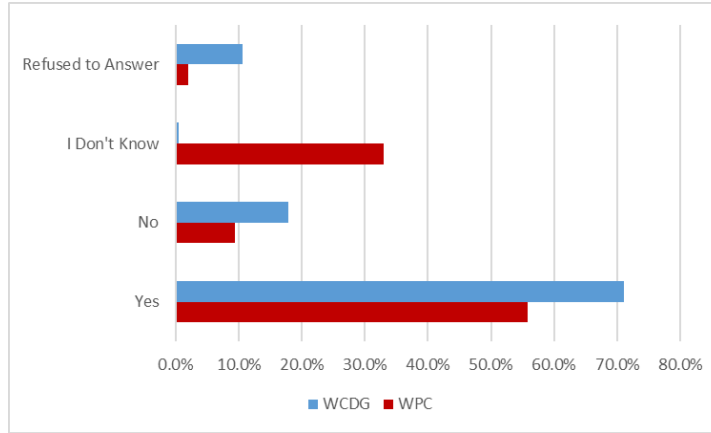[47] Ogbonnaya and Okenyodo (Eds.), 2022, page ii.

[48] KII 001, Kano.

Figure 9. Whether WCDGs and WPCs Engage with Men and Boys (Survey)

Another example is the work of the WCDGs and WPCs with young women. A FGD among WPC members discussed concerns about young women's involvement in prostitution, which can lead to health insecurities and threats of GBV. To support young women engaged in this risky behavior, the women's groups first educate them about the dangers of this behavior, and then connect them with resources to become involved in other forms of income generation. A WPC member in Katsina explains how her group helped connect young women to skills training centers: "In this area, we have a lot of underage girls who [are] taking family planning pills and are into sex trade [or prostitution] in our community. Through our enlightenment campaign, we have connected them to skills centers and individuals who are willing to teach them."[49]

In addition to engaging with young men and young women directly, the WCDGs and WPCs also engage with their families, particularly parents. Parenting for Peace, for example, is a program within CIPP implemented by these women's groups that aims to prevent violent extremism among youth by training both youth and their parents. The education and awareness activities on youth development and other related topic areas, like substance abuse, also teach the parents about the impact of peacebuilding and positive behaviors on both their households and the larger community. A community leader in Kaduna explains how the women's groups engage with parents through these activities: "They [the women's groups] carry out awareness/activities that involve peaceful co-existence within the community, within the homes, and with living together generally… The groups carry out sensitizations within the community on the need for parents to bring their children close to them and ensure they attend school to have formal education [so]... they will grow to be educated."[50]

CIPP Lesson Learned: A way to further improve the engagement of the women's groups with youth is to start activities with youth at an even younger age. This will enable youth to incorporate what they learn about the importance of peacebuilding and avoiding risky behaviors *throughout* their childhood and not solely when they are older in their adolescence. So instead of trying to address challenges from youth after they occur, the women's groups can be even more proactive and try to educate youth at an even younger age to help deter these problems from ever occurring. As recommended by a WPC member in Benue, families

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[49] WPC Member, FGD, Katsina.

[50] KII 001, Kaduna.

"should start training their children when they are small [through] Parenting for Peace, so that when they grow up they will not engage in violent activities."[51]

> *"Our children… have joined the habit of drug abuse… [so] we called the drug law agencies and… they came and lectured on drugs… my son… was into drug abuse and as he saw the effect, fear gripped him and he stopped."*
> — WPC Member, Focus Group Discussion, Plateau

Recommendations

Women's groups make important contributions to community-level peace and security, as illustrated through the work of the WCDGs and WPCs within CIPP, and should be incorporated into formal GPS processes and efforts at the local, state, and national levels. The following recommendations derive from the experiences of the CIPP program's women's groups and are directed towards two main audiences in Nigeria – government and GPS actors developing Nigeria's next NAP (including the National Technical Committee for the Development of the NAP), and civil society actors focusing on GPS.

Recommendations for Government and GPS Actors for Nigeria's Next NAP

- **Mobilize resources for women's groups to lead in the development of community-level action plans.** The NAP process in Nigeria takes a bottom-up approach since community-level action plans inform the plans made at the LGA, state, and national levels. However, there is a greater need to include the voices of women and other marginalized groups within the community-level action plans. Consequently, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, the National Technical Committee for the Development of the NAP, and other GPS actors should **mobilize resources** to support women's groups to lead in the development of community-level action plans. These resources can also be used for women's groups to present these action plans at the WPS consultation that takes place in the six geo-political zones for the development of NAP priorities. These validated community-level action plans can then become embedded within the LAPs, which then feed into the SAPs and Nigeria's NAP.

- Within the LAPs, SAPs, and NAP, **incorporate strategies for accountability for monitoring progress on implementation**. Nigeria currently has a weak accountability mechanism in place to confirm that the NAP is implemented properly at the local, state, and national levels. To ensure accountability, strategies and clear indicators that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be developed and implemented, such as:

  - Providing clear communication opportunities between policymakers and the NAP implementing actors for monitoring progress on the NAP implementation.

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[51] KII 003, Benue.

- o Encouraging documentation and reporting from the NAP implementing actors to formally track their activities and progress related to the NAP.

- o Encouraging regular, quarterly feedback from the NAP implementing actors to policymakers, and vice versa, to strengthen GPS efforts moving forward.

- o Explore collaboration opportunities with the National Bureau of Statistics to ensure effective monitoring, tracking, and reporting of NAP implementation efforts. This can include collecting, analyzing, and reporting disaggregated data (by gender, sex, age, disability) to ensure evidence-based gender responsive programming.

- **Prioritize youth engagement with both young women and young men** as an integral component of addressing current and future threats to WPS and GPS. Nigeria's next NAP should incorporate specific GPS strategies at all levels that encourage greater engagement of young women and young men, such as training, education, and awareness sessions focusing on peacebuilding, non-violence, and avoiding risky behaviors (like substance use and criminal activity). This should also include capacity building for young women to acquire peacebuilding and leadership skills, and ultimately the confidence to address GPS and play substantive roles in peacebuilding efforts.

  - o These activities should use the **Parenting for Peace** initiative within CIPP as a holistic model of peacebuilding education that starts within the home and targets the parents and families of youth, community institutions (religious institutions, traditional institutions, and schools), and governance institutions (including government, media, CSOs, and the private sector). Specifically, the Parenting for Peace Guide developed by CIPP should be adopted to help address the vulnerability of young people to violence and build a supportive and safe environment for young girls and equitable and inclusive societies. This should include promoting positive parenting and facilitating positive masculinities in order to reduce the risk of GBV. Additionally, Parenting for Peace promotes conversations around women's leadership in preventing all forms of violence, including violent extremism and GBV, and in efforts to build community resilience against violence.

- **Allocation of sufficient resources for the implementation of the NAP, including knowledge exchange around gender mainstreaming in peace and security processes**. This step is necessary in order to accelerate the implementation of Nigeria's NAP. As a part of the NAP process, budgetary allocations are necessary to implement a plan for addressing gender equality and WPS needs and priorities that are embedded within the SAPs and NAP under state and federal ministries, departments, and agencies.

Recommendations for Civil Society Actors in Nigeria

- **Include community-level women's groups in the regional meetings to plan the NAP**. Through this inclusion, representatives from community-level women's groups can voice the concerns of women within their communities and include their concerns in the NAP discussions. The critical issues identified within the NAP can then be validated by community voices through this bottom-up approach.

- **Encourage the development and support of women's groups to participate in community, state, and national level governance structures and processes**. By using the CIPP program's

WCDGs and WPCs as models, civil society actors should facilitate the establishment of new women's peace groups or support such existing groups. Even in highly patriarchal communities, the WCDGs and WPCs respect culture and tradition but also leverage their negotiation skills and peacebuilding tools acquired through CIPP to facilitate women's inclusion in non-traditional roles such as dispute resolution. The WCDGs and WPCs also prioritize collaboration with other peace actors in order to enhance their support and legitimacy. A similar approach can lead new women's groups to gain the respect of community leaders and stakeholders, including men, and thus contribute to community peacebuilding efforts beyond the domestic sphere.

- o **Support peacebuilding activities like those implemented by the WCDGs and WPCs**. The WCDGs and WPCs have successfully developed and implemented several unique peacebuilding activities that target various segments of the population. Civil society actors in Nigeria should work with existing or new women's groups and encourage them to consider scaling up these activities from the WCDGs and WCPs, specifically the radio program, the mediation training for women, and the Parenting for Peace program (as discussed earlier). While these activities were developed specifically for CIPP's operating context, other groups and civil society actors can adapt these successful activities to their own contexts, and by maintaining the same principles of Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity throughout.

- o When developing new women's groups, active steps should be taken to **address cohesion and team building** within these groups. As demonstrated through the WCDGs and WPCs, bringing together a diverse group of women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds may not immediately lead to enthusiastic group conversations. Only after relationships and trust have been built among the members can open discussions take place. Practices to encourage such positive team building within new women's groups include:

    - ▪ Holding regularly scheduled meetings (such as on a weekly or bi-weekly basis).

    - ▪ Maintaining these regularly scheduled meetings over the long term to encourage steadier relationship building among the members.

    - ▪ Keeping the groups smaller so members can get to know each other better and build sustainable relationships.

    - ▪ Encouraging group members to leverage their local knowledge and work collaboratively to design and implement peace action plans, which aim to address the underlying causes and drivers of conflict and WPS issues in their contexts.

- o Support should include **providing funding and continuous mentoring for women's groups on resource mobilization and advocacy**. This will help the women's groups expand their peacebuilding work to other communities and have a greater impact at the state and national levels.

- o Support should also include **funding for women's groups themselves to provide mentoring to young women and men on key GPS priorities**, such as GBV prevention and response. Such mentoring to young women and men would help foster greater security and peacebuilding efforts throughout their communities.

- • **Promote education and awareness on the value of women's groups and gender inclusion in peacebuilding**. Civil society actors in the fields of peace and security, from the community level to the national level, should implement advocacy and influence activities that highlight the importance

of gender inclusivity to peacebuilding efforts. This should include emphasizing the specific value of women's groups to peace and security efforts and GPS, as seen through the WCDGs and WPCs. Such education and awareness campaigns should target both communities and specific peace and security actors, which will lead to greater support for their inclusion in governance processes and respect for women's peace groups and ultimately their long-term success.

- o Awareness should also focus on highlighting the women groups' **expertise in conflict management and mitigation at the *community* level**, and not just at the interpersonal level. The IBNM training received through CIPP equips women with the necessary mediation skills to resolve conflicts at different levels. It is important to highlight that this IBNM training through CIPP involved follow-up sessions as well, not just a one-time training, illustrating the importance of continuous, ongoing mediation education. By providing other women's groups with similar mediation training, they can also resolve community-level conflicts. However, educating the community and other stakeholders about this ability of the women's groups will be important so that these conflicts are brought to them for mediation.

- o This awareness should also **highlight other key hindrances** to women's participation in formal peace processes at the community level, such as gender norms, male domination of community and traditional dispute management structures, and high rates of illiteracy. Consequently, these awareness efforts should emphasize the importance of addressing power imbalances, toxic masculinity, and gender inequalities, all of which impede women's access to and control over resources and are critical to increasing women's influence and transforming harmful social norms.

- o These efforts should also include **strengthening the collaboration and linkages between local/grassroot women's groups and national and regional mediator networks and other peacebuilding architecture**. This will help the women's groups expand their relationships with regional and national peace and security actors and ultimately contribute to their capacity strengthening, influence, and trust building with other stakeholders.

- **Connect peacebuilding to other sectors, especially economic opportunities**. Instead of implementing stand-alone peacebuilding activities and programs, civil society actors should connect them with other sectors that can positively affect GPS efforts in the long term, particularly livelihood activities. The WCDGs and WPCs demonstrate how youth engagement is critical to community-level GPS efforts. Specifically, by engaging youth in education and livelihood opportunities, this will deter them from risky and dangerous behaviors that could threaten community security and GPS efforts. Additionally, incorporating livelihood opportunities directly within programs that aim to establish and implement women's groups is critical to the groups' resilience and sustainability after funding ends. Members of the WCDGs and WPCs emphasized the importance of such economic opportunities for their group members to ensure they have a reliable source of income to support their peacebuilding work after CIPP ends.

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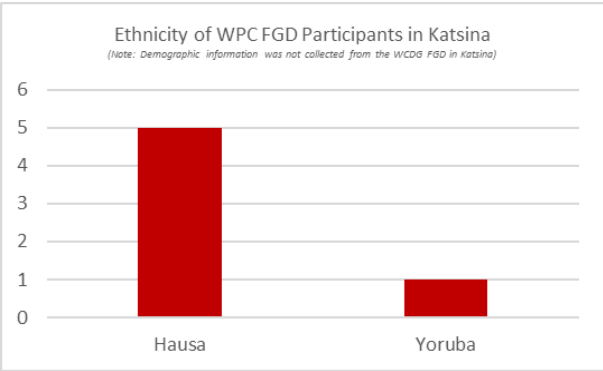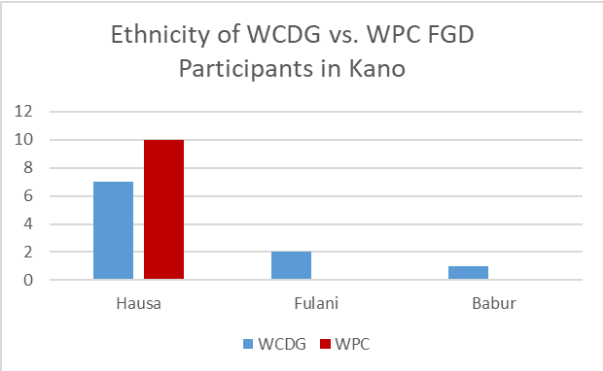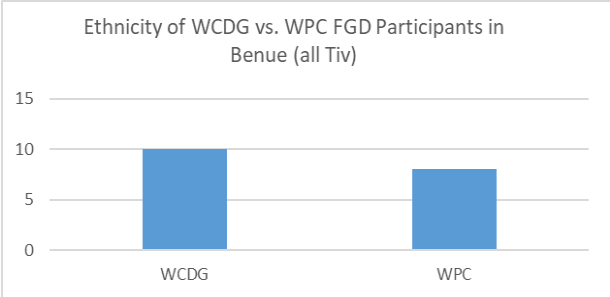
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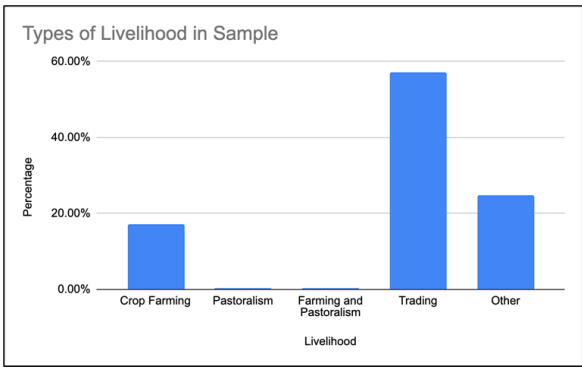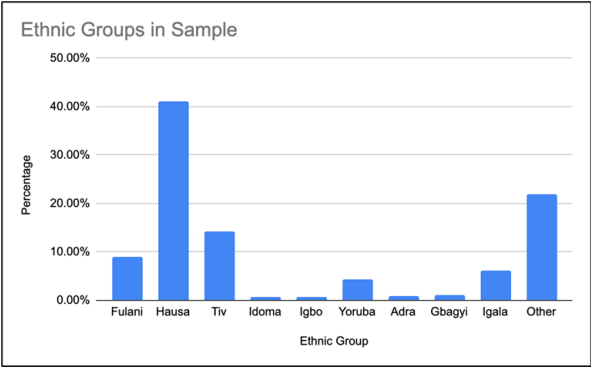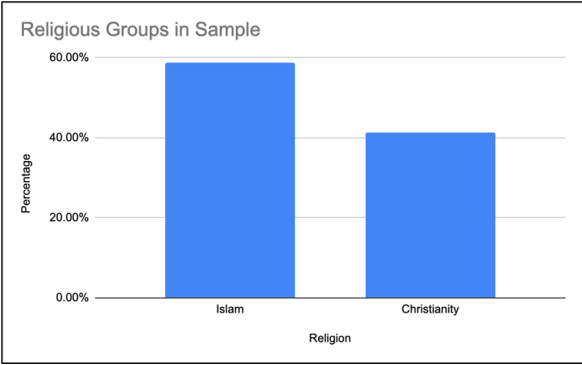
Appendix A

Ethnicity of WCDG and WPC Members in FGDs in Benue, Kano, and Katsina

Ethnicity of WCDG vs. WPC FGD Participants in Benue (all Tiv)

Ethnicity of WCDG vs. WPC FGD Participants in Kano

Ethnicity of WPC FGD Participants in Katsina
(Note: Demographic information was not collected from the WCDG FGD in Katsina)

Appendix B

Profile of Survey Respondents

Gender Composition of Sample

Religious Groups in Sample

Ethnic Groups in Sample

Types of Livelihood in Sample
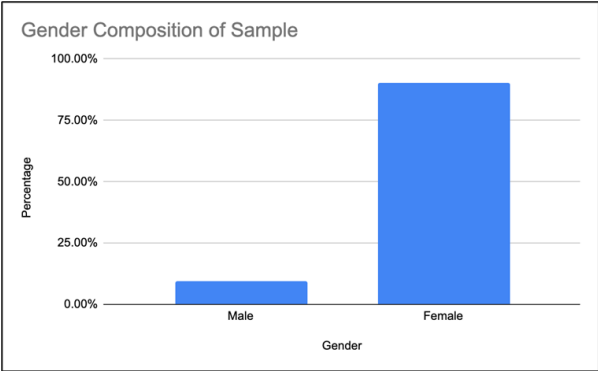
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About Mercy Corps
Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

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