

Strengthening police capacity for conflict resolution in Niger State.

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Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN)*

(A Case Study)

Overview

The Policy Duty Solicitor Scheme (PDSS) is an initiative that trains and embeds lawyers within police divisions to integrate people-centered policing as part of the overall enforcement-based approach to policing. This institutional shift has enabled the delivery of on-site legal aid at community level, as well as the adoption of improved human rights and ethics considerations that were not previously part of policing in identified conflict-affected communities.



Source: Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN)

The initiative is delivered by the Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN) and supported by SPRiNG. It has impacted the delivery of criminal justice within the context of conflict in Niger State with survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and other vulnerable indigent detainees, receiving real time rights-compliant legal assistance.

14 lawyers have been trained and deployed across seven police divisions in Niger State, with further trainings and deployments anticipated in future. Also, over 100 detainees were assisted within six months, while at least 3 magistrates have reported significant improvements in case documentation and changes in policing practices.

Context

Criminal justice in Nigeria generally is characterised by unlawful arrest and detention, torture or degrading treatment, weak procedural safeguards, and limited access to legal representation. National monitoring reports suggest that Niger State is among States with high numbers of unlawful arrests, torture, SGBV, and inhumane treatment, reflecting systemic challenges in enforcing the Administration of Criminal Justice Law and protecting detainee rights.

At project baseline stage it was established that indigent detainees especially SGBV survivors lacked legal representation, while police officers operated with limited understanding of detainee rights and ACJL provisions. Without intervention, these factors heightened the risk of perpetuated impunity, further erosion of community trust in security institutions, and the escalation of tensions into violent conflict.

Approach and Activities

PWAN adopted a multi-pronged strategy that aimed to promote human rights while enhancing community security and cohesion. The pathways adopted for this purpose include **training, embedding legal professionals within police operations, ongoing public awareness campaigns and regular dialogues between key institutions within the context of criminal justice administration.**

The scheme deployed 14 trained lawyers across seven police divisions to provide immediate legal assistance to indigent detainees, ensuring timely bail applications, legal counseling, and representation with specific focus on SGBV survivors. PDSS lawyers are positioned as practical advisors to police, offering guidance on documentation, procedural compliance, and rights-respecting practices in daily operations.

PDSS lawyers conduct continuous community and police education on SGBV laws, harmful practices, and legal consequences, exposing normalized abuses and reinforcing understanding that SGBV constitutes serious criminal offences. The scheme provides survivor-centered support including free legal representation, medical referrals, protection orders, and psychosocial support through collaboration with agencies like the Ministry of Women Affairs, Child Rights Agency, and Rayuwa Clinics.

Results

124 Police officers received technical support and capacity building, improving professional conduct, reducing legal liability exposure, and strengthening SGBV case handling. 18 officers have received capacity building: 2 officers from each of the 7 divisions, plus 4 officers from headquarters.

Over **100 indigent detainees received legal assistance** within six months, with monthly PDSS records showing detainees are now rarely held beyond 48 hours without court orders.

18 SGBV survivors received free legal representation, accompaniment, and comprehensive support from investigation through prosecution, including cases of rape, assault, domestic violence, forced marriage, and child abuse. **24 GBV cases were handled** at divisional level, and another **18 active cases are ongoing in court, pro bono.**

“There is a clear difference in the attention to detail in cases brought from divisions where PDSS is working... trying such cases is usually seamless as they are mindful of evidence and witness handling.”
- **Bawa Wuse, Magistrate, Niger State Judiciary.**

The scheme strengthened justice for survivors of SGBV by **supporting 18 cases** involving rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, child custody, and assault, preventing informal settlements, improving evidence handling, and supporting survivor-centred prosecution.

3 Magistrates have reported better case documentation and trial readiness from PDSS-supported divisions. There is now strengthened partnerships and improved coordination between key service providers in the administration of justice pathway including the PDSS, the police, prosecutors, Child Rights Agency, Ministry of Women Affairs, medical service providers such as the Rayuwa Clinics, and other service providers.

Lessons

One of the reasons for project results is that lawyers are embedded inside police divisions. This built trust, allowed real-time support, and positioned PDSS as a helpful partner rather than a watchdog. The people-centered approach is critical in conflict contexts because of its focus on a combination of the challenges that are common in such contexts such as dignity, safety, survivor choice, medical, psychosocial, and protection. The joint training for police and lawyers promoted a shared sense of ownership of the proposed people-centered approaches and enabled strengthened coordinated justice delivery.

About the SPRiNG Programme

Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRiNG) is a UK-funded initiative designed to support a more peaceful and climate-resilient Nigeria. By addressing the root causes of conflict and vulnerability, SPRiNG works to reduce violence, strengthen local systems, and promote inclusive governance across conflict-affected areas in North-West and North-Central Nigeria.

SPRiNG is grounded in a politically informed, evidence-based approach that integrates environmental science, political economy, and conflict analysis. Our goal is to create a more stable and peaceful Nigeria where citizens benefit from reduced violence and increased resilience to the pressures of climate change.



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