



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR **PEACE & FREEDOM**

Does Feminist Movement-Building Reduce Violence Against Women? Good Practice Case Study: Women's Situation Room, Nigeria

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Overview

In Nigeria, elections over the years have been characterised by violence, including violence against women. In addition, research indicates that violence or fear of violence is a major deterrent to women's active participation and engagement in politics. These are some of the reasons that women's groups including WILPF Nigeria have organised themselves to participate in peace building initiatives and processes, including initiatives aimed at strengthening women's participation in political processes.

One such example is the 2015 Women's Situation Room, which aimed to create an early warning and early response mechanism for electoral violence surrounding the March 28 2015 general elections. The Women's Situation Room successfully responded to a number of incidents of election-related violence, making it a strong example of the feminist movement's power to assist in countering Violence Against Women.

What are women doing to create change?

The Women's International League for Peace (WILPF) Nigeria section led action to create a Women's Situation Room in Nigeria in order to establish a network of peace activists equipped to respond to political violence, and strengthen women's solidarity beyond borders. It was the fourth Women's Situation Room in Africa after Liberia in 2011, Senegal and Sierra Leone in 2012 and Kenya in 2013.

The Women's Situation Room in Nigeria replicated the principles and goals of Women's Situation Rooms in those countries, but its implementation was adapted to local specificities and Nigeria's political context. The initiative was created in collaboration with WSRNigeria, a network of 13 women's and feminist organisations; it was convened by Nigerian Women Platform for Peaceful Elections (NWPPE); and it was led at a state level by State and Deputy State Coordinators in 10 states considered hotspots for the elections.

The Women's Situation Room consisted of a physical Situation Room set up at a hotel, where 40 Incident Report Officers received calls from the field through the Women's Situation Room toll-free number. In the physical Situation Room, women were involved in tasks including intervention and mediation, coordination, political and legal analysis, observation of the polling process and recording and documentation. Other essential activities of the Women's Situation Room project included work by a Contact Group of National Eminent Women; work by Eminent African Women;



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work by Pressure Groups; a youth peer peace process; elections observers' training; deployment of Elections Observers; the appointment of resource people and secretarial staff; and report preparation and dissemination. Media engagement was another essential activity of the Women's Situation Room; as such, a press conference and interactive session was held for 40 media practitioners, co-facilitated by Joy Onyesoh (National Coordinator, Nigeria).

Impact

During and post-elections in Nigeria (between 25 March 2015- 2 April 2015), a total of 4,973 reports were received and responded to. The incidence reports categories included voting complaints, violence, electoral offences, insecurity and spontaneous violence on announcement of results.

A Reflections Meeting at the close of the physical situation room revealed that the entire WSRNigeria process was a huge success that enhanced the image of Nigerian women internationally as peace activists internationally. Feedback reflected that the WSRNigeria was run in a professional manner, but still managed to stay alive and welcoming to the many visitors who passed through. The youth in particular appreciated the hospitality they were given and they also acquired knowledge about UNSCR 1325 and the positive roles they could play in sustaining peace in their country.

In particular, the introduction of Intervention Desks - which ensured a rapid response to threats/incidents of violence from the field - were highlighted as a Best Practice and recommended to be used in future Women's Situation Rooms. Feedback from callers clearly indicated that incidents were indeed resolved by both the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the police; and that the interaction between the youth and the police officer in the Situation Room changed youth perceptions of the police force as they found her friendly, protective and approachable.

In addition, feedback to the call center and radio programs from the public was that the Women's Situation Room highlighted women's right to participate in electoral processes and in an enabling environment and enhanced the public's appreciation of women's roles in building peace. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Commonwealth also highlighted that the Women's Situation Room in Nigeria widely contributed to promote peaceful elections in the country.

The WSRNigeria project was also able to collect valuable data showing election violence, represented in graphs available at in the Report on Women's Situation Room in Nigeria.

The WSRNigeria project gained visibility through a robust media engagement ranging from profile interviews of Women's Situation Room stakeholders, newspaper articles, press releases and radio and TV programs and guest appearances on popular TV Chat Shows.

The WSRNigeria was so successful that it also partnered with the WSPN/NSRP in the setting up of second physical situation room for the gubernatorial elections of 11th April 2015 in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.



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Challenges

- The team of Analysts - comprising of a Lawyer, a Political Analyst, and a Media expert who together analysed information coming into the Situation Room and briefed/advised the Team of African Eminent Women on their intervention - needed more support, including in managing press releases. At some points in time, they were overwhelmed with doing too much even and beyond their terms of reference.
- It was felt that there was a insufficient clarity about the roles, responsibilities and relationship of some actors in the physical Situation Room particularly between the Eminent Women and the Team of Analysts

Lessons learned/recommendations:

- The replication the Women's Situation Room in country of replication should be well-planned and inclusive, thereby ensuring that the women's movement representing women from all walks of life understand and own the process from the beginning
- There must be clarity about the roles of various stakeholders directly working in the process to ensure everyone plays their part well
- Early engagement of key stakeholders is key in order to enhance their understanding of the process, build rapport and strategically position the Women's Situation Room to ensure there is an enabling environment pre, during and post-elections
- Orientation of eminent women is a must, and this must happen in a timely manner to give them the opportunity to bond and understand their roles and responsibilities prior to the setting up of the Women's Situation Room
- A robust engagement with the media must be sustained to ensure that proper coverage of the Women's Situation Room takes place and that it gets the visibility that is critical to its success
- There is a need to do a contextual analysis in countries where the WSR process is to be replicated and in a timely manner to ensure clarity about the structures to be set up and ownership of the Women's Situation Room. This must be done through meetings with the women in-country and to be clear what they want, how they want it and where they want it done
- The Women's Situation Room must start early in country of replication and all work plans and budgets which guide the entire process must be developed in full consultations with the women convening the process in country of replication. There must be total transparency of the process to ensure that the process is owned by the women
- It is essential to have an experienced and qualified communications person to handle the media and press releases in a timely manner
- Youth are ambassadors of peace and should be encouraged to propagate peace post elections in country



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- Future physical Women's Situation Rooms should also have the Intervention Desks by the police and elections commission in the SR to resolve incidents as and when they emerge
- The roles and responsibilities of all actors in the Women's Situation Room should be clearly defined and documented before the commencement of all Women's Situation Rooms
- Training on incident reporting should be conducted in collaboration with the police to ensure accurate recording of incidents
- All statistics/data be sex-disaggregated and included in reporting to ensure a comprehensive narrative report

To learn more

- Report on the Women's Situation Room in Nigeria (2015, Joy Onyesoh and Barbara Bangura with support from The WSRNigeria Secretariat) Available:
<http://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=100213&type=Document#.V8ma1z4rK2w>