
CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Women's Inclusion and Barriers to Participation in Armed Forces in Nigeria

Submitted: 10 June 2024

Assignment Code: WPS069

WPS | Women,
Peace
& Security
Helpdesk

The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham and Women International Peace Centre (WIPC), was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you work for the UK government and you would like to send a task request, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk. If you do not work for the UK government but have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at enquiries.wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk

Experts: Sarah Hanssen and Kemi Okeynedo

Direct Audience: CSSF Nigeria

Suggested Internal Distribution:

Confidentiality Status: Open



Findings and analysis

1. Background and Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) has been actively involved in efforts to support peace and stability in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, including through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) programming to address the drivers and impacts of the conflict in the Basin as well as to support governance and security and justice sector reforms in Nigeria. In this context, the UK is exploring how it can support Nigerian partner forces, including the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), on gender and Women, Peace and Security (WPS), primarily with respect to women's inclusion and representation within the armed forces and police. The expectation is that this will reinforce parallel work around the armed forces' protection of civilians and support improvements in armed forces' conduct regarding women and girls.

To inform potential support relating to increasing women's representation and inclusion within the AFN and NPF, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence have commissioned a consultant team through the WPS Helpdesk to undertake an evidence review. The focus is on: understanding the barriers to women's representation and inclusion in the AFN and NPF in Nigeria; the relevant evidence of the operational benefits of greater inclusion of women; the learning from past initiatives relating to approaches that are effective; and any risks of backlash or unsuccessful attempts to increase women's representation from previous experience.

1.1 Focus of the study

This study provides a desk review of existing evidence and research to inform potential CSSF support to the Nigerian security sector to enhance women's participation and inclusion. This review focuses principally on the three services of the AFN—the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, and Nigerian Air Force—as well as the NSCDC and the NPF. It reviews evidence pertinent to the following questions:

What data is available about the composition of the AFN (including the Army, Navy, and Air Force), the NSCDC, and the NPF, including gender, age, disability, ethnic, and geographical group (as well as intersections between these groups)?

What are the barriers facing women joining, being retained, and being promoted in the armed forces and police in Nigeria and West Africa? Are women barred from certain roles/units?

What evidence exists, from Nigeria, West Africa, or more broadly, relating to the operational benefits of the inclusion of women, or other marginalised groups (ethnicity, religion, disability, age), in the armed forces and police, or of their lack of inclusion having had a negative impact?

What initiatives have been effective in improving women's representation (and diversity and inclusion more broadly) in the armed forces in Nigeria and West Africa (if nothing on West Africa, evidence from elsewhere would be valuable)? Have there been any initiatives which have had a negative impact/caused backlash?

1.2 Methodology

The methodology has consisted of a desk review of published and unpublished studies and policy documents, supplemented by key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives from Nigerian security institutions. In addition to reviewing published studies in the public domain, the desk review included the following documents, several of which are restricted/unpublished, to understand the policy context and barriers to women's inclusion within the Nigerian security institutions:

- Nigeria National Gender Policy, 2021–2026,
- AFN Gender Policy, 2021,
- NPF Gender Policy, 2023 (final draft),
- Harmonised Terms and Conditions of Service for Officers/Soldiers, 2017,
- Police Service Commission Gender Policy (undated, from 2011/2012),
- National Defence College, Gender Audit of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, 2021 (unpublished), and

NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021. A total of 10 KIIs were carried out, including with the gender desk officers/advisors of the NPF, Army, Navy, Air Force, the NSCDC, the Army Women's Corps, the Ministry of Defence Human Resource Department, and the Police Service Commission Recruitment Office.

2. Policy Context: Gender and Inclusion in the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC

In recent years, the Government of Nigeria, AFN, NPF, and NSCDC have renewed and strengthened their policy commitments to increase women's representation and address gender discrimination within the operations of the armed forces and police. At a national level, the National Gender Policy was revised in 2021, setting the ambition to work towards gender parity (50:50) across all public institutions. An amended Police Act was passed in 2020, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender within the NPF, and in 2023 the NPF approved a new gender policy. The AFN and NSCDC launched their first gender policies in 2021. The following sections provide historical background to these recent policy commitments, as well as the current status of progress in implementing them.

2.1 Historical Context

Post-independence Nigeria saw a gradual opening up to women's recruitment in the armed forces and police. The Nigerian Air Force was the first of the three services to commission female officers in 1964, followed by the Army in 1981 and the Navy in 1992. The Nigerian Defence Academy, the primary officer training institution for the three services, only admitted female cadets from 1981 onwards. Women were first officially recruited into the NPF in 1965.

However, they were largely barred from serving in combat roles until 2011 and were predominately employed in support roles, including medical services, clerical work, communications, and catering. In contrast, the NSCDC included women from its inception in 1967 and has historically had greater female participation. It was initially established as an unarmed corps mandated to undertake civil protection duties during disasters or emergencies. However, female participation declined following the amendment to the NSCDC Act in 2007, which provided for the corps to bear firearms.¹ The 2010s saw the beginning of a policy shift to encourage equal opportunities within the AFN and NPF and the gradual reform of discriminatory policies, regulations, and procedures. This was in response, in part, to the direction provided by Nigeria's first National Gender Policy, adopted in 2006 (revised in 2021), which reinforces the responsibility of all government institutions to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The NPF was the first security sector institution to internalise the National Gender Policy, launching the NPF Gender Policy in 2010 (revised in 2023). A breakthrough for the AFN occurred in 2011, following former President Goodluck Jonathan's order to allow women to be admitted to the Nigerian Defence Academy Regular Combatant Commission, and the admission of the first set of 20 women—nicknamed the 'Jonathan Queens'—to the course.² Nonetheless, progress in implementing institutional reforms to increase women's representation and address discriminatory practices in the AFN and NPF during the previous decade was slow. Recent gender policy commitments by the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC, from 2020 onwards (detailed in Section 2.2), aim to address many of the ongoing concerns relating to barriers to women's representation, full inclusion, and access to decision-making levels, including concerns relating to limitations on women's roles and

¹ Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), 2020. NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021.

² PWAN, 2020. Report on Gender Assessment of the Security Sector in Nigeria: At the Federal and State Levels (Benue and Bauchi).

duties (especially combat-related roles), discriminatory terms and conditions of service and recruitment/enlistment requirements (e.g. requirements that women be unmarried at the time of enlistment and/or remain unmarried/do not get pregnant during the first two years of service), and women's very low representation in senior leadership positions across all of the agencies, among other issues.³

2.2 Recent Policy Commitments and Status of Progress

NPF: Policy Commitments and Status

Police Act (2020) and revision of Police Regulations/Orders: The amended Police Act (2020) repeals the discriminatory provisions of the previous Police Act (2004) and prohibits all discrimination on the basis of gender within the NPF. This requires that the NPF put an end to discriminatory practices, which historically included disqualifying married women from enlisting in the police and restricting the duties and postings of women police officers.

In line with the requirements of the Police Act (2020), the Police Regulations/Orders are currently being reviewed and updated to remove all discriminatory provisions, including those that limit the duties, privileges, and opportunities for advancement/promotion of women police officers. With support from the United Nations Development Programme, the revised Police Regulations/Orders have been drafted and agreed at a technical level and are currently awaiting approval.⁴

NPF Gender Policy 2023: The Inspector General of Police (IGP) has recently approved a revised NPF Gender Policy which is expected to be publicly launched in 2024.⁵ This sets out a system-wide agenda to transform the police to be gender inclusive and responsive. It also aims to learn from the failure to implement the 2010 gender policy, which was never formally adopted by the IGP,⁶ lacked senior buy-in, and was poorly operationalised. A critical weakness was the inability to use it to review the Police Act, Regulations, Force Orders, and Standard Operating Procedures that guide regular operations of the police.⁷

The NPF Gender Policy is framed broadly, calling for “system-wide gender mainstreaming”⁸ across all aspects of NPF administrative systems and operations, including the introduction of gender-responsive reforms relating to gender-based violence (GBV), human rights and access to justice, legal and policy reforms, including a gender review of the Police Acts, Regulations and Force Orders, and capacity strengthening measures and tools required to establish a gender-responsive police force. Addressing gender disparities and ending discriminatory practices within the NPF is one component of the policy. Policy objectives focusing on women's representation and inclusion include to: “Reduce the current gender gap in the Nigeria Police Force, and make the Nigeria Police Force an equal opportunity employer” and to “Protect and promote female police officers' participation and representation

³ NPF Gender Policy, 2023. (Version cited is the unpublished final draft, as submitted to the IGP). NDC & UN Women, Gender Audit of the AFN (2021 Draft, unpublished). PWAN, 2020, Gender Assessment of the Security Sector in Nigeria.

⁴ Information provided by UNDP.

⁵ Information provided by UN Women.

⁶ PWAN, 2020.

⁷ NPF Gender Policy, 2023.

⁸ NPF Gender Policy, 2023.

across the police spectrums (e.g. adopt a gender quota system into the NPF internal security management frameworks)."⁹

The NPF Gender Policy includes detailed commitments with specific actions to be implemented. This includes bringing NPF administrative regulations in line with the 2021 National Gender Policy, in areas such as recruitment and enlistment, retention, promotion, postings, and parenting. It further specifies that "Recruitment and enlistment into the Nigeria Police shall reflect the 50:50 affirmative action by the year 2025"¹⁰. It also includes abolishing discriminatory police practices and conditions of service, including restrictions on enlisting married women, on marriage during the first two years of service, and on provisions barring women from armed military training exercises (drilling under arms).

AFN: Policy Commitments and Status

AFN Gender Policy 2021: This commits the AFN to gender mainstreaming across all aspects of its operations. This includes ensuring all of its administrative policies and procedures—including those related to recruitment, retention, promotion, postings, and maternity and paternity leave—are gender responsive. It also makes commitments to gender sensitivity related to training, logistics, accommodation, budgeting, community engagement, data and statistics, as well as commitments to implement zero tolerance of all forms of GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and sexual harassment.

While the overall goal of the policy is framed broadly as mainstreaming gender issues within the AFN, the policy is clear in its intention to create an enabling environment for women's inclusion in the armed forces and to reduce gender disparities. Specific policy objectives include to "close the existing gender gap and make the AFN an equal opportunity employer" and to "increase women's participation in decision-making at all levels"¹¹. The policy sets the ambition of achieving 35 per cent female representation in the AFN.¹² The policy also includes other commitments that are related to gender-responsive recruitment, enlistment, retention, promotion, and operations, including:

- Putting in place a gender-sensitive workplace environment;
- Removing any discriminatory policy that impinges on career progression or retention based on gender;
- Instituting measures to ensure equity in promotion, including gender-sensitive promotion boards;
- Granting male personnel four weeks paternity leave, while female personnel will receive maternity leave in line with the existing public service rules and Harmonised Terms and Conditions of Service (HTACOS); and
- Ensuring that all personnel can serve in any specialty regardless of gender and that there are no gender restrictions barring personnel from serving in combat roles.

However, in a number of cases, the policy also reinforces the idea that the existing HTACOS provisions shall be implemented, despite the fact that certain HTACOS provisions are not gender-sensitive and are at odds with other statements in the gender policy (see Section 2.3). This creates ambiguity over how to operationalise the policy and may lead to inconsistency in practice. The policy does not provide for a further review of the HTACOS, administrative policies, regulations, and standard operating procedures that guide the regular operations of the three services to

⁹ NPF Gender Policy, 2023, p.13.

¹⁰ NPF Gender Policy, 2023, p20.

¹¹ Gender Policy for the AFN, 2021, p3.

¹² Gender Policy for the AFN, 2021, p15. The policy states that the 35 per cent target aligns with the National Gender Policy requirement for governance institutions. However, it appears that this was the target of the 2006 NGP, whereas the revised 2021 NGP specifies that public institutions target 50:50 gender parity through affirmative action.

remove discriminatory provisions and ensure they are gender responsive, which may hinder efforts to operationalise it fully.

NSCDC: Policy Commitments and Status

The NSCDC launched its first Gender Policy in 2021 formalise and guide its efforts to mainstream gender across NSCDC operations.¹³ The policy specifically seeks to: “address gender-based barriers and provide guidelines on the implementation of remedial measures to correct existing inequalities in the career progression of female officers within the NSCDC” and to “promote equitable access for both female and male officers to rise to management rank and participate in policy formulation and decision making”. It includes a range of commitments to enhance the gender-sensitivity of the corps, including specific commitments to:

- Collect quarterly gender disaggregated statistics,
- Comply with the National Gender Policy recommendation of 35 per cent affirmative action for women in post and promotion of officers,
- Provide maternity and paternity leave benefits (previously men were not entitled to paternity leave) as well as provision for creches in all state commands,
- Develop targeted recruitment strategies to increase female recruitment, and
- Establish a Women’s Corps.
- To date, the NSCDC has taken the following steps to implement the gender policy:¹⁴ Gender desk offices have been established across the States of the Federation and 774 local government areas,
- A Female Squad has been established to respond to threats and protect life and property,
- Creches and a school have been established at the national headquarters level and creches at state levels to enable nursing mothers and staff to keep their children nearby while on duty,
- Recruitment strategies have been developed to increase female participation during recruitment exercises, engaging the Administration Directorate, Gender Unit, Planning, and Research and Statistics,
- Capacity building to mainstream gender at all levels and stages of the Corps with support from UN Women, and
- Paternity leave is implemented.

2.3 Available Data on the Gender Composition of the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC

The AFN Gender Policy 2021 reports the most recent data on the AFN’s gender composition. As of the second quarter of 2020, women constituted 4.2 per cent of officers and 6.6 per cent of soldiers in the Army; 9.9 per cent of officers and 12 per cent of ratings¹⁵ in the Navy; and 8.8 per cent of officers and 13.1 per cent of airmen/airwomen in the Air Force.¹⁶ The policy also notes that women are primarily employed in support roles and there is little or no representation of women in combat roles.¹⁷

¹³ NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021.

¹⁴ Interview with NSCDC Gender Adviser.

¹⁵ In a military navy, a rating is a junior enlisted sailor who is below the military rank of officer.

¹⁶ Gender Policy for the AFN, 2021, p.8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The NPF has not recently reported similar data on the gender composition of the police. The most recent data that the Helpdesk consultant team could find is from 2010. As of July 2010, women police officers comprised 12.4 per cent of the NPF's total number, which stood at 291,094. Within the rank of Senior Police Officers (Assistant Superintendent of Police II to IGP), the population is 18,745, with a sex distribution of 95 per cent men officers and 5 per cent women senior officers.¹⁸

Compared with the other security forces, the NSCDC has higher levels of women's representation. As of October 2020, 26.4 per cent of NSCDC officers were women, according to gender statistics published in the NSCDC Gender Policy 2021. The gender statistics by rank/level show that women's representation at officer levels and mid-level leadership positions is similar to the overall gender composition of the Corps, ranging from 25–31 per cent for levels 7 to 12 (up to Chief Superintendent of Corps). However, women's representation declines at more senior levels (ranging from 12–17 per cent at Assistant Commandant, Deputy Commandant, Commandant, and Assistant Commandant General levels), and there is no women's representation at the rank of Deputy Commandant General and Commandant General.

According to the AFN's and NPF's gender policies, neither institution currently regularly collects and presents personnel data and information that is disaggregated by gender. Personnel data showing composition of the forces by gender, age, rank, or unit (or other personal characteristics) is not publicly available. Furthermore, KIIs indicate that there are wider limitations in personnel data collection and management capabilities; for instance, the AFN does not track personnel data centrally, but rather personnel information is held by different departments. The lack of complete and up-to-date gender disaggregated personnel data makes it challenging to obtain an accurate picture of the current gender composition of the AFN and NPF and to monitor and track progress over time. Similarly, the lack of data on recruitment and retention levels by gender makes it difficult to understand the trends driving the gender composition of these institutions as well as to assess the impact of efforts to increase female intake and retention.

¹⁸ PWAN, 2020, p24.

3. Barriers to Women's Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion

This section provides an overview of the barriers affecting women's representation and inclusion within the Nigerian forces and police. It first draws out key themes that are relevant across the three services of the AFN (Army, Navy, Air Force), as well as the NPF and the NSCDC. Then, it briefly considers the status of women's representation in each of these agencies.

3.1 Overview

AFN operational policies, regulations, and terms of service include provisions that are discriminatory or that limit women's full and meaningful participation. Although the 2021 AFN Gender Policy commits the AFN to become an equal opportunity employer, the HTACOS as well as other AFN administrative policies and regulations still contain provisions that are not gender sensitive, including specific provisions that are likely to discourage women's recruitment and negatively impact their retention and advancement. Specific examples from the HTACOS include:

- **Restrictions on marriage and pregnancy as a condition for enlistment:** To be qualified to enlist in the AFN, candidates must be unmarried, have no children, and be 18–25 years old¹⁹; to be admitted for training at an officer cadet training institution, candidates must be unmarried and 18–21 years old.²⁰ This applies to both men and women. In addition, the HTACOS includes specific conditions for women soldiers/ratings/airwomen, stating that they are only allowed to get married or get pregnant after the first three years of initial military service.²¹ Further, women shall not be pregnant while undergoing basic military training, and if this occurs, they face disciplinary action.²² These provisions may particularly discourage women's recruitment and contribute to the perception that military service is not compatible with family life and with having children.
- **Limitations on the roles/duties into which women are deployed:** HTACOS states that women are eligible for enlistment and for the grant of all commissions, and that the service conditions and eligibility criteria that apply to men shall also apply to women. At the same time, it specifies certain exceptions to the service conditions that only apply to women and leaves open that the roles into which women may be deployed may be different than those for men. For instance, the HTACOS states that the "role into which female officers will be deployed in the Services shall be determined by the Service Council/Board from time to time".²³ In some cases, exceptions may be intended to provide special accommodations to

¹⁹ HTACOS for Soldiers, 2017.

²⁰ HTACOS for Soldiers, 2017.

²¹ HTACOS for Soldiers, 2017.

²² HTACOS for Soldiers and for Officers, 2017.

²³ HTACOS for Soldiers, 2017, p32.

be 'sensitive' to the particular needs of women, but in practice may serve to limit equal access to opportunities.²⁴

- **Prohibitions affecting LGBT+ individuals:** The Code of Conduct and Ethics for soldiers, ratings, airmen, and officers states that they "must not engage in homosexuality, lesbianism, or bestiality".²⁵

Administrative and institutional practices limit women's duties/roles and their access to decision-making levels.

While the situation differs across the security agencies, women's participation in the core operational duties and particularly in combat-related roles remains limited. The Army's Administrative Policy on women officers includes provisions preventing women's postings to combat and combat support arms. The Navy and Air Force do not have similar formal restrictions, however in practice, norms and perceptions related to women's skills, acceptable women's roles, and preferences influence the roles and duties to which women officers are posted. Women are more likely to be posted to less dangerous duties, to support related functions, and to roles relating to women and children. This limits the relevance and access of women officers to the decision-making levels of these institutions, due to the regimented, merit, and performance-based paths for career progression, and the importance of service in combat-related functions to career progression.

Although the AFN has adopted a policy of 'equal opportunity and equal treatment' in most areas, in practice, it also makes special provisions for women officers, as set out in the HTACOS, which includes a separate section on women officers/soldiers, as well as in administrative policies on women officers of some services (Army, Air Force). While in most cases the same eligibility requirements and service conditions apply to both men and women, these policies specify certain areas where different conditions apply to women officers/soldiers/ratings/airwomen. Their application in practice may allow for discrimination in posting and the roles to which women are assigned. For instance, the HTACOS chapter on women officers states that the roles into which they can be deployed shall be determined from time to time by the Service Council/Board, which allows for different roles to be prescribed for women officers only.

Gender discrimination within wider Nigerian society, including stigma and taboos surrounding military/uniformed women, deter women's participation in the security sector.

A study involving military women from 53 countries (including Nigeria and West African countries) found that military women face judgement from their families and communities, including views that they are less feminine, less marriageable, sexually promiscuous, and neglectful of their families and duties as mothers.²⁶ Within Nigeria, as in many other contexts, women's entry into security institutions goes against traditional gender norms and roles. These include that combat is a male responsibility, that manhood is equated with toughness and the role of protector while women should be protected, that women are biologically/physically weaker, less aggressive, and naturally more predisposed to care-giving linked with their reproductive role. Within patriarchal family structures, which are often underpinned by conservative religious practices, the requirements of service—particularly taking up postings away from home—may not be seen as compatible with women's expected marital, family, and childcare responsibilities. For instance, in more conservative areas of Nigeria, the view that women in security agencies are sexually promiscuous is more common.²⁷ In Nigeria, women's representation within the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC has been particularly low in some

²⁴ PWAN, 2020.

²⁵ HTACOS for Soldiers and for Officers, 2017.

²⁶ Vermeij, L., 2020. Women First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations. International Peace Institute.

²⁷ NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021.

parts of the country, particularly in the north.²⁸ An assessment focusing in Bauchi and Benue States found that cultural and religious practices, low levels of education, and marital preferences were among the factors limiting women's participation in the security forces.²⁹

Women face specific challenges related to working in male-dominated, hierarchical institutions, which tend to normalise gender biases and sexual harassment.

Women face a number of challenges related to 'fitting in' to a male-dominating working environment, including facilities and equipment designed for men, discriminatory attitudes, and sexual harassment. The hierarchical and regimented structure of security institutions creates strong expectations and incentives to obey authority, to conform, and to withstand hardship. By virtue of their presence, women 'stand out'. A global study (including military women from Nigeria and West Africa) found that military women feel heightened scrutiny of their performance and appearance and added pressure to conform to the masculine environment. This contributes to an institutional culture in which it is taboo to speak up about sexual harassment and discriminatory behaviour, or even inadequate facilities/equipment.³⁰ Women also face biases that affect decisions to deploy and promote them, including that they are physically weaker and should be protected from danger and that their career paths will be limited by the choice of family over the military.³¹

The same global study points to the normalisation of sexual harassment and misconduct within military institutions, linked with a masculine, sexualised culture.³² The 2023 NPF Gender Policy and the 2021 AFN Gender Policy broadly commit to zero tolerance of all forms of GBV, including sexual harassment, and the AFN has developed an SEA policy. But, as yet, the NPF and AFN do not have a complaints system and disciplinary procedures in place for handling cases of sexual harassment and misconduct within these institutions. For instance, there is no mention of sexual harassment and misconduct within the HTACOS Code of Conduct and Ethics, no clear statement of what constitutes sexual harassment/misconduct and consequences of such behaviour (e.g. dismissal, disciplinary action, etc), and no dedicated mechanisms/procedures for filing, handling, and resolving complaints.

Recruitment campaigns have not deliberately targeted women and often reinforce the 'masculine' image of the military.

The public image of the military and police remains closely tied to traditional and stereotypical militarised masculinity, with the messages and images used in recruitment drives reinforcing physical fitness, toughness, and weaponry.³³ With a few exceptions, there have not been specific, pro-active measures designed or taken with the purpose of increasing women's enlistment and intake into officer training. They also have not developed specific communications and outreach strategies in the context of recruitment campaigns that are designed to reach women and present employment opportunities in a way that would appeal to them—for instance, by focusing on the technical skills and values service represents.

Policy targets for women's recruitment have not been applied in practice during recruitment campaigns. The Police Service Commission—the civilian oversight body responsible for the NPF with responsibility for the appointment, promotion, and discipline of all police officers apart from the IGP—adopted a Gender Policy³⁴ in 2012/13. It sets the target to increase women's recruitment to achieve the Beijing Platform target of 30 per cent representation in the NPF and to ensure at least two senior

²⁸ NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021. AFN Gender Policy, 2023.

²⁹ PWAN, 2020.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ NDC, Gender Audit of the AFN, 2011.

³⁴ This is undated but was adopted in approximately 2012-13.

women officers are included in the NPF top management. However, there have not been deliberate and proactive measures to increase the intake of women officers to achieve the 30 per cent target. In addition, once women enter the service, there are no special initiatives to encourage retention or career advancement—for instance, programmes to develop senior women's talent.

3.2 Nigerian Army

Army institutional culture and administrative policy limits women to certain units.

The Army is the largest of the three services of the AFN. It is functionally organised into Combat Arms,³⁵ Combat Support Arms,³⁶ and Combat Support Services.³⁷ Women officers are employed within the Combat Support Services, within which they tend to be concentrated in the following corps: Medical, Supply and Transport, Education, Military Police, Band, and Legal. The Army's Administrative Policy on women officers limits their engagement in Combat Arms and Combat Support Arms.³⁸ According to an interview with an Army commander, the policy restricting women from these roles is framed as protective rather than limiting. It aims to safeguard women from the heightened risks associated with frontline combat. As the Air Force and Navy do not have similar policies restricting women's role in combat, this also reflects the particular physical demands, logistical challenges, and risks associated with the Army's operating environment and ground-based combat scenarios. This includes the need to consider female soldiers' specific health needs and their specific vulnerabilities in conflict zones, including exposure to SEA/GBV. The rationale is presented as aligning with international resolutions emphasising the protection of women in conflict zones. The loss of a woman soldier is also considered to have wider societal implications, linked with women's reproductive role.

Women's access to decision-making levels and ability to rise to senior positions is limited by the institution's strictly regimented career paths and approach to promotion. Restrictions on women's participation in Combat Arms and Combat Support Arms effectively limit career opportunities, since service in combat units is a prerequisite for advancement into leadership positions.³⁹ An officer's entry point into the Army also determines the opportunities for career progression, with only those admitted through the Regular Combatant Commission allowing for career development and the potential to head any of the services up to the ranking of Chief of Staff.⁴⁰

The establishment of the Nigerian Army Women's Corps is the most significant recent initiative to expand women's operational role.

In 2018, the Army established a separate women's unit, the Nigerian Army Women's Corps. Its establishment was inspired by all-female units in other countries (e.g. Sri Lanka) and has been highlighted as part of the effort to increase women's representation and visibility within the Army. A further rationale is that there are operational advantages to engaging female personnel to support operations in response to the Boko Haram insurgency, due to the role of women in the insurgency (women have carried out numerous suicide bombings) as well as its gendered impacts (including the kidnapping of women and girls). The Women's Corps has supported various internal security operations, including the deployment in 2021 of 300 female soldiers to the Abuja-Kaduna highway as

³⁵ Infantry and Armour Corps.

³⁶ Artillery, Engineers, Signals and Intelligence Corps.

³⁷ Combat Support Services comprise the Corps of Supply and Transport, Medical, Ordnance, and Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Military Police, Education, Finance and Accounts, Band, and Women's Corps. Directorates that are of Corps status include, Physical Training, Public Relations, Islamic Affairs, Chaplain Services and Legal Services.

³⁸ NDC, Gender Audit of the AFN, unpublished draft, 2021.

³⁹ NDC, Gender Audit of the AFN, unpublished draft, 2021.

⁴⁰ PWAN, 2020. Report on Gender Assessment of the Nigerian Security Sector.

part of operations to fight armed banditry and kidnapping along that route.⁴¹ While the Corps is headed by a senior male officer, he is supported by senior female officers.

According to an interview with a Women's Corps commander, the deployment of the Women's Corps has been effective operationally. For instance, women have been deployed to strategic areas like the Kaduna-Abuja road, easing the burden on frontline forces. There are now women serving as pilots, engineers, and drivers, contributing positively to military operations.

It has also demonstrated women's capabilities and helped to advance gender sensitivity within the military. Particularly in the past, the Corps enabled resources and opportunities to be channelled towards women in the Corps, with tangible benefits including access to capacity building and training, involvement in operational tasks, and increased visibility. However, recently, due to changes in leadership, there has been a decline in these initiatives, which has led to lower interest among potential recruits and reduced operational support for the Women's Corps.

In addition, the Women's Corps also opens doors for international deployments, with the United Nations (UN) often requesting female personnel, providing economic empowerment and career development for women in the military.

3.3 Nigerian Navy

Women increasingly have access to equal opportunities in the Navy and serve in onboard duties, although their representation at senior levels remains low.

The Nigerian Navy is among the largest navies in Africa. It carries out various duties which are classified as onboard⁴² and ashore duties. Prior to 2011, women did not serve onboard sea-going vessels. However, following the admission of women regular combatant cadets to the Nigerian Defence Academy, the Navy began allowing mixed gender ships, and the number of women serving onboard sea-going vessels has been increasing. Since 2012, the Navy has acquired warships with facilities to accommodate men and women personnel, including separate cabins and toilets for women. There are no formal restrictions on the type of command and specialty women can hold. Nonetheless, they are still more commonly recruited into non-combat specialities, such as finance, education, medical, and logistics.

The Navy has taken steps to provide equal opportunities for men and women personnel to train and get vocational experience across all specialties within the Navy, including in previously male-dominated fields. Technical and vocational training opportunities are available irrespective of gender, including in aviation, engineering, ship design, communications, and medical fields. The Navy also encourages women officers to serve onboard at an operational level and to get exposure to core professional duties (including in male-dominated specialties), including serving as Navigating Officers, Engineering Officers, Watch Keeping Officers, and Catering Officers.⁴³

Promotion in the Navy is performance-driven and women are eligible to rise to senior ranks, although the number of women in senior positions remains low. Promotion in the Navy is based on evaluation of professional courses attended and the officer's service record, irrespective of gender. The highest position ever held by a woman in the Navy is that of Rear Admiral (a two-star General) —there have

⁴¹ Hassanwuyo, 2021.

⁴² The tasks performed onboard are: Gunnery, Electrical, Marine Engineering, Anti-submarine warfare, Navigation, Aeronautical Engineering, Under- Water Warfare, Diving, Under-Water Medicine, Hydrography etc.

⁴³ Gender Audit of the AFN, unpublished draft.

been two, both of whom retired recently. Presently, there are some women Commodores (a one-star General) still serving in the medical and legal departments, as well as several women Navy Captains who are expected to rise in the ranks. According to respondents in the Gender Audit of the AFN, recruitment and promotion in the Navy is based on merit and performance, and the low representation of women is primarily due to social, cultural, and religious factors, as well as the preparedness and competitiveness of the candidates.⁴⁴

3.4 Nigerian Air Force

The Air Force does not formally restrict women's roles and duties, and equal opportunity is being encouraged.

According to the AFN gender audit, respondents report that men and women have equal access to opportunity with regard to training, re-training, posting, and deployment. Women are eligible to belong to any trade in the Air Force, including pilots, aircraft engineers, regiment, armament, and civil engineers. The Air Force has been making an effort to mainstream gender across its policies and operations. This has included developing a draft SEA policy and holding a series of gender trainings for all members of the service, focusing at strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Another notable initiative has been the creation of a short documentary entitled 'Women of War' in 2019, which documents the increasing role of women officers in the Air Force, and showcases the role of specially trained women officers flying in combat and combat support operations.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, women's access to decision-making levels within the Air Force remains limited. All of the Air Force's 11 commands are led by male officers, and the highest rank obtained by a women in the Air Force is that of Air Commodore (equivalent to Brigadier in the Army).⁴⁶ Family policies, as well as policies relating to posting and deployment, continue to hinder women's recruitment and promotion.⁴⁷

3.5 Nigerian Police Force

There are no longer any formal restrictions on women's duties within the NPF; however, they remain concentrated within certain divisions.

Within the NPF, the amendment of the 2020 Police Act formally overrides discriminatory provisions in the Police Orders/Regulations that historically limited the duties of women police officers. Historically, this included designating women for office and clerical duties and for duties connected with women and children,⁴⁸ as well as prohibiting women from drilling under arms. In practice, many of the provisions restricting women from performing general duties had already been phased out by 2020,

⁴⁴ Gender Audit of the AFN, unpublished draft.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ This provides that "women police officers shall by a general rule be employed for duties which are connected with women and children, particularly the following duties: investigation of sexual offences against women and children, recording of statement from female witnesses, be present where women and children are being interviewed by male police officers, guarding women prisoners, crowd control where women and children are present in large numbers and school (Zebra) crossing duties." In itself, assigning female officers to these roles is likely intended to improve the gender sensitivity of the police and to prevent misconduct. But taken together with the other restrictions on women's duties, it may have the effect of limiting their role in the police to handling of issues related to women and children.

despite the lack of a statutory requirement. For instance, prohibitions on women drilling under arms are not observed; women bear arms for duty and personnel protection, and head zonal/state police commands, divisions, and other formations of the force.⁴⁹ However, the lack of a statutory requirement until 2020, as well as clear operational guidance within Orders/Regulations, means that practices have been inconsistent across states and depend upon the Commissioner of Police.⁵⁰

3.6 NSCDC

The NSCDC is a paramilitary institution first established in 1967 and tasked to provide protection in the event of an attack or disaster, including to sensitise and protect the civilian population, especially the most vulnerable (women and children). It is reported that early in the NSCDC's history, there were more women officers than men officers.⁵¹ However, the amendment to the NSCDC Act in 2007, which provided for members of the Corps to bear firearms, resulted in increased efforts to recruit more men and a decline in women recruits.⁵²

Compared with the other Nigerian security institutions, the NSCDC, since its inception, has had the largest share of women officers and has been the most open to and accommodating of women personnel. The NSCDC has no formal restrictions on or specific duties designated for women in the corps. It also has less rigid conditions for appointment and paths to leadership positions than other agencies. Historically, men and women of all ages, irrespective of marital status, were absorbed into the NSCDC. Nonetheless, women are still under-represented at senior levels within the NSCDC. As of 2020, 3 out of 20 Assistant Commandant Generals and 3 out of 36 Commandants (heading state commands and the Federal Capital Territory command) were women.⁵³

⁴⁹ PWAN, 2020, p.26.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ PWAN, 2020.

⁵² PWAN, 2020. NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021.

⁵³ NSCDC Gender Policy, 2021.

4. Learning from Initiatives to Increase Women's Representation, Diversity, and Inclusion

4.1 Learning from Nigerian Initiatives

As described above, the AFN and NPF have adopted a policy stance providing equal opportunities for women and have gradually removed and eased formal restrictions on women's roles, duties, and opportunities. However, the pace of change has been slow, overall numbers of women remain low, and women's seniority, access to, and relevance at decision-making levels remains limited.

The development of the AFN and NPF gender policies outlined above, as well as efforts to operationalise the policies, have been carried out with support from UN Women. In addition, United Nations Development Programme is supporting the gender review of the Police Regulations/Orders. The UN system and Member States, with support from initiatives such as the Elsie Initiative Fund, have actively supported efforts to increase the number of women deployed in and meaningfully participating in peacekeeping operations, which has helped to encourage Nigerian and West African troop-contributing countries to increase the pool of women available for peacekeeping deployments.

Nigerian policy initiatives aim broadly to embed gender-responsiveness across all aspects of the security agencies' operations. Increasing gender parity in the security forces—including through measures to increase female recruitment, retention, and promotion—is only one element of this. This relates to learning from early efforts to address gender-blind security sector reform initiatives that had a limited focus on increasing the numbers of women in isolation from wider efforts to make the security sector more gender responsive. Criticism of these approaches has included that simply adding women is not sufficient to transform the male-dominated culture and structures of the security sector, to change the conduct and operations of the security forces to be more gender responsive and prevent gender-related abuses, or to lead to an inclusive environment (i.e. women are expected to conform within a masculine environment and set of standards). In addition, there is a risk of promoting the assumption that women possess certain characteristics or will promote gender-responsive practices simply by virtue of being women, while also underestimating the importance of male gender champions.

- A number of lessons from Nigeria's experience to date have been highlighted within the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC gender policy documents and in KIIs. **Need for senior-level political commitment and coordination capacity.** Historically, progress has been hindered by insufficient commitment from senior military and police leadership, as well as insufficient coordination capacity within the AFN and NPF, to drive forward a reform agenda that includes actions to work towards national targets for gender parity. All three services have appointed HQ Gender Advisers and gender focal points at various commands to help integrate a gender perspective and institutionalise gender-responsive practices at different levels. However, gender focal points often lack the seniority or the operational experience within core aspects of the police/armed forces to have the

weight and influence to push forward gender issues. Having a dedicated WPS team with the seniority, knowledge, experience, and institutional backing to coordinate this agenda could help to accelerate the pace of change.

- **Importance of embedding reforms at the operational level.** Previous policy efforts have had limited impact at the operational level in part because the acts, administrative policies, procedures, and orders that guide the regular operations of the NPF and AFN were not amended to mainstream gender. For the NPF, this is underway now, while for the AFN, it is not clear how the Gender Policy will be incorporated at operational level.
- **Need for proactive initiatives to address societal and cultural barriers to women's recruitment and to support their retention and promotion.** It is clear that even when explicit, formal restrictions are lifted, cultural and institutional barriers to women's full integration and meaningful participation in the armed forces and police remain. In addition, a range of social and cultural barriers continue to discourage women from pursuing a career in the security sector to begin with and limit their career paths. Despite ambitious policy targets, women's recruitment will remain low without proactive recruitment campaigns deliberately targeting and designed to reach women and addressing specific barriers to their recruitment (e.g. such as physical fitness requirements, eligibility based on marital status, etc). This needs to be combined with efforts to improve the experiences of women in the armed forces and to increase their access to decision-making levels (e.g. family friendly policies, review of criteria for promotion, sexual harassment policies, etc).
- **Greater investment is needed to build institutional capabilities and the competencies of key personnel on gender.** There has been some sensitisation and training on gender topics across all of the security institutions; however, the understanding of what 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender sensitivity' mean in practice remains low. There is a need to build up a cadre of senior and mid-level personnel with specific WPS/gender expertise. In addition, there has been a lack of investment in systems to enable greater monitoring and accountability for policy commitments—including the capturing of gender disaggregated personnel data.

4.2 Lessons from Other Contexts

Military institutions globally have a long history of being dominated by men; the movement to make military organisations more gender balanced institutions is a recent phenomenon. At the beginning of 2000, only 6 out of nearly 200 countries had over 5 per cent women in their armed forces—and these women were mostly employed in 'feminine roles' such as nursing and secretarial work.⁵⁴

While military organisations globally remain male-dominated today, women's representation has begun to increase across a number of countries in recent years. For example, across 29 NATO members, the average share of women in the armed forces increased by 8.3 per cent in 2020 compared with the previous year—reaching an average of 13 per cent female representation for NATO members in 2020.⁵⁵ While some countries have been more assertive than others in pushing towards gender parity, 25 out of 29 NATO members reported an increase, and 18 countries reported

⁵⁴ Goldstein, J. 2003. War and Gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa. Cited in Alma Persson & Fia Sundevall (2019) Conscripting women: gender, soldiering, and military service in Sweden 1965–2018, *Women's History Review*, 28:7, 1039–1056.

⁵⁵ NATO, 2020. Summary of the National Reports of NATO Members and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/6/pdf/2020-summary-national-reports.pdf

having specific policies and campaigns to promote women's recruitment.⁵⁶ This section highlights some of the approaches and lessons from other countries that can potentially inform initiatives in Nigeria.

Changing selection criteria and addressing gender stereotypes that disadvantage women or limit their roles.

To promote diversity in recruitment, security institutions can review eligibility and selection criteria to ensure they do not disadvantage women or other under-represented groups and that they meet contemporary needs and skills required to fulfil job requirements.⁵⁷ It may also be necessary to challenge biases and gender stereotypes, especially related to what men and women are able to do and to the traditional gender division of roles, which often serve as informal barriers to recruitment and promotion.⁵⁸

It is increasingly recognised that physical fitness standards often have the effect of excluding women from serving in all roles; yet, often they are disconnected from job requirements and poorly reflect the skill sets required by modern militaries. The 'cult of physical strength', which is often embedded in military culture and linked with the idea that the military is a 'proving ground' for masculinity, can serve to reinforce male dominance in the institutional hierarchy.

For instance, within the United States (US) military, arguments suggest that certain physical standards that advantage men over women, such as upper body strength, should continue to be upheld—despite the fact that they poorly reflect job requirements—as an apparently 'gender neutral' way to maintain men's positions at the top of the military hierarchy.⁵⁹ Another implicit mechanism maintaining men's position at the top of the hierarchy has been the emphasis on combat experience for promotions and the treatment of Special Operations, which have remained almost exclusively male, as the most elite units, with an outsized role in military strategy. Some argue that a structural and cultural shift is needed, especially to enable women's integration into Special Operations, in order to address barriers that still inhibit women's promotion to leadership positions.⁶⁰

In the Nigerian context, the Army's physical fitness standards are adjusted for women (e.g. women are given more time to complete certain tests). However, the stereotype that women are physically weaker and unable to withstand combat duties and training has not been challenged and provides a rationale for limiting their deployment in combat roles.

To address these issues, some countries have begun to re-evaluate physical fitness standards. The approach of the Canadian Armed Forces is notable, because they have redefined physical standards for everyone (both men and women) to reflect contemporary requirements and take a more holistic view of optimal health.⁶¹ Other countries, such as Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, and Luxembourg, have opted to set different physical fitness tests or rating scales for men and women (and in some cases, also take into consideration age and disability).⁶²

Norway, one of a few countries with universal conscription of men and women, provides an example of an alternative approach, which has been to maintain very rigorous physical standards, but provide

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ DCAF, 2019. Gender and Security Toolkit: Tool 3 – Defence and Gender.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Nagel, R., et al. 2021. Culture, Gender and Women in the Military: Implications for International Humanitarian Law Compliance. Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security.

⁶⁰ Nagel, R. et al. 2021.

⁶¹ Wittenberg-Cox, A. 2020. The Best Defense? How about more women in the military? Forbes.

⁶² NATO, 2020.

separate training to women to attain the most elite levels. Since 2014, its all-women special forces training programme has produced an elite cadre of highly trained women soldiers.

Beyond physical fitness, other selection criteria and standards for promotion can be reviewed to address implicit and explicit requirements or biases that may lead women or under-represented groups to feel unwelcome or recruiters to screen them out. This might include ensuring standards for promotion are based on experience, competence, education, and leadership skills, rather than privileging experience in male-dominated operational and combat roles.

Some forces have taken specific actions to challenge gender stereotypes affecting men and women's roles. For instance, the South African National Defence Force took actions to increase the number of men in nursing; the Indian Air Force carried out a marketing campaign to encourage women's recruitment that sought to challenge stereotypes that women cannot be fighter pilots.⁶³ A number of forces have also provided training to those involved in recruitment decision-making aimed at promoting values of diversity and inclusion in recruitment and recognising and overcoming gender biases.⁶⁴

Introduce family and human resource policies that support gender equality.

Recognising that a lack of support to pregnant women and parents of young children and poor work-life balance are common reasons that people leave the armed forces, many countries have introduced human resource policies, including family policies aimed at increasing retention.⁶⁵ In some contexts, women are disadvantaged in recruitment and deployment because they are of childbearing age; for instance, in some forces in Nigeria women are expected not to be pregnant during training or within the initial years of service.

Human resource and family policies can support gender equality: by removing policies and practices that disadvantage women due to their reproductive and care-giving roles; by providing men and women with the same rights to work flexibly so that they can balance work and child care; and by creating incentives for men and women to share unpaid care. Many countries have implemented family-friendly and work-life balance measures that benefit and apply both to men and women personnel and encourage retention. These include offering more flexible service options, part-time, flexible and remote working options, subsidised parental leave, childcare options, and provision for breastfeeding breaks.

Recruitment and retention campaigns tailored specifically to women.

Many countries are implementing recruitment campaigns and special programmes aimed at increasing women's recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities. In some cases, initiatives target only women, while in other instances special initiatives providing equal opportunities both to men and women have been shown to have a positive effect for women. For example, Germany offers a mentoring and leadership training programme to all personnel early in their careers that supports equal opportunities for women, and it has proved to have a positive effect on increasing women in leadership roles after a three-year pilot.⁶⁶ Other countries, such as Australia and Austria, have mentorship opportunities that are specifically aimed at women.

⁶³ Examples cited in DCAF, Gender and Security Toolkit: Tool 3 - Defence and Gender, 2019.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ DCAF, 2019.

⁶⁶ NATO, 2020.

In a number of contexts, including in Lebanon, Nepal, and South Africa, quotas and other affirmative action measures have helped to accelerate the pace of change and to increase numbers of women in the armed forces.⁶⁷ A number of countries have set targets for women's representation within the armed forces, and some countries, such as Germany and Austria, have recruitment policies that give preference to women candidates with equal qualifications. At the same time, quotas and affirmative action measures have been criticised in some contexts, including by women personnel, for implying that standards have been lowered for them and that women have not earned their positions based on merit.⁶⁸ Quota driven recruitment in some contexts has also led to women being unwelcome or inadequately trained and prepared for the roles into which they have been recruited.⁶⁹ Experience in Nigeria also indicates that recruitment targets may have a limited effect if they are not part of a wider programme changing attitudes and institutional barriers to women's representation and inclusion.

Many countries have reviewed their recruitment strategies to address barriers to women's recruitment and undertaken studies/market research to inform the design of communications campaigns to increase women's recruitment. For instance, Portugal and New Zealand have carried out studies to inform the design of targeted recruitment campaigns to increase women's enrolment. The US, in 2020, undertook a comprehensive review of all policies and processes to assess if they had any negative effect on diversity, equal opportunities, and inclusion, and also has various programmes in place to increase women's recruitment and retention.⁷⁰

Establishing special initiatives for women versus adapting the model for everyone.

Some countries have developed special programmes and initiatives tailored to uniformed women's specific needs and designed to provide additional support to women, rather than expecting women to adapt to the 'male model' within the military. For instance, in France and Norway, women's networks or associations have been established specifically aimed at working towards equality and providing support for women in the defence space. An alternative strategy has been to facilitate women's integration by changing the model in ways that level the playing field and benefit everyone—rather than providing targeted support to women.⁷¹ Examples of the latter approach include reviewing eligibility criteria and physical fitness standards for all personnel, introducing family and work-life balance policies that provide the same rights to men and women, and providing mentoring and career development support to all personnel.

While both approaches have merits, the latter strategy may help to avoid some of the risks and pitfalls that have sometimes been associated with female-focused initiatives. These risks include the potential for a backlash against women due to perceived privilege associated with special programmes and benefits, and the risk of segregating 'women's issues' and creating women's enclaves that in practice are devalued. There also may be wider benefits to changing the model for everyone, as this has the potential to become a driver of positive organisational change.

⁶⁷ Examples cited in DCAF, 2019.

⁶⁸ DCAF, 2019.

⁶⁹ DCAF, 2019.

⁷⁰ NATO, 2020.

⁷¹ Wittenberg-Cox, A. 2020. The Best Defense? How about more women in the military? Forbes.

5. Evidence of the Operational Benefits of Women's Representation, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Armed Forces and Police

Since at least the 2000s, justifications for increasing women's representation within the security sector have been tied not only to normative principles but also to operational effectiveness. The main focus has often been on increasing the number of women deployed in multilateral peacekeeping operations, with the justification that this will lead to less abusive, more gender-sensitive, and more effective missions. The arguments tying women's representation and operational effectiveness go beyond UN peacekeeping contexts and have accompanied a much broader shift in the objectives and tasks of military organisations, particularly in complex peace and stability operations. The aims of military operations in many contemporary contexts have shifted from 'winning conventional wars' to achieving conditions that allow for political outcomes to be achieved, including stability, democratisation, and respect for the rule of law and human rights.⁷² Military tasks are often carried out in support of integrated civil–military approaches and operations, with military tasks including the protection of civilians, humanitarian response, establishment of order, and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In this context, military operations should reflect the principles of the wider political effort, including respect for human rights, gender equality, and democracy.⁷³

The main arguments for the operational benefits of the inclusion of women and people from diverse backgrounds in security forces are summarised below. Critics have argued that the 'evidence' to support claims that including women increases operational effectiveness is limited and often anecdotal—with much of the evidence coming from the same operating contexts. Concerns have also been raised that the arguments linking increased numbers of women to operational effectiveness often hinge on or reinforce the idea that women 'naturally' possess certain abilities and qualities that their male counterparts do not.⁷⁴ But women officers are not necessarily interested in promoting gender equality—and 'a gender-aware man' may sometimes be equally or more effective at promoting gender perspectives within security institutions as 'a gender-unaware woman'.⁷⁵ In addition, the notion that women inherently possess certain capabilities, such as the ability to communicate with local women and assist victims of GBV, has contributed to women being deployed without adequate training and preparation in some contexts.⁷⁶

Women personnel are required to perform certain tasks involving other women.

Military and police have recognised the need to use women personnel for certain tasks, such as carrying out body searches, interrogating women suspects, and interviewing women witnesses and

⁷² Egnel, Robert, 2016. Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness, PRISM 6:1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Biskupski-Mujanovic, S. 2019. Smart peacekeeping: Deploying Canadian women for a better peace? International Journal, 74(3), 405.

⁷⁵ Egnel, R. 2016.

⁷⁶ Holmes, G. 2019. Female military peacekeepers left feeling overwhelmed after inadequate training. The Conversation.

victims, out of operational and tactical necessity. Their role has been especially important in religious and conservative contexts, where male soldiers/officers may not be allowed to interact with local women. This was one of the driving forces behind the US Marines first establishing Lioness teams in Iraq, a precursor to the deployment of Female Engagement Teams (FET) and mixed engagement teams by NATO allied forces in Afghanistan. In conservative regions of Iraq, female soldiers were able to search women for weapons and contraband, whereas male soldiers could not, and their deployment was therefore necessary to respond to security threats coming from women.⁷⁷ Similarly, the use of mixed and FETs in Iraq and Afghanistan has been credited with making counter-insurgency operations more effective—for instance, women marines were used to search areas designated as women's spaces, often leading to the discovery of IEDs hidden in 'women-only' areas.⁷⁸

Improving situational awareness, intelligence gathering, and constructive interaction with a larger segment of the local population.

The role of FETs and mixed engagement teams in Afghanistan evolved to have an explicit focus on intelligence gathering. For instance, US FETs in Afghanistan were mandated to make regular contact with Afghan women and families through routine patrols, security checks, clearance operations, gathering census information and engaging key leaders—whereas men could not converse with women. While initially focused principally on engaging with local women, female and mixed engagement teams could communicate both with men and women in the community.⁷⁹

They later became a model for UN peacekeeping missions use of Engagement Teams and, more recently, Engagement Platoons—mixed gender teams and platoons (the latter formally comprised of at least 50 per cent women) that engage with the entire community.⁸⁰ Community engagement began as a way to gather information to enhance situational awareness and to build trust with the host community, but became increasingly important to protection activities as well as to the safety and security of peacekeepers themselves.⁸¹

Similarly, officers coming from the same background and speaking the same language as the local population, particularly within ethnic or religious minority areas, may be more successful at gathering information and establishing relationships with community members.

Increased trust, credibility, and legitimacy from the perspective of the local population.

Security institutions that are representative in their composition of the wider civilian population they serve may benefit from greater legitimacy, engagement, and support from the civilian population—factors which are linked with their effectiveness.⁸² Furthermore, within operational contexts, culturally diverse and mixed-gender units may be more aware of and sensitive to gender and cultural dynamics and may be viewed as more legitimate by local stakeholders.⁸³ This may reduce tensions and mistrust with local communities, which have the potential to lead to conflict escalation, thereby contributing to force protection.

⁷⁷ Dharmapuri, S., 2011. Just add women and stir?

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Dharmapuri, S., 2011. Just add women and stir?

⁸⁰ Baldwin, G. 2021. From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons: The Evolution of Gendered Community Engagement in UN Peace Operations. International Peace Institute.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Slapakova, L, et al, 2022. Leveraging diversity for military effectiveness: Diversity, inclusion and belonging in the UK and US armed forces. Rand Europe.

⁸³ Slapakova, L, et al, 2022.

Women officers may be perceived by local communities as more approachable, less threatening, and less likely to abuse their authority, especially in relation to sexual misconduct.⁸⁴ The all-women Indian UN police unit deployed to Liberia in 2006 is an early example, which was found to have built trust and reduced tensions between the local population and peacekeeping operation.⁸⁵ Some argue that the use of mixed gender engagement teams in Afghanistan served to enhance force protection by avoiding unnecessary conflict with local communities.⁸⁶

Similarly, ethnically and culturally diverse units may benefit from an understanding of local language, customs, and religions—bringing strategic and human intelligence benefits—or be more generally capable of operating in a culturally sensitive way. Local perceptions of a diverse force may be equally important for credibility and trust; a diverse force may help to diffuse mistrust due to historical power imbalances between groups linked with a legacy of ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination, conflict and military intervention, or colonialism.⁸⁷

Improved conduct and ability to address SGBV.

Increased representation of women within police and military structures is thought to contribute to improvements in the quality of responses to SGBV, as well as to contribute to reducing sexual misconduct (although adding women is not in itself sufficient). Women may feel more comfortable reporting SGBV to women officers. For instance, the integration of women in US policing between the 1970s and early 1990s has been shown to be associated with significantly higher rates of reporting of violent crimes against women, especially domestic violence.⁸⁸ Some argue that improving the gender balance within security institutions can change the gendered culture within these institutions, which is thought to play a role in normalising and condoning SGBV.

It is often considered good practice to allocate women officers to specialist GBV units, such as women's helpdesks (spaces designed to offer privacy and specially trained staff to receive and assist women complainants).⁸⁹ However, in some contexts, the practice of establishing 'women-only enclaves' (e.g. all-women police stations or women-staffed GBV units) can be counter-productive—reducing the responsibilities of women officers, deflecting resources and attention to gendered crimes by 'segregating' the issues, and negatively affecting the quality of response.⁹⁰ For instance, a study of police responses to domestic violence in Ghana and Nigeria found that specialist units established to handle domestic violence cases, which were staffed almost entirely by women, were treated as a 'feminine arm' of the police, and were demeaned, neglected, and under-resourced.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Dharmapuri, S. 2011.

⁸⁵ Dharmapuri, S. 2011.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Slapakova, L, et al, 2022.

⁸⁸ Miller & Segal, 2019. Do female officers improve law enforcement quality? Effects on Crime Reporting and Domestic Violence. *Review of Economic Studies* 86(5):2220-2247.

⁸⁹ Suktankar, S. et al, 2022. Making the police more responsive to gender-based violence.

⁹⁰ Nirvikar, N. 2020. Gender, Law Enforcement and Access to Justice: Evidence from All-Women Police Stations in India. *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 114, Issue 4, November 2020, pp. 1035–1054.

⁹¹ Yalley, A., & Olutayo, S. (2020). Gender, masculinity and policing: An analysis of the implications of police masculinised culture on policing domestic violence in southern Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 2(1)

6. Recommendations and Potential Entry Points for UK Support

- Support the development of **institutional capacity, knowledge, and leadership within each of the security institutions to coordinate WPS**, including commitments related to working towards gender parity within these institutions. This coordination capacity needs to include senior champions and to involve relevant departments (e.g. those responsible for recruitment and human resources, training, etc). There may also be a role for Nigeria's National Defence College and other training institutions that cater to mid and senior level personnel in the AFN and other institutions in building a cadre of senior leaders with WPS expertise.
- Support and build the **AFN, NPF, and NSCDC's capabilities to capture and monitor gender-disaggregated personnel data** that provides the basis to assess and monitor progress in achieving gender and inclusion objectives. Encouraging publication/reporting of this data would also signal a commitment to transparency, might enable partnership with civil society, and improve civilian oversight on this issue.
- Support the AFN, NPF, and NSCDC to increase the intake of women personnel through the **design and implementation of recruitment campaigns that are women-friendly and inclusive**. Men and women from diverse religious, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds ideally should be centrally involved in the design of outreach and communication campaigns to ensure that messaging is effective in overcoming gender, religious, and cultural stereotypes, including particular stigmas around uniformed women. These campaigns should also be targeted to ensure that they reach women, including, for instance, by engaging women from diverse backgrounds in communications and outreach.

 - Support the **technical review of the AFN HTACOS as well as other operational procedures and administrative policies of the Army, Navy, and Air Force** to address provisions that hinder gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. This should not only remove overtly discriminatory provisions but also review outdated terms and conditions of service/policies that no longer serve the skills and leadership requirements of the Nigerian AFN and that may improve its performance and the well-being of both men and women personnel. These should also be reviewed to incorporate best practices relating to non-discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and SEA (e.g. to include these within the Code of Conduct and Ethics, to establish procedures to report and handle complaints in a confidential and sensitive manner, etc).
 - Support the provision of **training and sensitisation on gender that focuses on and supports the roll-out and operationalisation of newly adopted policies/orders** (e.g. the AFN Gender Policy 2021, the NSCDC Gender Policy 2021, the NPF Gender Policy 2023 and amended Police Act/Orders). For instance, this might include targeted training focusing on the new provisions of the revised Police Regulations/Orders once approved, or on the responsibilities of particular departments/units for implementing aspects of the AFN Gender Policy 2021.
- Explore how to **leverage the experience of the Army's Women's Corps** to increase women's access to training and decision-making levels within the Army, to improve the everyday experiences of uniformed women, to change perceptions that may limit women's duties and operational roles, and to encourage more proactive women's recruitment. As a starting point, this might include evaluating the experience of the Women's Corps to date, including the adequacy of

training/preparation, perceptions/experiences of women participating, and the impact of the Women's Corps on operations, in order to identify specific needs and entry points for support.