Having improved outcomes in a number of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) areas, Nigeria still has many inequalities to tackle. Despite encouraging progress in areas such as maternal mortality, Nigeria still ranks poorly in terms of human development, at 152 out of 187 countries and territories. Evidence from intervention by State and Federal Governments, as well as donor agencies and partners are yielding positive results. The infant mortality rate improved from 126 in 1990 to 78 in 2012, and the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) improved from 213 in 1990 to 124 in 2014. The Nigerian Government has also committed to a range of equalities-related legislation, from international accords such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1985) (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to the country’s Constitution (1999), the National Gender Policy (2006), the Child Rights Act (2003) and a range of other legislation.

Both the improvement and challenges have implications for Gender and Social Inclusion. While women have a slightly greater life expectancy at birth than males (in line with general worldwide figures), literacy and education show females behind males. Areas such as access to skilled birth attendants, school attendance and underweight prevalence are poor, but significantly worse in rural or poor situations compared to urban-affluent areas.

It is important, when developing and implementing plans to improve outputs in health, education and other development indicators, to be able to identify where there are inequalities – such as between rich and poor, urban and rural, males and females. It is also essential to target inequalities based on factors such as gender, location, wealth or ethnicity, otherwise there is the risk of exacerbating existing inequalities, which can contribute to an unfair society, and potentially to civil unrest.

This is why the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capacity (SPARC) has prioritised gender and social inclusion (G&SI) throughout its engagement with state governments and over the lifetime of the programme. SPARC places gender and social inclusion centrally when providing reform advice to government – ensuring governments planning, budgeting and delivery frameworks become increasingly gender and socially inclusive.

Why SPARC’s Approach in G&SI in Nigeria:

- **Concepts**: Building awareness on the need to tackle inequalities across government programmes (as well as in SPARC teams) is an important first step to addressing G&SI. Ensuring equalities concepts were mainstreamed in SPARC logframes was the first step to embedding G&SI elements in the programme;

- **Tools and capacity**: Developing a range of tools and building capacity to support states in their work are critical to effective mainstreaming;

- **Processes**: Once developed, it is important to ensure G&SI-sensitive tools and approaches are used throughout the programme-supported activities (such as using checklists to ensure State Development Plans (SDPs) and Medium-term Sector Strategies (MTSSs) are G&SI-sensitive);

- **Outputs and impact**: in the later stages of the programme, SPARC has focussed its support on the achievement of G&SI-related governance outputs which contribute to a more equitable approach in policies and processes, and actual impact on improving equalities for women and girls and other marginalised or excluded groups.

“I don’t see G&SI any differently to any other good policy practice. Our role is exactly the same as it is in terms of the need for policies to be evidence based. So it’s our job to support better use of evidence in planning – and the same goes for gender – in policy, workforce planning, communication – in everything.”

- SPARC National Programme Manager
### Domesticating federal equalities policies

**Support**

SPARC supported the process of domestication by states. This included the development of guidelines and a self-assessment checklist, and provision of training on integrating G&SI elements into policy and planning.

In addition, specific support to states was determined in response to local circumstances, including: helping to develop and implement a state gender policy; advocacy for inclusion of disaggregated data in SDPs and MTSSs; and capacity building.

**Lessons**

Without government commitment, as demonstrated through policies and plans, there are limited drivers for improvement.

Having a domesticated state policy can be a strong policy driver, and in the case of Jigawa has helped to drive equalities work.

Domesticating the National Gender Policy requires a systematic approach to engagement with all key stakeholders, and developing champions, as demonstrated in Jigawa.

In situations where the political climate is not right for domestication, a pragmatic direction can be to undertake a range of other approaches, from integrating G&SI throughout the SDP and MTSSs (as was done in Enugu with an MTSS for the MOWA) to issuing a call circular requiring MDAs to address inequalities. Follow-up is important in all cases, and effective use of G&SI officers and other champions is helpful.

Flexibility is required: if it is impossible to address one issue, other ways should be found. For example, if child marriage cannot be addressed, perhaps girls’ education can be prioritised (as in Zamfara).

It is important to lay groundwork and assess the current situation (as in Kaduna, including using participatory needs assessment (involving civil society, including women and representatives of the most disadvantaged groups).

### Giving mainstreaming a boost

**Support**

Developing and implementing rigorous plans that address the needs of the whole population are central state functions. In 2013-14, SPARC provided support to Ministries of Women’s Affairs and Ministries of Planning and Budget (MOPBs), initially in five states (Enugu, Jigawa, Niger, Yobe and Zamfara), to strengthen the G&SI focus of MTSSs and related budgets, particularly in agriculture, education and health. Support was then extended to all SPARC states in 2014-15. Support included a range of tools (e.g. a self-assessment framework for equalities-sensitive content and processes, and sample key performance indicators (KPIs)) and technical support and analysis. In-state and multi-state workshops were also used to facilitate learning and sharing.

**Lessons**

- Entrenched social, religious or political views can make it difficult to ensure that plans adequately address inequalities and are developed with meaningful involvement of civil society (including women and representatives of excluded groups);
- As part of the evolution of mainstreaming G&SI in its work, SPARC recognised the need for additional, targeted expertise and support for addressing what can be complex and contentious issues;
- An additional benefit of targeted joint capacity building for MOWAs and MOPBs (and in some cases, with sector MDAs) has been improved collaborative working towards a shared goal of addressing inequalities;
- Further benefits of targeted support, advocacy and capacity building include wider awareness of gaps and commitment to further action, such as states developing state G&SI policies, appointing G&SI desk officers, and adopting an increased equalities focus;
- While some states are confident that their plans are adequately addressing inequalities, this can be due to a lack of awareness of what could be done for a wide range of disadvantaged groups (e.g. through targeting LGAs with the worst outcomes) and the approaches that could be undertaken. More is needed to build understanding of the potential for action;
- While some states are including a focus on equalities in performance review, a more systematic approach is needed to demonstrate improvements.
G&SI sensitive service delivery

**Support:**
Improved HRM and improved service delivery (for example, through the introduction of service charters) have been two fundamental areas of SPARC support. A range of tools, capacity building and expertise in these areas has been provided throughout the programme, with a strong focus on G&SI. SPARC has also provided support on G&SI-sensitive planning and policy development that included consideration of infrastructure.

**Lessons:**
- Human Resource Management has the potential to impact on service delivery through ensuring that the public service workforce reflects the population served, and is trained to deliver G&SI-sensitive services.
- Service charters in themselves have the potential to increase and improve access to services; they can have an even stronger equalities impact if they systematically address bias and include specific access improvements for service users who have special needs.
- Systematic assessment is needed of the impact of service charters, both on customer satisfaction, and more widely on improved service outcomes.
- G&SI-sensitive infrastructure has an important place to play in improving access to services for groups such as women and children, older people and PWDs.
- When planning any infrastructure improvement, states should systematically consider the potential impact on inequalities – and ensure that this is positive.

Working together for equality

**Support:**
SPARC is a partnership-based programme, and has worked well on equalities with partners such as SAVI, ESSPIN, health programmes and development partners on G&SI issues (for example working together to ensure a focus on equalities in Education and Health MTSSs).

With respect to engagement, states appear to be increasingly aware of their responsibility to listen to the views of civil society. There are positive examples of engagement focusing on equalities issues across the SPARC states, with some states consistently involving input from established civil society groups (Kaduna). SPARC has worked extensively with SAVI to strengthen effective engagement with civil society in all common states. A number of very positive sector-specific models of engagement have developed in states, such as: Anambra’s involvement of Nigerian Farmers and Women in Agriculture in MTSS planning; Jigawa’s approach to involving religious and community leaders in its Gender Policy development; Kaduna’s Gender Working Group, which is systematically involved in planning; Kano’s G&SI working group, which has made recommendations on girls’ education and PWDs; and CSO participation in the YOSERA in Yobe.

**Lessons:**
- Partnership working can help with ‘joined-up thinking’ that can contribute to services that meet people’s needs.
- Sustainability of the CGS will require additional resources.
- More effort will be needed to ensure effective collaborative working across sectors to benefit deprived areas and communities.
- While work with SAVI has strengthened civil society involvement, engagement is not always systematic and views are not always taken into account in all processes. A greater emphasis on the need for engagement with representation from diverse groups, and sharing models and benefits across sectors and states is needed.

Reliable information

**Support:**
SPARC has supported development of HR management information systems (HRMIS) including a focus on G&SI-sensitive data, as well as equalities-focused baselines and key performance indicators (KPIs) to support effective planning and review of services. SPARC has also supported and encouraged the NMIS, which was developed to support the operations of the CGS.

**Lessons:**
- Access to and effective use of robust data disaggregated by a range of factors such as sex, location, age, disability and other sector-specific factors is critical to ensuring that planning, budgeting, delivering and reviewing the effectiveness of services contribute to reducing inequalities;
- Better coordination and alignment is required between initiatives such as the NMIS and state data collection;
- Capacity building is required for data analysts in use of equalities data, and for planners and government officials to understand the importance and meaning of equalities data;
- More effort is needed to build on successes to date in collection and use of data, and establish systematic collection and use of disaggregated data to allow targeted interventions in areas and for groups with the worst outcomes.
SPARC’s success in the states:

Drawing from the results and achievement of SPARC on mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in its programme states, SPARC has:

1. Raised the profile of G&SI and improved state government’s capacity to address equalities in policy-making and programming;
2. Supported significant improvements in in the capacity and profile of Ministries of Women’s Affairs in partnership with Ministries of Planning and Budget to lead G&SI in states;
3. Supported much improved equalities focus in state MTSS contents and processes in priority sectors;
4. Supported G&SI sensitive public service HRM;
5. Brought a stronger equalities focus to service delivery;
6. Improved collection and use of disaggregated data; and
7. Facilitated partnerships and engagement with civil society to tackle inequalities.

Key Lessons for the Future

- **Political engagement**: Identify and cultivate champions: It is essential to identify champions – in central government, sectors, SLPs and among civil society – to support an equalities approach. SPARC have been able to build on the passion of modernisers in government who recognise that they need to use the whole society to strengthen the state overall, rather than ignoring large portions of the population, such as women or rural people.

- **Be flexible, but persistent and challenging**: States noted that a single effort was not enough to embed equalities issues. Sustained advocacy and engagement at different levels of government were critical to success. Many SPARC initiatives are in environments where there is considerable resistance – or even hostility – to equalities issues generally, or in relation to a particular group, such as women, or a particular issue, such as child marriage. In some states, government counterparts were either unaware of, or unconvinced about, the importance of tackling inequalities. A range of creative and pragmatic approaches to tackling challenging issues, such as focusing on girls’ education when child marriage is impossible to immediately tackle proved successful. Other states avoided particular terminology that was proving an obstacle, while at the same time finding ways to introduce equalities concepts. The SPARC programme found that it is also important to move at a pace that works for government to ensure that the results are sustainable.

- **Don’t reinvent the wheel – localise it!**: New states in particular were able to learn from the experience of the original SPARC states, using tools and approaches that had been proven successful, but tailoring them to local needs. To do this, knowing who you’re working with is essential. SPARC staff who had – or made sure they developed – knowledge of the local area, and a good working relationship with government counterparts had an advantage in being able to bring up challenging topics.

- **Knowledgeable support and achievable solutions**: Gender and social inclusion and inequalities are issues that can be socially or politically unacceptable, impenetrable or too challenging. SPARC staff have found that having access to technical advice and tools helped to demystify terminology and break down barriers. It is also important to be able to provide concrete, tangible approaches and suggestions – or to point to sector specialists – to help ensure solutions offered are achievable by MDA staff that often have low capacity.

- **Be systematic**: Good progress was made in states that took a systematic approach, both mainstreaming G&SI through all activities but also undertaking specific equalities initiatives, such as Jigawa, which included G&SI across elements but also developed a Gender Policy, with MDA focal points.

- **Develop a common understanding and shared plans**: It is important through shared capacity building and undertaking of activities that there is a shared understanding of equalities issues, why they are important and the direction to be taken. Clear guidance and information are essential, with equalities issues systematically highlighted in tools and frameworks.

- **Both mainstreamed and separate**: It is important to both thoroughly mainstream G&SI in plans, implementation and review (including in reports), but also to have separate committees, focal points and sections in reports. This dual approach helps to ensure the issues are both fully integrated and progress in reducing inequalities highlighted and provided with the expertise, profile and resources needed.

States also emphasised that it is important not to bring up G&SI without a context. They found it useful to bring up G&SI in relation to MDG targets or to point to the potential for reducing crime and lawlessness by reducing inequalities based on poverty, ethnicity or gender. In Jigawa, by increasing the awareness and capacity of the Commissioner of Women Affairs, her advocacy became more effective. “She’d be talking about G&SI not as a new concept but in terms of something such as transport to take pregnant women safely to the hospital before delivery”.

- **Develop and maintain good partnerships and ensure meaningful civil society engagement**: Working with SAVI and other development partners was seen as critical to allowing coverage and making best use of resources and expertise, as well as contributing to sustainability. Partners helped to ensure meaningful involvement of civil society in planning and review.

- **Take account of what works**: SPARC teams found having access to evidence of what works in the SPARC programme is essential in ensuring their work was effective. In order to have a record of this, evidence of equalities achievements and challenges in the state must be documented, and research should be done to understand what has and hasn’t worked in nearby locations.

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