

What Women in Leadership Looks Like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
Enablers and Distractors

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DSA 2020: New Leadership for Global Challenges

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## Acronyms and definitions

ARC	Accountable, Responsive and Capable Government
AWARD	African Women in Agriculture and Research Development
BAY	Borno, Adamawa and Yobe
BHC	British High Commission
CoP	Community of Practice
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
DAWN	Development Agenda for Western Nigeria
DFID	Department for International Development
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PDIA	Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PERL	Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn

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## The Context

Historically, the predominant culture in Nigeria has promoted a patriarchal society where women have less resources, power, control, voice and autonomy than men. While there has been significant improvement in the status of women in public life in several states in the south, there are still substantial variances in political representation and public leadership across the country. In Northern Nigeria access to education, representation in government and workforce participation is even more disproportionately skewed against women. Even for educated women employed in the civil and public service and those who seek elected office, the higher in the ranks, the less female presence there is. Progress is being made, however, towards increasing the number of Women in Governance in the Nigerian civil and public services. This is especially true in states such as Kaduna and Kano where women are occupying spaces that have never been filled by women and there are overall higher percentages of Women in Governance.

From 1999 to 2011 there was a progressive increase in women’s political representation in the National Assembly; in the past two elections, however, there has been a regression<sup>1</sup>. The ratio of women in politics is reflective of both the cultural and political climate. Additionally, negative attitudes to women in leadership persist across the country. A 2015 study of male and female attitudes to women in leadership roles showed the persistence of gendered attitudes. The political party system has also done little to encourage women’s participation, with women only making up a small percentage of nominees for governors, deputies and both legislative houses. During the early years of Nigeria’s return to democracy (1999-2007) there was political will to open leadership spaces based on merit and this resulted in a good number of women in high positions. This continued in the following years but has waned recently. However, there are exceptions. In Kaduna State, in Northwestern Nigeria, Governor El-Rufai has demonstrated similar political will to open spaces for leaders based on merit regardless of their gender (for example, the Head of Service, Deputy Governor, and other roles are occupied by women). This is why progress in women’s representation is fragile - it often only happens when the executive demonstrates political will to open spaces based on merit and not based on the pervasive patriarchal hegemony.

The data therefore indicates that women, whether elected, appointed or promoted, are the minority in the Nigerian governance space<sup>2</sup>. According to national data, women comprise 25% or less of top government officials and senior administrators, with the disparity often being greater in some parts of the country.

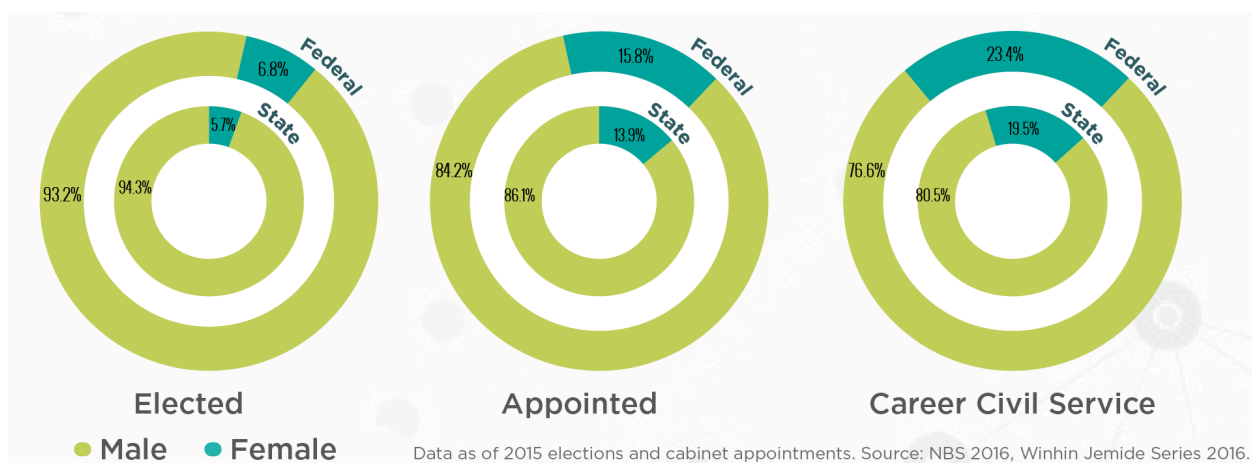


Figure 1. Women in Public Office: Nigeria is numbers

<sup>1</sup> By the 8th National Assembly there were 29 women (of 469). However, since the 2015 general elections, there has been a regression in these numbers and there are currently 18 women out of 469 members in 9th Nigerian National Assembly. There are seven female representatives in the Senate and 11 in the House of Representatives, this is gross under-representation in a country of about 200 million people split evenly between women and men.

<sup>2</sup> [https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary?queries\[search\]=Statistical%20Report](https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary?queries[search]=Statistical%20Report) – Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria for 2018 and 2017

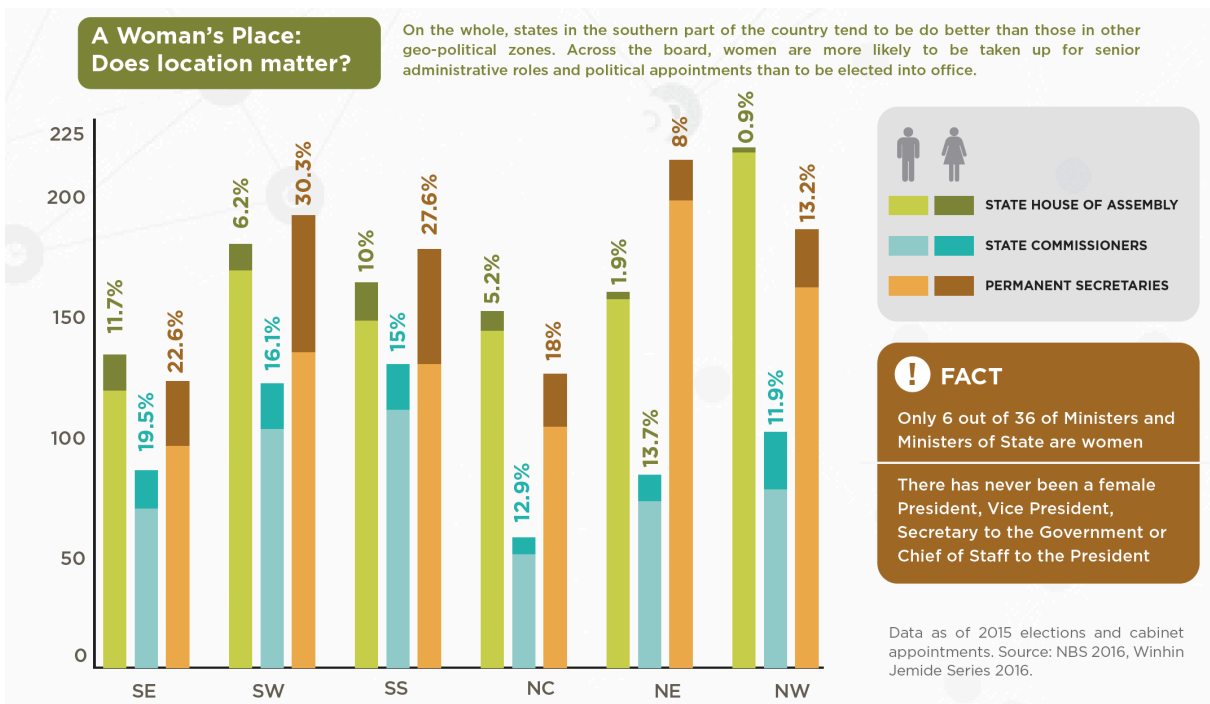


Figure 2. A woman's place: Does location matter?

Many women in government are in positions of responsibility in which quality policy development, planning and strategy development are essential in the effective delivery of their mandates. Research has shown that highly placed professionals in the public sector can often feel isolated and frustrated. This is so, in part, due to the absence of a critical mass of women office holders<sup>3,4</sup>. In Nigeria, there was no evidence of any specific support system for women in the governance space to form a casual network, to have opportunities to learn from each other, to develop a collective identity or to participate in a community of practice, to enhance their capacities to deliver on their mandates. Some women have made some significant strides in governance, as individuals, but could achieve more if they have access to a technical support bank to boost their delivery capacities for public goods and services.

To provide a support system where women can form networks, seek technical assistance, and enhance their capacity to deliver on their mandates, the DFID-funded Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) programme designed the "Women in Governance" intervention. The PERL Women in Governance (WinG) intervention was designed to support increased capacity among potential female Change Agents currently occupying key roles in government. The intervention has been implemented at the National level with sub-interventions at the state and regional levels, in the locations where PERL works since 2018. The targeted population of change agents are mostly politically appointed women and female career civil servants who occupy positions that would normally be supported by governance programmes such as PERL.

The intervention has supported ongoing work to improving service delivery through technical assistance interventions in core governance challenge areas. It has been delivered flexibly and adaptively, creating the space for the participants to request for technical help as and when necessary, and when discreet support will help catalyse change.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.mlkrook.org/pdf/childs\\_krook\\_2008.pdf](http://www.mlkrook.org/pdf/childs_krook_2008.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6594&context=etd>

### The objectives of the Women in Governance intervention are:

- To provide a platform for delivery of technical assistance to selected women, addressing gaps in competency that will enable them to lead change and improve service delivery;
- To provide peer learning and strategic networking opportunities for the women and their teams where relevant;
- To provide a safe space to reflect on, understand, and learn how to address challenges that female public office holders face in Nigeria.

### Nature of support received

There are three broad categories of support provided under the Women in Governance intervention:

- Institutional capacity strengthening by the provision of technical support to women and their teams;
- Activities to improve individual technical and leadership capabilities; and
- Incorporation into the Kaizen Community of Practice, a support system and networking platform that women can leverage for increased performance.

The intervention has been ongoing for three years. The case study examines:

- How the “Women in Governance” Community of Practice (CoP) has given participating women an opportunity to learn from one another, develop a collective identity and provide a support system to decrease bottlenecks in service delivery. And the secret formula behind the success of the CoP;
- What successes have been achieved, including in fragile contexts in Northern Nigeria, which have enabled women to run critical agencies, and to run for top elected offices, and win; and
- The role played by UKAID and HMG in supporting the PERL programme to provide tailored technical assistance and build the capacity of high-ranking Women in Governance who are strategically placed to make an impact in line with their given mandates, to improve engagement with civil society and to influence wider institutional reform.

## The Leadership Story

Leadership is about change, and transformation, and is as much about developing a vision and strategic direction, as it is about communicating that vision in a manner that it can be seen, felt and owned by the followership. It is also about creating an enabling culture and environment for that vision to thrive. Women have been traditionally disadvantaged, marginalised and subjected to societal and institutional discrimination across the ages, all around the globe.

In Nigeria, largely due to traditional customs and practices, the perception and place of women as objects, subjects and beings lesser than men has been institutionalised and internalised both by males and females in the society. The beliefs and behaviours occasioned by this socialisation are challenged by the emergence of competent, credible and effective women leaders who not only disprove and discredit this fallacy, but provide role models for other women, young and old.

### Women as change agents

Empowering and encouraging women to participate more fully in the public sphere is essential. Improving gender equality in politics and the public service is an important achievement in and of itself. In addition, research has shown that an increase of women in public life results in lower levels of inequality, increased collaboration and win-win scenarios and increased confidence in national and state governments. For example, figures show that the increased presence of women cabinet ministers is associated with a rise in public health spending across many countries.<sup>5</sup> Additional evidence indicates that where women are in office, corruption reduces, as does the perception of improved service delivery.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/gov/women-in-government.htm>

<sup>6</sup> ([www.inclusivesecurity.org](http://www.inclusivesecurity.org))

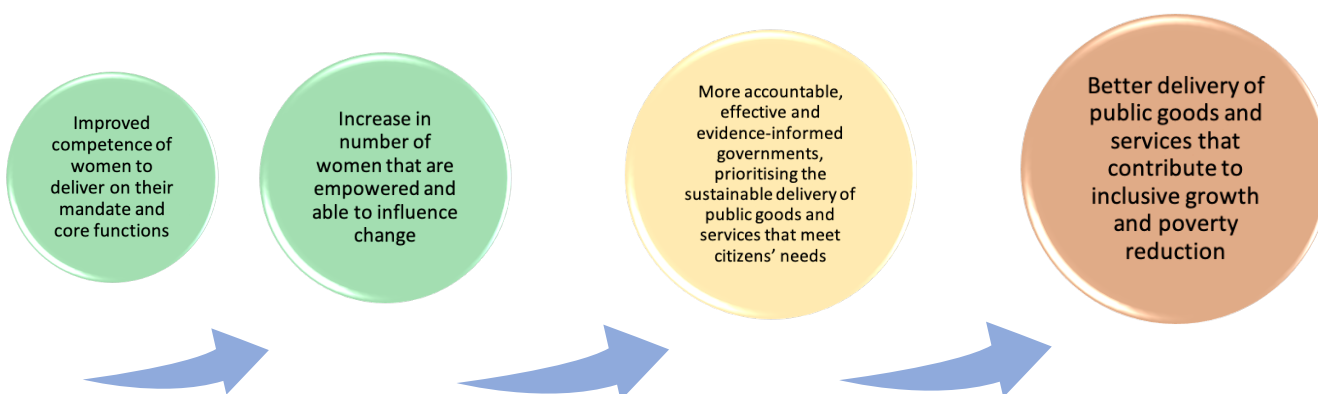
Additionally, women bring the experience and knowledge to contribute to evidence informed policy design; and the design and delivery of services that meet the needs and aspirations of other women in a manner that men-only institutions are unable to achieve.

## Catalysing Change

PERL set out to provide technical support, tools and resources to individuals and their teams to build up capabilities and improve their work in removing obstacles to service delivery for citizens. At the same time, PERL supported the development of a Community of Practice of senior professional women, active in governance in Nigeria, to complement ongoing technical assistance. The programme was futuristic in its thinking, focusing on sustainability of a community that, when formed, would remain beyond the lifespan of the programme, and which could be replicated or adapted, particularly at the regional level.

## Theory of Change

PERL's Theory of Change for was simple: the right inputs (technical assistance and strengthened skills), would produce the right outputs (increase in the right number of women who are empowered to influence change with improved competence to deliver on their mandates), would lead to the right outcome (improved capacity, practices and processes within target Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to address service delivery issues in an accountable, responsive and equitable way), which would have the right impact (More accountable, effective and evidence-informed governments, prioritising the sustainable delivery of public goods and services that meet citizens' needs) and eventually, over time, the right super impact: Better delivery of public goods and services that contribute to inclusive growth and poverty reduction<sup>7</sup>.



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<sup>7</sup> Impact and Super Impact are aligned with PERL's business case and Results Framework



## Women in Governance - Theory of Change

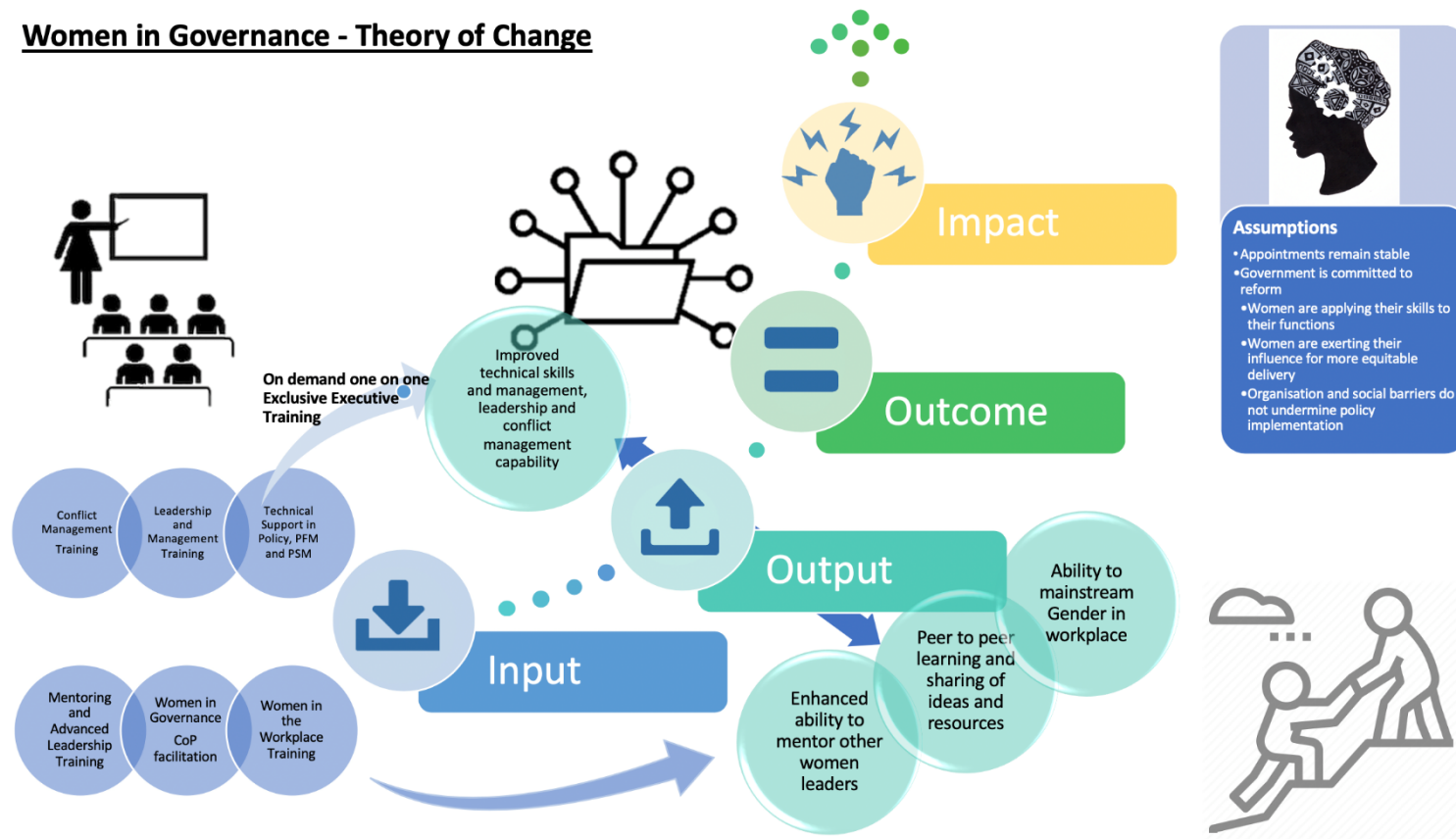


Figure 3: WinG Theory of Change

The WinG Theory of Change was hinged on a number of assumptions. First, the intervention's success depended on the idea that appointments to key positions would remain relatively stable. As this has not always been the case in Nigeria, it posed a significant threat to this type of investment. Another assumption was that government, not just the change agent alone, was committed to reform. A third assumption that PERL made was that skills learned in the Community of Practice would be applied, and that space to apply those would be made available, therefore catalysing reforms. In addition, the programme worked under the assumption that change agents would exert their influence in their position to influence more equitable delivery of goods and services to citizens, rather than business as usual. The final assumption that the programme made was that organisational and social barriers would not hinder policy implementation. In other words, the system would allow a good (equitable) policy to be implemented irrespective of the gender of the reformer. The programme conducted significant Political Economy Analysis (PEA) to identify specific barriers and mitigate against the risks posed in case the assumptions did not hold.

## Identifying Initial Participants

PERL, having been designed on principles of Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA), commenced the intervention on a smaller scale, using the provision of technical assistance as an opportunity to identify female change agents and to test the intervention. PERL, through the government support pillar, conducted a horizon scan of potential participants based on their performance and commitment to pro-poor service delivery, growth and reform. The list comprised of highly placed executives from the Federal and State public services as well as sectors that had convergence with DFID Nigeria objectives. At the Federal level, seven women were identified at the Minister level, while five worked in key sectors. The programme had previously interacted with three. At the state level, nearly 20 were originally identified, mainly from central state ministries such as Finance, Budget and Planning and from key sectors (Health, Education, WASH).

The scoping questions for the first horizon scan were based on a number of hypotheses that were explored in interviews with similar participants in locations where PERL operated. The key learning questions were:

- What are the aspirations of politically appointed women and female career civil servants who are active in governance and in visible positions?
- What are the resources available to these women and what challenges do they encounter?
- What help do they need to improve in their competencies and deliverables?
- How can the role of women as catalysts of change be sustained?

Based on the answers from the first horizon scan, a second scan was undertaken to assess blockages and opportunities for Women in Governance to serve as change agents. These were aligned with the programme's workplan at the sub-national and Federal levels, and enabled the programme to reduce the list of initial participants into a manageable number.

## Why a Community of Practice?

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour. A community of practice consists of groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. They consist of a process of social learning that occurs when people collaborate over an extended period to share ideas, find solutions and build innovations. In the case of WinG, PERL expected that the Community of Practice (CoP) would provide a platform for learning from peers in other states or agencies on good practices and improved networks.

A critical principle of the CoP is the domain. This is a network of connections between people whose identity is defined by a shared interest which distinguishes them from others. For these women in government, their

job as senior administrators of a public service is that shared interest. In pursuing their interest in their domain, the participants of the Women in Governance intervention engaged in joint activities and discussions to share information and help each other. They were supported to build relationships that enabled them to learn. Although they do not work together daily, the strength and support that they get from their times together (and know that they are a part of a community) has positively impacted their respective daily jobs. The practice also generated a repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems that were transferred to successive women in similar positions.

## Why did PERL focus on Communities of Practice?

Learning from a successful Community of Practice at the Federal level, where Commissioners of Finance, Budget and Planning successfully worked and learned together, PERL realised that Communities of Practice were important because they provided an opportunity for people to interact, who may not have otherwise had that chance. In the case of the women supported through WinG, they came from opposite corners of the country, serving at different levels and in different sectors. CoPs also provide a shared context, and an opportunity to share personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight that is adaptable to personal context. CoPs also enable dialogue between people who come together to explore solutions to challenging problems, while stimulating learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection. And finally, as experienced through the CoP, communities are not limited by formal structures: they create connections among people across organisational and geographic boundaries.

## The Secret Formula

DAI has implemented three successive governance reform programmes for DFID in Nigeria since the country's return to democracy in 1999. In October 2019, DAI commenced a study to synthesise the lessons, expertise, and impact generated through this work. The study<sup>8</sup> found that the creation of a robust "super-network" of actors is a key to resilience, sustaining and scaling of development results. The study determined that the CoP creates a collaborative approach that builds pathways for public dialogue, brings together actors from various states and sectors and scales Nigerian governance strengthening and reform efforts.

Following the initial scoping and needs analysis which identified the need for Leadership and Management skills, 15 women were invited to participate in the inaugural face-to-face meeting. In advance of the meeting, a curriculum tailored to specific needs of the individuals was developed. The course was designed in a manner that would reinforce the skills needed to enhance leadership and managerial effectiveness. It included practical sessions on sustaining team performance, managing conflict, and creating alliances to achieve research / program / business results. The PERL programme engaged the African Women in Agriculture and Research Development (AWARD) organisation who has run globally recognised Women's Leadership and Management Courses for senior professionals throughout the African Continent. This presented good value for money; rather than sending participants out of the country to be trained at the AWARD training site, AWARD brought in three trainers to deliver the bespoke course for the Nigerian government officials. Prior to the event, participants also took the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test, to determine their personality style.

PERL believes that leadership skills can be learnt and nurtured, and as such, identified opportunities to provide this course for those women who were receiving support from the initiative or who have been identified to be members of the CoP. The initial training curriculum focused on applied skills to strengthen leadership and managerial effectiveness, understanding emotional intelligence, essential communication skills, including feedback and facilitation skills, building effective teams and developing influencing strategies, and skills to manage interpersonal conflict constructively, and an understanding of gender bias that women face in the workplace. In the design of the training, PERL considered the following questions:

### 1. What types of barriers do women face?

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<sup>8</sup> *Anatomy of Change: Subnational Governance Reform in a Democratizing Nigeria*, Alex Their, October 2019

2. How can women overcome these barriers to leadership and influence?
3. What changes in the politics and workplace culture would enable both men and women to be more effective?



Figure 4: Barriers to Leadership for Women

Another aspect that contributed to the success of the CoP included the approach used in the delivery of the training. The training was delivered in a safe environment that encouraged candid conversations about specific leadership challenges that women face. Participants were helped to explore responses that were sensitive to gender and diversity, and over the course of the four-day training, women learned, spoke, and listened. The women in the room (hailing from West and East Africa, from Europe and the United States, occupying senior and not so senior positions in their organisations) discovered that irrespective of where a woman works, which country, state, agency or organisation, the barriers that women face are relatively similar. And over the years, tools and resources have been designed to assist women to function more effectively by navigating through the barriers to deliver on their mandate. The “Women in Governance” Community of Practice (WinG CoP) has given the women an opportunity to learn from one another, develop a collective identity and provide a support system to decrease bottlenecks in service delivery.

### Collective Leadership

Collective leadership is defined as a group of people working together towards a shared goal. For the women supported through the CoP, the shared goal has focused on improving the overall performance of the change agents. Women who participate in the CoP are internally motivated through the CoP to perform better (albeit often on an individual level), celebrating the successes of each member, while generally receiving external motivation to improve their performance through their respective organisations.

## PERL-ARC Launches Women in Governance Community of Practice<sup>9</sup>

The Women in Governance CoP was officially launched on the 28th of February 2018, just ahead of International Women's Day with 15 members. The theme for that CoP was “Stronger Together.” By March 2020, membership has grown to 52. Since the launch of the Community of Practice, there have been three training programmes to improve the service delivery and overall performance of these change agents. The first, held in February 2018, provided AWARD certified leadership and management skills building through well-defined modules and team building activities. On September 2018, there was a second Community of Practice gathering for a one-day conflict management training. In January 2019, the expanded Community of Practice met again for an AWARD certified four-day advanced leadership and mentoring training, following the identification of the women to understand and deploy mentoring skills within their organisations to optimise performance. A fourth training was conducted in the South West to support the process of mainstreaming gender in the workplace.



### Ideas Shared

Women leaders made connections across areas of expertise and influence and shared ideas. The Director of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Lagos Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, proposed “one way we can increase equity and inclusiveness could be to hold a joint stakeholder forum between technocrats and government to identify the issues regarding equity and inclusiveness of women and persons with disabilities.”

Other ideas were exchanged and initiated over the course of the Community of Practice Launch and training. Women in leadership are indeed becoming even “Stronger Together.” A social media group (KAIZEN – meaning continuous improvement) has been set up for the Community of Practice using the WhatsApp platform. This remains active today. The group has used this platform to share ideas, tools and resources that could improve the performance of others in similar locations. The group has also used the platform to celebrate successes (one of the founding members becoming the first ever female Deputy Governor to be elected in the North) at work (and in personal realms) and also to lament on barriers faced. For example, a founding member of the group, a Commissioner in the Executive Council of a Northern State, chose to run for a seat in the House of Representatives in Nigeria’s National Assembly 2019 elections. She faced great intimidation within her party while trying to win the nomination, experiencing bodily harm at some point after a run in with the police for refusing to leave the voting grounds for three days, so that her supporters could vote. The women in the KAIZEN CoP encouraged her to hang on, and reached out to their contacts, including development partners who put pressure on the Governor to allow a democratic process to be carried out in his state.

The findings from the March 2019 impact assessment<sup>10</sup> reported that most CoP members derived great value from their interactions with other Women in Governance and from the content of the trainings administered. The women testified to experiencing internal changes regarding their confidence and inspiration levels which have led to differences in the way they conduct business, how engaged they are with their work, the manner in which they handle conflict and the effectiveness and efficiency with which they discharge their duties. As Sylvia Onwubeumeli, the Senior Special Assistant to the Enugu Governor on Training at that time shared, “I’ve learned so much over the past two days it’s like I never went to school. [As women] we have to keep working, someone is always watching.” The then Executive Secretary of the Kaduna State Primary Health Care Development Agency (now Deputy Governor), Dr Hadiza Sabuwa Balarabe agreed. “I’ve gone for training on leadership in the past, but the energy here is different.”

<sup>9</sup> <https://us13.campaign-archive.com/?u=3c3cbd01beaedfd6d46c10628&id=af09816bb5>

<sup>10</sup> *Women in Governance Service Delivery Impact Assessment, April 24, 2020, PERL*



For Women in Governance who are often excluded from trainings and skills building that would facilitate the progression of their careers and strengthen their service delivery capacity, such platforms can be vital. An assessment of the CoP, testimonials and evidence from members of the community, as well as reflections from those working alongside the Women in Governance and a study of other CoPs, indicate that the CoP’s approach to supporting its members has strengthened their capability to perform in their functions. It was assessed that the CoP is contributing to the achievement of reforms to improve service delivery through creating value for individual members that lead to wider institutional reform. Through the CoP, linkages are being created, including networking with likeminded individuals and peer learning that have led to collaborations across states and sectors. These have fostered adaptation and adoption of existing reforms, removed bottlenecks that have allowed for merit-based promotions and provided opportunities for collaboration and peer learning. In addition, the access to trainings on leadership, management, conflict resolution and mentoring; which many of these women may not have received otherwise, has been vital to improving performance, staff and situation management and ultimately better service delivery.

The positive value creation was reported to include increased technical skills, equal learning partnerships, new ideas for practice and increased confidence. The women also reported improved personal networks with other governance professionals – both within the CoP and with other government counterparts. There are tangible examples of new collaborations that have arisen from networking within the CoP and have resulted in promotions and solutions to challenges the women faced. In the former instance, Hafsat Ashiru, the current Senior Special Assistant to the Deputy Governor of Kaduna State, met the Deputy Governor at the first CoP session. At the time of their meeting, Hafsat was the Special Assistant to the then Commissioner of Kaduna Ministry of Rural and Community Development, Hajiya Balarabe Aliyu–Inuwa, while Dr Hadiza Balarabe was the Executive Secretary of the Kaduna State Primary Health Care Agency (KDSPHCA). When Dr Balarabe became the first female elected Deputy Governor of the North, she offered Hafsat a job as her Senior Special Assistant. Their relationship was established within the CoP and the leadership and management lessons Hafsat learned helped increase her capacity and better equipped her for this higher role. As Hafsat noted, “without the knowledge, skills and networking gained from the CoP she would not be where she is; the three courses she took on leadership and management, conflict management and advanced leadership and management and have had lifelong impact.”



For the CoP, the depth of the training curriculum and breadth of topics covered was noted as helpful by its members. The networking opportunities allowed for: i) exchange visits to learn more about ongoing reforms; ii) quick access to information from fellow CoP members; and iii) opportunities to leverage new relationships formed, for the furtherance of individual and organisational objectives. In addition, the access to trainings on leadership, management, conflict resolution and mentoring, which many of these women may not have received otherwise, has been vital to improved performance, staff and situation management and ultimately better service delivery.

As documented in the “Assessment Report of PERL-ARC’s Communities of Practice,” the women in the CoP reported “having new ideas for practice and gaining technical skills or knowledge from the CoP. They also improved their personal networks and increased their confidence in their professional abilities. Members were inspired by information shared by colleagues and facilitators during the CoP sessions. The Head of the Planning Unit in the Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget shared how the strategic influencing topic taught at a session has helped her to identify her aims and abilities. This has helped to influence her interactions

with people to get more work done in the ministry. She reiterated the important role these lessons played in strengthening her confidence.”

As a result of the value created during immediate and potential value creation cycles, the CoP members have begun to adopt and apply skills learned; make technical changes in their processes, leadership and conduct and form new collaborations. Princess Adedoyin-Ajayi, Director, Office of Transformation, Creativity and Innovation, Lagos State Government noted that “the knowledge sharing with other women was excellent and provided me with new ways and perspectives to do things. It empowered me to learn new approaches to deal with situations inside and outside the workplace and how to best manage myself as a woman with leadership responsibilities in order to deliver well.” Due to the value added through the CoPs, members reported being more successful at work and improving service delivery. After applying lessons learned from the CoP, Mrs. Clara Bamgbola reported increased recognition and rewards at work when she was promoted based on applied knowledge, and her team emerged with the best overall achievement against her group’s key performance indicators.

Her fellow CoP member, Hajiya Yabawa Kolo, the Head of the Borno State Emergency Management Commission (SEMA) in the conflict affected North of the country, reports improvements in her leadership style immediately after the first training session, as her outlook and attitude towards her staff changed and her confidence increased. Her interactions with key stakeholders were strengthened and she was able to pass on knowledge to her staff. Speaking about the enabling environment provided by PERL as a development partner, Hajiya Yabawa Kolo noted, “I have been working with different organisations but the most structured in approach and administration is that supported by PERL-ARC.” Today, Mrs. Kolo is a key member of the Borno State Government supporting residents of her state with the distribution of palliatives for those affected by COVID-19. The members of the CoPs have also been proactive in making the community work and applying approaches from the CoP approach. “The CoP has allowed us to become a family” a number of women noted.

Other documented benefits of the CoP were testimonials from the CoP members which evidenced the successful transfer of knowledge to other stakeholders (stepping down learning within their organisations), having more influence with their superiors and having a stronger voice in places (and bridging gender gaps) where they can make a difference. There are reported experiences across all CoPs of these positive interactions that have result from the value the CoP has added to them professionally.

## Success Stories

Within the first month that the intervention was designed and launched, three requests for support we received, two at the federal level and one at the state level. PERL was able to support the federal Government Enterprise Empowerment Program (GEEP) with a Communication Strategy and a Media Plan and Kaduna State to develop the Kaduna Framework for the Ability Trust Fund<sup>11</sup>. Within six months PERL supported the validation of the National Disability Policy, assisting with consultative meetings for key government officials, civil society members, persons living with disability (PWD), and other relevant groups to review, adopt and validate Nigeria’s National Disability Policy. PERL also supported the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council, headed by an influential female executive to conduct customer service training for federal MDAs who interface with Nigerian citizens and foreign investors, to improve their skills around complaint mechanisms, in line with PERL’s goal to improve service delivery and promote growth in Nigeria. Requests for support continued to take place over the course of the next two years, with significant results.

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<sup>11</sup> A Kaduna Trust Fund to support Persons with Disability

## The Making of a Public Service Amazon



Mrs Clara Adenike Bamgbola joined the public service in 2002, in the Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, Budget Department, where she worked for 18 years. Her role in Public Service and previous collaboration with development partners afforded her the opportunity to participate in the PERL Women in Governance Programme. Her next assignment saw her move to the Ministry of Health as the Head of Health Planning Unit, where she was able to put the learnings from the CoP to practice. At this new assignment she made significant changes to their budget processes and realised ground-breaking success. She pinpoints this as a life transforming factor in her career. Mrs Bamgbola is now a Director, and currently the

Head of Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) in Lagos State Government. She is a proven technocrat in the planning and budgeting domain of public service and is the assertive force behind some of the notable sustainable reforms in Policy & Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation that are transforming Lagos State. As she continued her refining her skill set through learning events, Mrs Bamgbola became more assertive and confident in different areas including conflict management. Her tactful approach to conflict management favoured collaboration and compromise rather than competition; a refreshing approach that bore considerable results.

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*“After the training I began complementing managerial functions with leaderships skills, especially through Emotional Intelligence i.e. understanding who I am, applying empathy, listening and getting involve in personal issues and building interpersonal relationships. I began to marry the two and that has helped me to achieve more results, from colleagues, subordinates as well as superiors.” Mrs Clara Adenike Bamgbola, Head of the Economic Intelligence Unit, Lagos State*

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### Behind the Scenes of Lagos State’s Smart COVID-19 Response

January 2020 in Lagos started out like every other year. Big businesses lined up annual calendars and individuals shared goals for the next 12 months. However, few weeks into the year, everything changed, and Lagos, along with the rest of the world was thrust into confusion and panic. By April, businesses had shut down, oil prices plummeted, and most importantly, people were facing uncertainty and fear. In the middle of this global tension, at the heart of Nigeria’s economic capital, a team led by the assertive and resourceful Mrs. Adenike Bamgbola was crafting a sustainable pathway to recovery for a resilient city. As Head of the Economic Intelligence Unit in Lagos State, the responsibility of providing an economic solution during this pandemic rested squarely on Mrs. Bamgbola’s shoulders. Within a short time, she and her team delivered an actionable plan that covered key areas of interest. Mrs. Bamgbola and her team presented the comprehensive economic response plan for COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic with recommendations that have provided palliative solutions (some based on knowledge garnered from the CoP) for those living in the epicentre of the pandemic in Nigeria. The implementation of their ideas has impacted over 30,000 Lagosians directly and many more indirectly.

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*“The state ensures that the standard of living of an average woman is protected in the economic palliatives... For preparation and distribution of stimulus packages, women are highly involved...inspecting, packaging, validating, monitoring. Most of the 600 vendors in Lagos are women and there are other women in the community to support.”*

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## A Rising Change Agent



Hafsat Ashiru, is a very well-educated young woman who currently serves as the Senior Special Assistant to the Deputy Governor of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Her career development has followed an interesting trajectory that has seen her serve as an Aide or Assistant to many women over the years. This success is built on an enviable educational background that includes two Master's degrees in International Rural Development and Peace, Conflict and Strategic Studies, while she is currently pursuing PhD studies in Policy and Development Management.

Her career path reflects a genuine interest in areas that demand practical application of her skills to impact the lives of others, especially women. In line with this passion, she served as Special Assistant to the Commissioner in Kaduna State's Ministry of Rural and Community Development and

Kaduna State's Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure. This position afforded her the opportunity to attend her first Women in Governance event, where she represented the Commissioner. Today, she has become an icon for the Women in Governance Community of Practice. Her progress highlights some of the personal outcomes of the intervention.

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*"I feel I belong somewhere...I have people I can go to. The Community of Practice makes me calm because I know I have women supporting me. I have pillars." Hafsat Ashiru, speaking on the impact of the community said.*

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Another direct impact of the initiative is her growth from Mentee to Mentor. Hafsat's participation at these learning events has played a pivotal role in the inauguration of her Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Hafsah Crowdfund and a co-founder of Arewa Young Graduates. Spurred by the desire to bring change to other women, and leave a legacy, she has committed her time to training others, sharing the invaluable lessons from the CoP she has attended over the years. "When I came back with that 'How to be an effective change agent', it really worked on me, my mind. [I thought], how can you leave a legacy? How can I bring change to other women?" Today, her NGO has empowered more than 65 young girls, providing them with skills, learning opportunities and the attitudes necessary for success. In her assertive, but humble nature, she attributes most of the success she has recorded in the last few years to the practical sessions at the first Women in Governance course (Women's Leadership and Management).

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*"I can never forget what it instilled in me in three sessions. I cannot measure the impact the Community of Practice group has made on me. The communication skills, the emotional intelligence, the assertiveness, effective change agent; it is all what made me stronger. ...we communicate, we network and then the trust we have, that is why I am a Special Aide now."*

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Hafsat's portfolio of achievements and impactful contribution to society are a testament to her robust approach to development. She is committed to advancing the cause of other women, especially women in Northern Nigeria through leadership development and mentorship opportunities. Her diverse experience in rural development and policy development refined by carefully selected courses from the CoP make her a great resource in public service. Hafsat Ashiru is currently the Senior Special Assistant to the Deputy Governor of Kaduna State.



## Abia's Unprecedented Change Leadership

On December 24, 2019, Governor Okezie Ikpeazu signed the dotted lines that ushered in a new era of progress in Abia State. For the first time in the history of the state, the budget was passed on time and a gender-equitable budget document was signed. These are directly linked to the hard work and dedication of our visionary Change Agent, Dr. Nnena Chikezie, the Executive Secretary of Abia State Economic Planning Commission.

Dr. Chikezie's achievements in Abia State are the turning points that promise an era of inclusive and structured development planning for Abia State. Some of her outstanding contributions in the areas of gender mainstreaming, equitable budgeting and the fight against gender-based violence all stem from her experience with PERL's support through Women in Governance.

As the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women Affairs in Abia State at the time that the CoP was being formed, Dr. Chikezie had been leading the fight against gender-based violence in the state for years. However, the fight did not yield the expected result.



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*“When PERL met me, there was this one on one meeting, where they asked, ‘what support do you want?’ and I said “we need to be trained on advocacy.” I said there is a gap and we really need to know how to go about this high-level advocacy...”*

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Inspired by the knowledge from the Women in Governance forum, it became obvious that the long-standing approach to the fight against gender-based violence required a legal framework. The task of effecting this in a state that was laced with strong cultural influences and political apathy on the subject matter seemed insurmountable. Dr. Nnenna turned again to PERL Women in Governance for support. She tactfully combined her learnings in the areas of Leadership and Management, with the high-level advocacy training, to push for legislation against gender-based violence in the state.

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*“...With the learning [from Women in Governance]...the MDA was able to get it done....so from one step to the other we planned it and at the end of the day the bill was passed.”*

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## The Quintessential Change Agent



Mrs. Mofoluke Adebisi is the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Budget and Planning in Oyo State. A perfect combination of visionary leader and empathetic manager who honed her skills through years of training and technical support through the CoP. Mrs. Adebisi has played a part in the development of the state over the years, but one of her most significant contributions is the fight to bring budget and planning under one umbrella in Oyo State.

Interestingly, the foundation of this achievement was forged at one of the Women in Governance meetings, an iconic moment that set the ball rolling for the creation of the Ministry of Budget and Planning. Mrs. Adebisi explains, “from the Budget & Planning Community of Practice (CoP) and the Women in Governance meetings, we realized the challenges of Oyo State compared to other states in terms of budgeting, and how they affected economic growth and development”. At one of the Women in Governance meetings, Mrs. Adebisi brought up the challenge that she and her team faced with the separation of budget from planning. Following discussions with her colleagues in Ekiti and Osun states during the Budget and Planning CoP, PERL, in collaboration with Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission, conducted an architecture scan of the Budget

and Planning structure in the Southwest States which clearly revealed that the Oyo State structure was not in line with good practice. The results of the scan were presented to the current administration in Oyo State and culminated into realignment budget and planning. Following that, Oyo State has aligned its Budget and Planning under one Ministry and introduced a fully participatory budget in line with global best practice.

Today, the Ministry stands as testament to her inspiring work. This is one of the numerous impactful outcomes of PERL's Women in Governance forum, an intervention designed specifically to support women to increase their capacities as Change Agents through the provision of technical support, networking and peer-learning opportunities. As a Change Agent, mentorship and training is also a primary responsibility. Mrs Adebisi effectively cascaded her experience from the Women in Governance CoP to her team members, going a step further to extend it to the entire Ministry for some of the trainings.

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*"Each time I attend courses, I step it down to my colleagues... ..First thing I did after the Women in Governance training was to train and mentor my management staff.....The [Women in Governance] Conflict Management course was stepped down to the whole ministry and to the all members of staff, irrespective of grade or level."*

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With greater capacity comes greater responsibility. Consequently, the Ministry has been tasked with the responsibility of providing a strategy to help the state to mitigate some of the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the economy. "We have advised government on the need to review the 2020 budget, we are coming up with the strategy for that. We need to allocate more money to health and carry out realignment." The impact of her contributions has been highlighted in the face of COVID-19 and its direct impact on the state's economy. She is actively involved in the budget realignment plan aimed at redirecting funds towards the fight against COVID-19 and its impact.

On a personal level, the Women in Governance learning exercises have played a significant role in Mrs. Adebisi's career development. "My training handouts are like a working dictionary for me. Sometimes I have to go back to them to review what I learnt as I encounter issues. I still apply my learning, even now."

The comprehensive nature of the support from Women in Governance reflects in Mrs. Adebisi's inspiring work. Mrs. Mofoluke Adebisi and her team in the then State Planning Commission championed the course of action that led to the reform of the budget and planning structure in Oyo State. From structural transformation and transparency to mentoring and training management staff, Mrs. Adebisi confidently showcases the lessons from the PERL Women in Governance forum.



Mrs Adebisi loves to make situations better than she found them. For the first time in the history of budgeting in Oyo State, a participatory approach to planning and budgeting was initiated. With her advanced leadership skills learnt during the sessions, she advocated for the Citizens' Needs Assessment (CNA) and received the Governor's buy-in and approval. According to her, the participatory approach to planning and budgeting is an effective, more equitable alternative to an MDA-centred approach. Being an advocate of best practices and inclusive development, Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State led discussions throughout the flag-off event of the citizens' consultation exercise. This initiative resulted in the incorporation of a significant number of citizens demands into Oyo State 2020 budget. Mrs Adebisi hopes that the next round of citizens' consultations would be more robust as learnt from her colleagues in Ekiti and Osun states.

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*"First thing I did after the Women in Governance training was to train and mentor my management staff. I also told them to look out for junior ones that are productive, but not well read as per their education. They identified such staff and we gave them the opportunity to improve their education. Today about 4 younger staff are going through distance learning programmes at University of Ibadan. We support them and give them time to study."*

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## Enablers and Distractors



Debbie Palmer, the Head of DFID Nigeria in 2018, gave a compelling and significant speech as the first female to occupy this position in Nigeria at the launch of the CoP. She identified the need for more female representation in government, reinforced DFID's and her personal commitment to unlocking the potential of Nigerian girls and women and encouraged women, stating that whilst it might be lonely, women should be proud of the role they play and the models they set for those in succession. Mrs. Palmer reiterated the theme of the night, "Stronger Together," reminding those present that "we can be stronger together, we must be stronger together because Nigeria needs more women in government. Women who undermine each other undermine everything." In the presence of the Deputy High Commissioner, the Head of DFID Nigeria, representatives from the federal and state government, and team members from PERL and partners at DFID, the community of practice was launched. The launch brought together Nigerian women leaders who work in Northern States and at the Federal and regional levels in influential positions such as Executive Secretary, Permanent Secretary, Commissioner, State Accountant General, Head of Programmes, Director and Senior Special Adviser to the Governor.

### What did DFID do?

By designing a flexible programme such as PERL, which is based on PDIA principles, PERL technical staff were given an opportunity to listen to their partners, and jointly develop capacity building support that would enhance performance at the state and Federal level. PERL recognised that due to the overwhelming numbers of males in the civil and public service, women in Nigeria had not benefitted as extensively from development partner support. Following discussions about what the intervention was hoping to achieve, DFID encouraged the programme to test the intervention, even though PERL was not a gender programme. DFID also supported by attending all face-to-face events and providing words of encouragement to participants. DFID also supported by promoting the intervention, encouraged partners in government to reach out to PERL to receive support in technical areas during their field visits, and to join the CoP. DFID and the British High Commission (BHC), also reached out to the PERL programme to understand how the intervention was designed, and to identify opportunities for learning amongst the female staff in DFID and the BHC.

With the assistance of DFID, these formidable female leaders were able to spend four-days at the launch of the CoP, participating in the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) Women's Leadership and Management Course. Considering the level of influence present, Salome Gitoho, one of the AWARD trainers, encouraged the women to be even more present and more assertive in their spheres of influence stating, "Women need to sit at the table, to begin to jump at opportunities even when we have not had any preparation." The former Commissioner for Budget and Planning in Kano State shared how useful the training had been for her, specifically with regards to self-diagnostic personality tools and how diversity models influence leadership. Zubaida Damakka Abubakar said, "I thought I was all alone in the world. After hearing the breakdown of the preference types I am able to identify myself." Debbie Palmer reiterated this point explaining that women "will face peculiar challenges and perhaps feel isolated." She encouraged the women to "network to learn from each other and craft an identity; this will be useful when things get tough. This I hope is the spirit all of you could take and learn from each other. It will create the space for participants to request technical help when necessary."



As Nabila Aguele, the Technical Adviser to the Honorable Minister for State Planning and Budget Hajiya Zainab Ahmed (now Nigeria's Finance Minister), aptly summarised her experience as a young woman in governance reporting to a senior woman in governance – it is impossible to do it alone. Nabila shared, "Having a community like this with my sisters in the programme is important. I encourage us to build on what we are developing, to encourage and pay it forward, and to hold each other accountable. When the time comes remember what it was like to be someone looking for a mentor."

## Political Economy, Learning & Adaptation, Sustainability

This intervention presented tremendous opportunities for PERL and partners to jointly learn and to develop tools that would support enhanced content and reform opportunities. Starting with the initial scoping and subsequent needs assessment, WinG has been a demonstration of a locally-led, locally negotiated and locally-delivered intervention. Joint reflection with partners presented opportunities to identify gaps based on the needs and requests of partners and offer recommendations/updates to tools and resources. The flexibility of the programme, and the flexibility in being able to allocate funding and resources to interventions with traction, enabled PERL to draw from its vast pool of expertise (Consultants, Staff and State Teams) to provide technical support tailored to the needs of the individuals at the time that it was needed. This did not, in many instances, require additional approvals or workplan revisions, allowing for technical assistance to be delivered in real time. The programme carved out funding from central/national funds to resource the intervention.

Based on learning from other Communities of Practice that PERL supported, for example at the federal level through the CoP for Commissioners of Finance, Budget and Learning, PERL worked with partners to design the support, ensuring that technical assistance delivered was in line with the needs of that particular person/agency and was forever mindful of the context. For example, in South Western Nigeria, the programme worked through a para-governmental organisation to support anti-sexual harassment policy development on a regional basis, and through an “Active Women in Government” platform. In the north, when the programme supported gender equity policies, this was done by identifying male champions who worked in the space and could guide the technical assistance, and rally support behind these policies that were needed, but not necessarily supported by the cultural context. More recently, PERL supported the Kano CoP (Sister to Sister initiative) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kano experienced mass denial of the existence of the virus and a lot of fear and confusion riding on the back of reports of multiple inexplicable deaths. The CoP in Kano identified a specific need for messaging that was direct and instructive for other women in a contextually acceptable way. The Kano CoP leveraged their own networks and mobilised their own funding to translate key COVID-19 safety messages into local parlance and used appropriate mass media to reach women, leveraging on existing infographics previously developed by PERL.

The programme also recognised, from the beginning, that not every woman who worked in senior management either in central ministries or in key sectors would receive support – the programme simply did not have enough resources. PERL conducted PEA on every individual before the hand of support was extended, determining the “will to reform” and using important PEA tools such as stakeholder maps to identify any connections to senior leadership, any instances where the individual may have become leveraged (financially or politically), and their level of influence within their organisation, or within the state structure. As a result, the programme decided not to support a good number of women because: a) they worked in sectors that were not aligned with PERL’s deliverables, b) they had not demonstrated sufficient will to reform in the past or did not carry enough weight to influence reforms and c) they posed a potential reputational risk to the programme.

The PERL programme did recognise that women leaders work in teams, often comprised of men who provide the enabling environment for the women to thrive and deliver results. The programme has supported these teams to buttress the entire governance structure. Where necessary, the programme has provided organisational development skills, including those that have strengthened team bonding, facilitated communications and improved perceptions of the participants, both within and outside their organisations. The support given to the women has been non-threatening to men who work closely with them, working sensitively and intuitively with men in such a way that does not antagonise, but supports and empowers them as well. Many of the strategies that have been deployed have depended on the local context and political economy and were guided by the advice of PERL teams on ground.

## Sustainability of Regional and Sub-national CoPs

As PERL commences its final year, sustainability of the CoP becomes pertinent. One strategy developed was to devolve the CoP from the centre (a national event) and turn it into independent state/region specific communities. There are currently two regional CoPs – the South West CoP and a North East CoP comprised of members from Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY).

In the South West region, DAWN Commission as PERL's partner already has an existing active women's support initiative. They are in the process of taking over full support of the South West CoP and in the future, will run it independently of PERL. In the North East, sustainability is taking on a different face. At this regional CoP, a management structure has been put in place and an executive committee elected. Also, in two of the three states, members of the CoP have committed to ensure that a line item in their respective state budgets is committed to the CoP and its activities. This guarantees that funds are available for the growth and progress of the CoP beyond the life of PERL and the individuals currently in office.

The South West CoP held its maiden event, "The Women in the Workplace" in Lagos on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019 aimed at equipping participants with the required skills for organisational effectiveness in delivering improved service delivery in line with organisational mandates. It was also an opportunity to share experiences. This event was the birth of the South West CoP. The North East CoP also held its maiden activity on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The one-day event was organised in response to the request for further support on mentoring for women in the civil service in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) States. Participants were all female Senior Civil Servants (Permanent Secretaries, Directors, and Chief Executive Officers/Executive Directors of parastatals) from the BAY states. The key objectives of the event were to i) explore formal mentoring as a means of promoting gender equity and bridging capacity gaps in the civil service; ii) share experiences and learning in mentoring in the public service; and iii) identify areas for support, including the North East CoP formation and make recommendations for next steps. At the conclusion of the event the next steps necessary to facilitate the take-off of the BAY states WinG CoP as a regional body, aligned with the existing national platform were agreed upon. Kano State has been considering forming a CoP at the state level, among the large number of Permanent Secretaries. At the moment, they are using resources from the KAIZEN CoP to support learning around COVID.

Finally, we noted that women who have left the civil service remain members of the CoP because they continue to derive benefit from the community. They continue to share resources on the platform, and support other members of their community and the women in the CoP. Government needs more women in public offices to reach the goals that have been set for future generations. By increasing the number of Women in Governance, Nigeria could see improvements in overall progress, cooperation and results from officials who work together to identify arrangements that allow the government to run more efficiently and provide the opportunity for innovation.

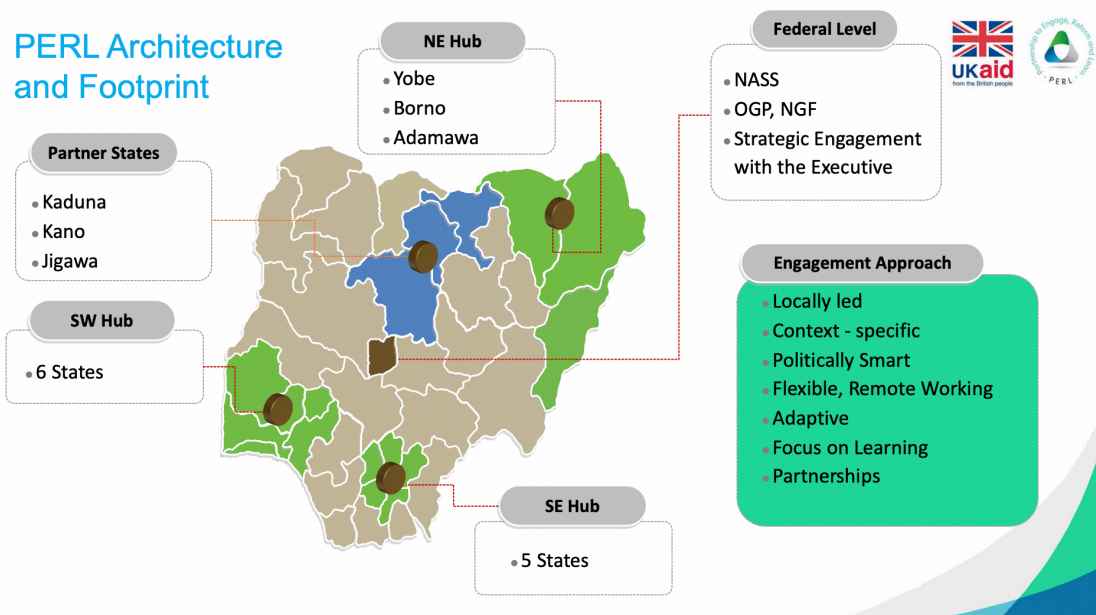


# Annex I

## About PERL

The Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) is a five-year Public Sector Accountability and Governance programme, funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). PERL’s support focuses on governments, citizens, and evidence-based advocacy. PERL provides assistance to governments in the core areas of policy development and implementation. This is done by assisting them in tracking and accounting how these policies, plans and budgets are used in delivering public goods and services to promote growth and reduce poverty to the citizenry. The programme supports citizens to engage with these processes. The PERL programme is being delivered through three ‘pillars’ which plan and work together to support sustainable service delivery reforms: Pillar 1. Accountable, Responsive & Capable Government (ARC); Pillar 2. Engaged Citizens (ECP); and Pillar 3. Learning, Evidencing and Advocacy Partnership (LEAP). The programme works at the federal level, in the partner states of Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa, and through regional learning and reform hubs in the South West, South East and North East areas of Nigeria.

Development partners such as the UK Government have made strong policy commitments to help Nigerians tackle development challenges. Specifically, DFID Nigeria has been supporting public sector reforms in Nigeria for nearly two decades. However, as development work occurs in a context where violent conflict also occurs, the UK government elevated instability to a national security priority in the 2011 Building Stability Overseas Strategy. Therefore, all UK funded programmes, including governance interventions, are expected to “do no harm”, or assure that conflict tensions are not exacerbated as a result of the interventions at the community, state and federal levels in Nigeria. In line with UK Government commitment to “Do No Harm”, PERL has adopted a conflict and gender sensitive approach which mainstreams both conflict and gender sensitivity as well as social inclusion across the programme. Therefore, PERL prioritizes updated context analysis and is empowering staff with mitigation strategies for interventions that have the potential to “do harm”.



Panel 31: Aiding Leadership: Lessons from Successes and Failures of International Cooperation