



**THE
SOCIAL
NORMS
LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE
NIGERIA**

Case Study

NIGERIA FOR WOMEN PROJECT

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THE NIGERIAN SOCIAL NORMS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative (SNLC) facilitates building knowledge and developing tools among researchers and practitioners across regions and disciplines to advance effective, ethics-informed social norm theory, measurement, and practice at scale.

The Collaborative draws members from government organisations, donor agencies, NGOs, and academia with an objective to strengthen networks, build sustained expertise and capacity in Nigerian organisations and institutions, and support good quality programming. Members work across multiple development focus areas including women’s economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and family planning, infectious disease, gender-based violence, maternal and child health, nutrition, and immunization, among others.

The Community of Practice shares state-of-the-art social norm evidence, approaches and resources with key players and actors through proven learning strategies, with specific focus on gender norms and their impact on health and women’s economic empowerment. The SNLC is made possible by the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The contents of this document are the responsibility of the SNLC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in Nigeria face a number of challenges, including limited access to education (Omowole, I. 2016). Primary education is almost free and compulsory in the country, yet many girls are still unable to attend school due to poverty, cultural beliefs, and practices such as early marriage. As a result, the adult (aged 15 years and above) female literacy rate (49.68%) in Nigeria is lower than adult male literacy rate (69.19%) (Countrymeters, 2023).

Additionally, women in Nigeria are typically employed in low-paying, informal jobs and are not able to access credit or other resources to start their own businesses or may face discrimination in hiring and promotion (World Bank Group, 2022). These practices are often perpetuated by discriminatory social and gender norms that influence women's access to services, assets, information, and market opportunities -- hence their inability to change their socio-economic situation.

Violence against women is another major issue in Nigeria; domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment are all too common as 48% of women face this issue (UN report, 2021). These practices are further reinforced by societal norms that stigmatize women who speak out about gender-based violence.

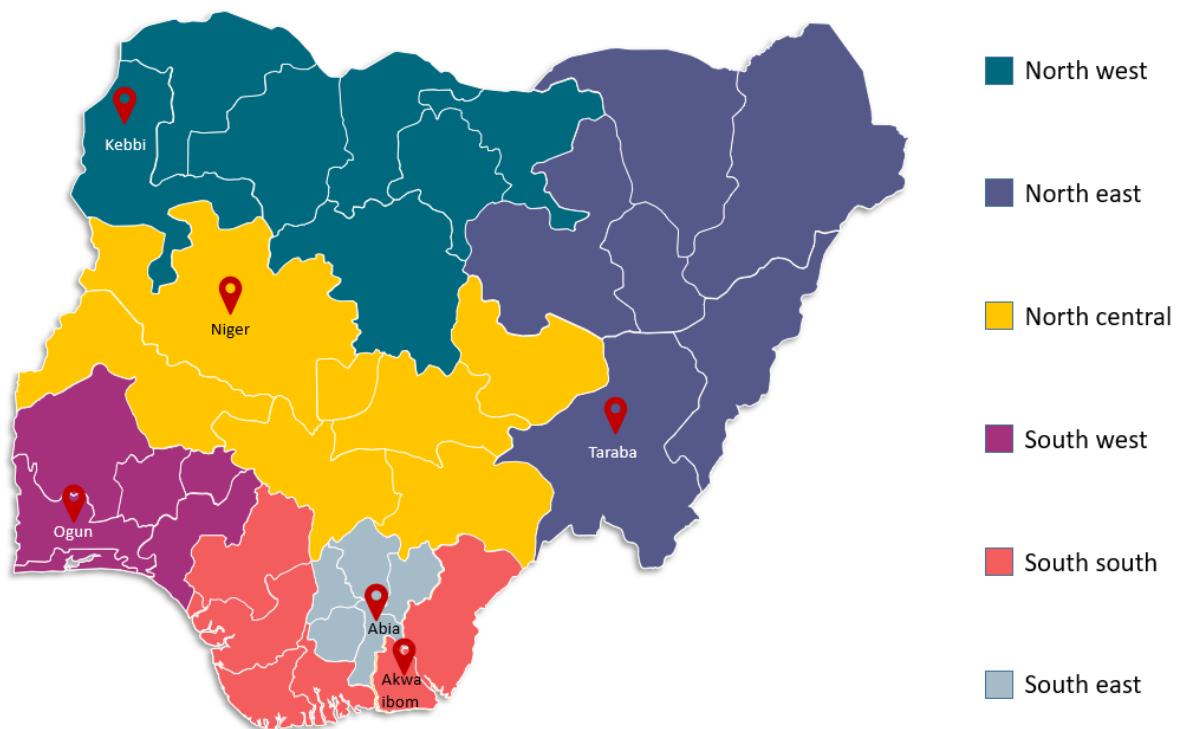
Despite these challenges, there is progress. The federal government adopted the National Gender Policy in 2006, under which the government must be proactive in its commitment to addressing problems affecting women and ensuring women's issues are the focus in the formulation and implementation of all policies and programmes. The policy expressly highlights and advocates for action to address problems faced by women in various sectors such as education, health, employment, agriculture, legal reform, legislative protection, and in decision making.

Although the Nigerian government has taken steps to address issues affecting women, progress has been slow since women are still underrepresented in politics and decision-making roles and are often excluded from economic opportunities (National Human Right Commission, 2019). In view of this, the Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP) seeks to address norms that perpetuate harmful practices or reinforce inequities and support improved livelihoods for benefiting women in targeted areas of Nigeria.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP) supports improved livelihoods for women in targeted areas of Nigeria by influencing social norms related to gender equality, promoting social inclusion, and establishing institutional platforms that improve women’s access to critical life, business, and technical skills. The NFWP is currently being implemented in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of six states of Nigeria across the six geopolitical zones, targeting women already carrying-out livelihood activities with a goal of supporting empowerment and guiding women through self-actualization.

The map below shows the different states per geopolitical zone covered by the NFWP.



The project utilizes a community-driven development approach that supports the formation and strengthening of Women Affinity Groups (WAGs), as an avenue for socialization and a platform for equipping women with skills. For this approach to succeed, a methodology that addresses barriers to gender equality and socio-economic advancement of women was adopted. The project is being carried out in two phases over a 12-year period. Phase One of project implementation will last five years (2018–2023), with Phase Two taking off immediately after Phase One ends in November 2023 and will span through 2030.

The Nigeria for Women Project has four major strategies to implement its objectives:

- **Building social capital:** Women are mobilized to form affinity groups to meet with project facilitators who will take them through modules of the project on a periodic basis.
- **Livelihood programmes:** The project supports individual and collective grants for income-generating activities with a one-off cash payment into individual accounts and collective business seed grants for affinity groups.
- **Innovations and partnerships:** NFWP builds capacity in evaluation and effective business development, supporting the businesses of the grant recipients of the livelihood programmes. The project also equips women to obtain health insurance for themselves and their children.
- **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E):** The project has a defined multi-strata M&E framework which includes periodic evaluation of project facilitators and grant recipients at the local government, state, and federal levels by government officials and development partners.

The implementation of the NFWP faced significant challenges, primarily due to insecurity in certain LGAs such as Wushishi and Gurara. Additionally, there were difficulties in payment of matching grants/government counterpart funds to the women in need, particularly regarding the N450 Million mandatory counterpart funds for scale-up implementation, which the government eventually paid in August 2022. Furthermore, the NFWP encountered obstacles related to deep-rooted social norms that persistently marginalize women, making it exceedingly challenging to bring about a shift in the existing social norms that marginalize women. The Niger State spotlight provides further insights into these norms and their implications for the project's work.

SPOTLIGHT ON NIGER STATE

In order to identify the prevailing norms in specific areas, community meetings and dialogues were conducted in three out of the 25 local government areas of Niger state: Agaie, Wushishi, and Gurara. These dialogues involved engaging with project champions from all three LGAs, including both men and women who actively contributed to the successful implementation of the project in their respective communities. The discussions revealed numerous norms and practices revolving around women's economic empowerment. Some of the identified norms are listed below:

- The prevailing norm is that **men are socially superior to women** and have the right to assert their power over women. Their power is demonstrated in various norms related to decision making such as permissibility of women to leave the house for healthcare or social events or who should eat first in the household.
- Another norm is that **outspoken women are considered promiscuous** and hence no woman wants to speak unless given permission by her husband in private or public places. The stigma of promiscuity and violence may be used to enforce the norm that women should not speak in a public gathering to avoid being considered promiscuous.
- Both men and women hold the belief that **women should be content with what they have been provided** and are not supposed to have individual life aspirations. Hence, they are not supposed to engage in business activities to make extra income or handle finances.
- A widely held norm among both men and women is that **lucrative businesses should only be for men** as the providers of their families. Because of this norm, men and women will only purchase goods or services from women-led or owned businesses if they are low-income generating.

In pursuit of its goals and to address these entrenched norms, the NFWP placed a strong emphasis on women's vocational training, extending financial and technical assistance to women-owned enterprises, and also engaged in strategic advocacy on behalf of women within the designated communities.

PROJECT OUTCOMES IN NIGER STATE

The project outcomes in Niger State are listed below:

- **Financial inclusion:** The project was able to facilitate the financial inclusion of 75,545 women in Niger state by supporting them to open personal bank accounts and obtain valid means of identification.
- **Political empowerment:** As women were able to get national identification and voter cards, this led to their inclusion in elections and campaigns. Politicians visited the affinity groups to share their manifestos – a significant breakthrough since women had not previously been recognized or acknowledged as stakeholders in the political process. In a shift away from the traditional approach of husbands selecting candidates for the family, women were able to engage in politics through these affinity groups.
- **Financial and social empowerment:** The project took various steps to support women's empowerment and combat gender-based violence. One approach involved facilitating market linkages for products made by women, while another initiative established toll-free hotlines for reporting cases of gender-based violence.

The creation of **market linkages** remains an ongoing process. In the meantime, the Niger State Ministry of Commerce and Investment, in collaboration with the Dangote Foundation, organized a trade fair in July 2023. As part of this event, women affinity groups are granted free space allocations and a dedicated day to showcase their products. This trade fair provided a valuable platform for women to exhibit their products and thrive in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

The **toll-free hotline** continues to be utilized by women to report cases of gender-based violence. The project diligently follows-up on these reports with the involvement of the traditional leaders, who hold significant authority within the communities. The husbands and heads-of-households are summoned to the Emir's (the ruler of the community) palace, where reported cases of gender-based violence are resolved under the guidance of the Emir. As a result, women are becoming more vocal in condemning gender-based violence, indicating a shift in societal attitudes.

LESSONS LEARNED

During the course of the project implementation, the need to focus on community-driven and community-led programming became apparent. The following lessons were learnt during the course of the project:

- **Addressing cultural and social norms:** The project highlights the significance of addressing harmful cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and hinder women's empowerment. By identifying and challenging these norms, the project aims to create an environment conducive to women's socio-economic advancement.
- **Multi-faceted approach:** NFWP adopts a multi-faceted approach to empower women. It combines interventions such as vocational training, financial and technical support for women-owned businesses, strategic stakeholder advocacy, and facilitating access to financial services. This holistic approach recognizes that addressing gender inequality requires addressing various aspects of women's lives.
- **Community-driven development:** The project utilizes a community-driven development approach by forming and strengthening Women Affinity Groups (WAGs). This approach promotes socialization, skill-building, and collective empowerment among women. It recognizes the importance of involving the community in the process of women's empowerment.
- **Collaboration and partnerships:** NFWP emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership with government officials, development partners, and traditional institutions. These partnerships help in monitoring and evaluating the project's progress and enable effective implementation of interventions.
- **Financial inclusion as a key enabler:** The project facilitated financial inclusion for women by supporting them in opening personal bank accounts and obtaining valid means of identification. This highlights the importance of financial inclusion in empowering women economically and enabling their participation in various sectors.
- **Political empowerment:** The interventions implemented by NFWP led to increased political empowerment of women. Through access to national identification and voter cards, women were able to participate in elections and engage with politicians. This demonstrates the significance of political inclusion for women's empowerment and challenging traditional gender roles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NFWP addresses the challenges faced by women in Nigeria, such as limited access to education, low-paying jobs, discrimination, and violence. This project is significant because it takes into account social norms related to gender equality in its efforts to promote social inclusion and improve women's access to critical life, business, and technical skills.

This case study holds relevance for other programs, donors, and implementers working towards women's empowerment and gender equality. It highlights the importance of addressing harmful cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. By challenging these norms, the NFWP creates an environment conducive to women's socio-economic advancement.

The NFWP's multi-faceted approach, combining vocational training, financial and technical support, strategic advocacy, and improved access to financial services, demonstrates the need for comprehensive interventions. Addressing gender inequality requires tackling various aspects of women's lives.

Overall, the NFWP serves as a valuable example of a project that seeks to address gender inequality and empower women in Nigeria. Its lessons emphasize the need for comprehensive, community-driven, and collaborative approaches to create meaningful and sustainable change.

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