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# CONFLICT SNAPSHOT

# Nigeria

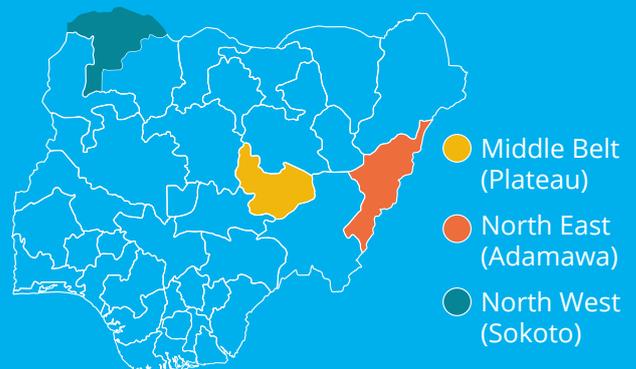
April 2021

## Introduction

Nigeria has a variety of complex conflict issues ranging from political, ethnic, religious, resource-based, and economic related issues. Moreover, the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the North East has fueled a large-scale humanitarian crisis and immense suffering, while conflict between farmers and herders, which spans the country, has cost hundreds of thousands of lives. These conflict issues cut across different states in Nigeria, however, four major regions have been identified as the most conflict prone areas, namely the North East, Middle Belt, North West and the Niger Delta. Nigeria is also synonymous with deep divisions which cause major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious and regional divisions.<sup>1</sup>

## Data collection and analysis

Data for this second conflict snapshot report for Nigeria was gathered from 5 to 14 January 2021 in three target zones.<sup>2</sup> This report was prepared by the Search for Common Ground (Search) Nigeria team, with support from Search's COVID-19 Response Programming Team and Institutional Learning Team. For more information on the data collection methodology and tools used by Search for Common Ground for this research, click [here](#). This report is part of a series of regular conflict snapshots aimed at providing quick and actionable answers to a set of specific questions. The previous report for Nigeria can be found [here](#).



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1. Haldun Çancı and Opeyemi Adedoyin Odukoya, "Ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria", 2016.  
2. In the Middlebelt, we collected data in the same location (Plateau) as in the first snapshot, however for North-West and North-East zones, we changed data collection sites from the first round, to Sokoto and Adamawa respectively.



## Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

Nigeria is now experiencing a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic with epicentres in Lagos (South West), Kaduna (North West), and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). **Between October 2020 and January 2021, the number of reported cases has doubled.** As at the end of January 2021, Nigeria has confirmed over 130,557 cases of COVID-19, with over 23,267 active cases, over 104,712 discharged cases and over 1,586 deaths.<sup>3</sup> Currently in Nigeria, the following measures are applied:

	<b>Schools open</b>
	<b>Teleworking not mandatory</b>
	<b>Borders/airports open</b>
	<b>All services/sectors open</b>
	<b>Mask wearing mandatory</b>

At the time of writing, Nigeria had received 3.94 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses (out of 16 million expected to be received in February 2021). The government has stated that healthcare workers, security agents,<sup>4</sup> and the elderly will be prioritised to receive the vaccine.<sup>5</sup> Since the government announced that it was acquiring the COVID-19 vaccine, there have been different misconceptions and reactions to this decision.<sup>6</sup> Overall, vaccine acceptance is on the rise, from 54.7% in July 2020 to 61.6% in February 2021.<sup>7</sup> **The country continues to face dire socio-economic challenges and a rise in insecurity.** As such, a large part of the population believes that the government should prioritise providing basic food supply, improving the economy, and addressing the state of insecurity in the country, more than vaccine distribution.

A deterioration of the security situation has been observed in the country through the months of November and December 2020.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, some of the respondents identified an increased security lapse due to the pandemic, worsening the situation. Crime rates have overwhelmed the security officers who seem unable to cope with the increasing level of criminality in the states.<sup>9</sup> In general, violent crime – such as armed robbery, assault, carjacking, kidnapping, and rape – is common throughout the country, while violence and insecurity is particularly acute for conflict areas. There have been notable spikes in insecurity in the North West and North East regions, including kidnapping, banditry, and armed robbery. In December 2020, a few weeks prior to the kidnapping of over 300 Kankara school boys in Katsina State, Boko Haram extremists admitted to killing more than 100 rice farmers in Borno State in retribution for the farmers cooperating with the Nigerian military.<sup>10</sup> Data shows that between January and November 2020, there were 142 incidents related to the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, an average of 13 per month.<sup>11</sup> At least 1,606 people were killed in 125 fatal incidents, an average of 13 per incident, making Nigeria the third-most terrorised country in the world.<sup>12</sup>

Ongoing violence and insecurity might render vaccine administration difficult, as conflict-affected communities see security as a greater priority than the pandemic and access in remote areas will continue to be hampered by the rampant insecurity. Beyond insecurity, there has been a sustained decline in economic activities since the pandemic started, which is playing out in the context of an economic recession in Nigeria. The pandemic was projected to push 5 million Nigerians into poverty in 2020 - with a poverty rate projected to rise from 40% in 2019 to 43% in 2020.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the number of people in need of urgent assistance in the North East rose from 7.9 million end 2019 to 10.6 million since the onset of COVID-19.<sup>14</sup> In the wake of ongoing insecurity and an increasingly dire economic situation, aggrieved citizens are increasingly mobilizing to respond, at times violently.

## COVID-19's Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

**Levels of trust in COVID-19 information heard on Search's radio partners is relatively high, and informal information sharing about COVID-19 is very widespread**

The top four trusted sources to get information about COVID-19 are:



TV



Social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp)

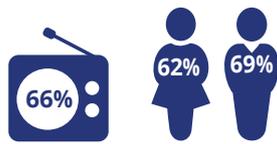


friends and family



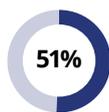
radio<sup>15</sup>

- The Nigeria Center for Disease Control, "COVID-19 Nigeria Update", accessed January 2021.
- Security agents are considered front-line workers according to the Nigerian government.
- NanNews, "COVID-19 Vaccine: Rate of Infection to Determine Distribution-NPHCDA," January 2021.
- A video by a former senator Dino Melaye went viral and has caused panic when it was disclosed that [Nigeria is expecting to get the COVID-19 vaccines in January, 2021](#). The senator "revealed that some of those who took that vaccine died within three days" and this further led to more reactions and misinformation of the COVID-19 vaccine among Nigerians.
- Johns Hopkins, "KAP COVID -Trend Analysis For 23 Countries", March 2021.
- Search for Common Ground, Internal Report- Monthly Conflict Snapshot Analysis - December 2020.
- Search for Common Ground, Internal Report- Monthly Conflict Snapshot Analysis - January 2021.
- Al Jazeera, Nigeria: [Boko Haram killed 76 farmers in Borno State, December 2020](#).
- Infodigest, "Will insecurity kidnapping and crime get worse in 2021?", February 2021
- Institute for Economics & Peace. [Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism](#), Sydney, November 2020
- World Bank Group, [Nigeria Development Update](#), 2020
- UNOCHA, [HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN- NIGERIA ADDENDUM COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN 2020](#), 2020.
- In comparison: as per [Johns Hopkins survey](#), TV and radio stations are among the top trusted sources in Nigeria to get COVID-19 information, at 62% and 60%, respectively, whereas 43% trust online sources and 28% trust ordinary people they know personally. These percentages are significantly higher than what we found in our own study through in person data collection, compared to Johns Hopkins team's reliance on Facebook responders.

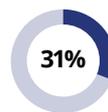


listen to our radio programmes aired by our partner radio stations<sup>16,17</sup>

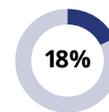
Out of those who listen to our programmes<sup>18</sup>, people trust the information shared about Covid-19:



trust (mostly, very much)



trust it at lower levels (rarely, somewhat)

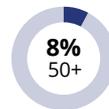
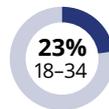


do not trust it



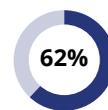
### Younger generations have lower trust in COVID-19

**information** spread through Search's radio partners than older generations. Higher rates of mistrust among youth is possibly attributable to the perception that young people in Nigeria are less at-risk of developing severe physical health symptoms from COVID-19, whereas they suffer more from the indirect socio-economic effects of the pandemic. This may make them less receptive to information on COVID-19, as they feel it does not address their priority needs directly.

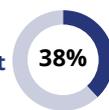


do not trust

**Muslims trust information on COVID-19 from Search's radio partners much more than Christians.** Our radio program has greater visibility and awareness in the North East and North West, which are predominantly Muslim regions and is likely the reason for higher trust rates among Muslim respondents.

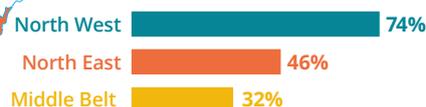


Muslim

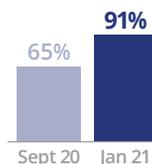


Christian

**Respondents from the North West have the highest level of trust in COVID-19 related information shared through Search's radio partners,** while the North East and the Middle Belt have lower levels of trust. These two regions have been severely affected by violent conflict for many years and the insecurity has further intensified over the past months, as COVID-19 has put additional strain on local resources and limited freedom of movement, which affects dynamics between Muslim herders and predominantly Christian farmers (Middle Belt). Populations in these regions tend to have low trust levels in the government, as it is unable to protect them from increasing violence, and this widespread distrust affects how people perceive of the government's COVID-19 response and any information on the pandemic.



The survey found a dramatic **increase in the number of respondents who share information about COVID-19 with family and friends.** We also found that 100% of respondents living with disabilities share COVID-19 related information. As more Nigerians believe the pandemic is real amid the second wave, they may be more inclined to share information related to COVID-19.



Persons with disabilities

## Search's Rumor Tracking Initiative

Additionally, Search's ongoing rumor tracking initiative continues to find worrisome misinformation trends related to the pandemic. **Between October and December 2020, our rumour tracking tool has identified approximately 14,000 COVID-19 related rumors and misinformation related to the pandemic on social media.**<sup>19</sup> Additionally, there was a notable increase in the amount of rumours and misinformation related to the vaccine after the government announced plans to roll out the vaccine in Nigeria. In January 2021, Search tracked more than 10,700 online conversations including a variety of misinformation, of which more than half (61%) were related to the vaccine, including vaccination campaigns, clinical trials, affordability, access, and distribution.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, misinformation trends showcase citizens' continued lack of trust in pandemic-related information relayed by authorities, especially in relation to increasing case numbers, which are released daily by the NCDC. There are a lot of discordant voices, especially at the grassroots on the reality of the virus in Nigeria.

16. Search for Common Ground, together with its local radio partners, produces weekly talk shows in English and Hausa languages in the 3 target states of this research.

17. Slightly lower listenership among women is primarily due to socio-economic and cultural considerations, which affect the accessibility of the show for women. Findings from our interviews in the North West revealed that while many women listen to the radio, they are unable to actively participate on live talk shows due to cultural limitations of speaking out in public. Other women in the Middle Belt and North East stated that they do not listen to or call in on live radio shows, because they can not financially afford to purchase call airtime to participate.

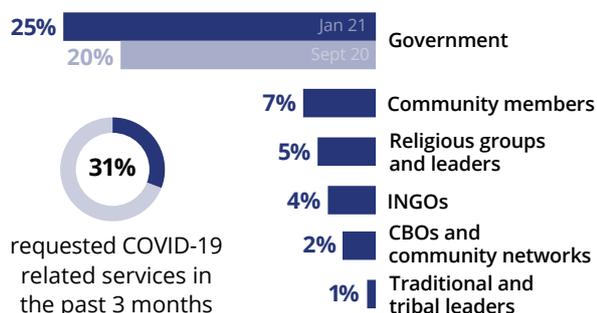
18. It is worth noting that these findings are not comparable to those in the first round; back then respondents were asked about their trust levels in radio programming in general and not specifically about Search's radio programming on our partner radio stations, as we had not started airing in all states yet.

19. Search for Common Ground, [COVID-19 Rumour Tracking Bulletin](#), December 2020.

20. Search for Common Ground, [COVID-19 Rumour Tracking Bulletin](#), January 2021.

## Trust in the government's pandemic response and in non-governmental actors is on the rise amid a second wave

Since the pandemic broke out in Nigeria, the government has taken numerous health, social, and economic measures to cushion the impact of COVID-19. However, our findings reveal that some of these policies and interventions are not inclusive. Particularly, persons living with disabilities report receiving little COVID-19 related support or services from the government.<sup>21</sup>



This means **people rely mostly on government services.**

Access to food and employment remain the top requested services from the government.



48%

access to food



33%

employment

There was a decrease in health-related service requests, from the first round to second round, demonstrating that the needs of Nigerians are shifting to other issues such as unemployment, poverty, and insecurity.



Overall, our research found that **70% of respondents (or a member of their household) have fully or partially lost the main source of income during the pandemic**, underlining the increasing economic needs.



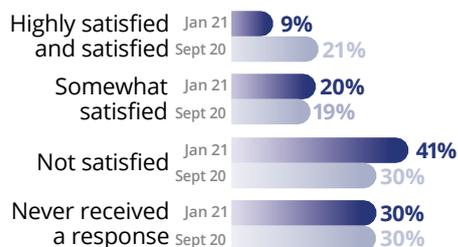
Out of those who sought COVID-19 related services from *all service providers combined*:



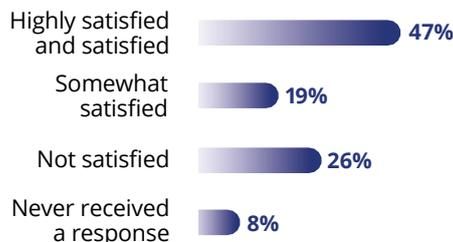
Looking at the 2 largest service providers, **respondents are more satisfied with services provided by community members than by the government. The satisfaction level is much lower for services provided by the government, although it is the largest service provider.** Community interventions in our research

research zones are usually targeted to meet specific needs of community members and are generally perceived to be delivered in an effective way, unlike governmental services that tend to be more generic in nature.

### Satisfaction with COVID-19 services provided by the Government



### Satisfaction with COVID-19 services provided by Community Members



**The Middle Belt and North West recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction (highly satisfied, satisfied) with services provided by the government.** The Middle Belt percentage is likely

reflective of the religious composition in that region, where Christians in general are less satisfied with the services provided by the government. Also, the inability of the government to adequately address insecurity has worsened the trust deficit between citizens and the government. These dynamics might contribute to higher levels of dissatisfaction in the government in general and in pandemic related services specifically. The higher levels of satisfaction in the North East could largely be a result of the active presence and activities of humanitarian and aid organizations complementing the Government's efforts in supporting communities affected by violent extremism.<sup>22</sup>



Middle Belt | 2%

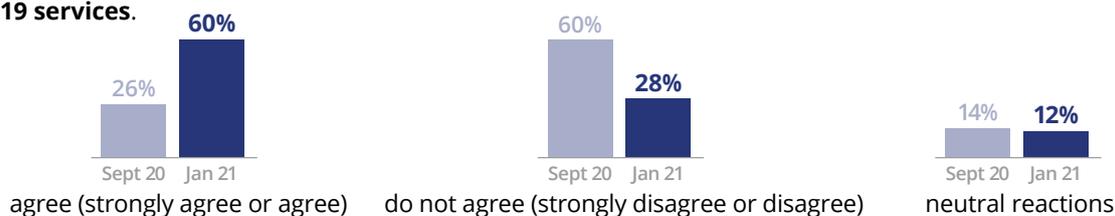
North West | 8%

North East | 47%

21. Search's radio talk show featured an episode on the effects of the pandemic on persons living with disabilities and those with special needs. The radio programme provided a platform for this traditionally marginalised group to express their needs and concerns related to the pandemic, including perceptions of neglect by the Nigerian government. PLWD are interested in receiving COVID-19 related information, especially on pandemic-related support, particularly livelihoods.

22. As we have found in our previous round of multi-country research, there can be a positive correlation between citizens' positive experience with support provided by non-governmental actors and a more positive perception of their government, indicating that these actors can help reduce tensions between citizens and the government. See: Search for Common Ground, "Trust in Authorities – the golden ticket to successful COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in conflict settings", January 2021.

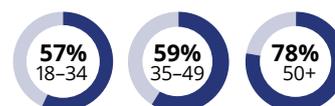
Compared to the first conflict snapshot, there has been a dramatic increase in the level of **agreement that the government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about COVID-19 services.**



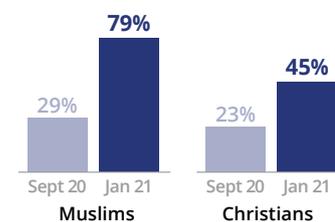
This increase could be due to several factors: (i) data was collected for this round in different locations (Sokoto and Adamawa states in North West and North East, respectively), which are predominantly Muslim regions and may therefore be less critical of the government; and (ii) as described above, the second wave led to increased awareness among Nigerians that COVID-19 is real and therefore may have increased their appreciation of the government's response. Lastly, it is important to note that people's perception of their government's pandemic response can evolve rapidly, as we're also seeing in our rumour tracking data.<sup>23</sup>

**Young people (18-34 years) and adults (35-49 years) report lower levels of trust in government.**

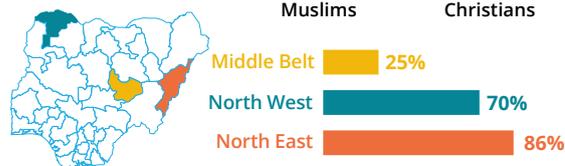
Elderly people report a much higher level of trust. Unemployment and loss of livelihood may be more acutely felt by youth and adults, and this may contribute to their lower levels of trust. Youth and adults may also be more exposed to rumours circulating on social media, thereby negatively affecting their trust in the government.



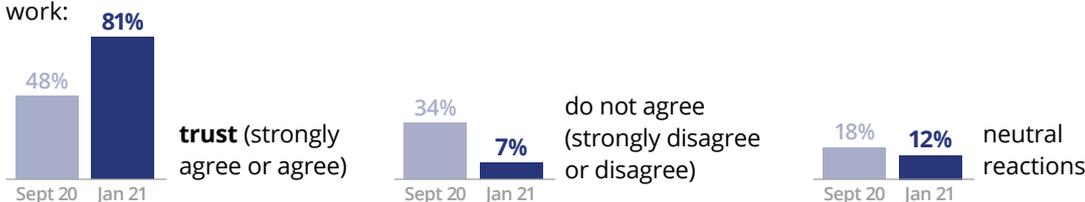
**Muslims are more likely to trust that the government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about COVID-19 services than Christians.** So there is an increase in trust in the government among both religious groups, but at the same time the gap in trust levels is widening between these groups. The difference might be explained by prevailing perceptions among Christians that the government prioritises Muslims for services.



**The Middle Belt region reported the lowest level of trust in authorities** compared to the North East and North West. These trends might be explained by the religious composition of the population in these regions.

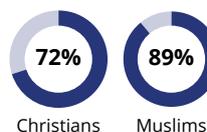


Respondents' trust that non-governmental actors working on COVID-19 have their best interests in mind when doing their work:



**Christians have lower rates of trust in non-governmental COVID-19 responders compared to Muslims.**

Certain religious beliefs may contribute to this difference, particularly when it comes to protective measures. For instance, in Plateau state, some Christian respondents are skeptical of using personal protective equipment as many perceive mask use as a ploy to infect citizens with the virus, and some believe their faith is enough to protect them. A similar trend was reported in the first report, but among Muslims respondents and their corresponding beliefs.



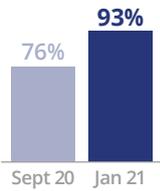
**The North East region reported the highest level of trust in non-governmental responders,** followed by the North West and the Middle Belt. Higher levels in the North East might be because of the large, existing presence of international aid and relief organizations working in the region, providing support to populations affected by the Boko Haram insurgency.



**Horizontal Cohesion is increasing during the second wave, but with important age and regional variations**

Collaboration and interaction between groups increased in the last 3 months, compared to the first round; there was a 17 percent points increase in the amount of respondents who report valuing collaboration with people from other groups during a crisis, while actual interaction between groups increased by 5 percent points. Relaxation of movement restrictions has allowed for more interactions and more awareness raising on COVID-19 by various government entities and NGOs, which may have further incited joint initiatives.

23. An often heard rumour in Nigeria is that the government exaggerates the COVID-19 situation for political gains and to attract donor funding. But people's belief in this rumour fluctuates dramatically over time: 17% of tracked online conversations mentioned that concern in October 2020, only 2% did so in November, and then 30% in December, and 25% in January 2021.



**value collaboration with people from other (religious, ethnic) groups to respond to a crisis like COVID-19 (strongly agree or agree)**



**strongly disagree or disagree**

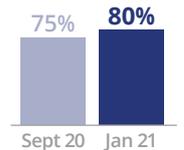


**neutral reaction**

**Respondents in the Middle Belt value collaboration with people from other groups less** than people in the North East and North West. Lower rates in the Middle Belt might be explained by a protracted history of ethno-religious crisis in the region, which has escalated in recent years and exacerbated the level of trust across ethno-religious divides.



Regarding instances of interaction between groups over the past 3 months, on average, **80% of respondents regularly interacted (remotely or in-person) with someone from another group (religious or ethnic).**

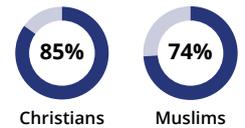


**Women report less interaction with other groups than men.** Due to cultural norms, men often have more opportunities to interact across religious and ethnic groups.



**Older respondents report interacting with other groups much less than younger generations.** For the younger generation in Nigeria, interaction goes beyond physical contact to more conversations taking place online. The pandemic has increased social media usage among citizens, and as of January 2021, Nigeria had about 33 million social media users.<sup>24</sup>

Christians respondents report interacting with other groups more than Muslims. This trend has reversed from the previous report; more research is needed to understand the reasons behind this.



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**Respondents in the North East report the lowest level of interaction with other groups,** compared to the Middle Belt and the North West. The insurgency in the North East has displaced over 2 million people,<sup>25</sup> and this displacement continues to negatively impact social cohesion and interaction among people affected by the Boko Haram insurgency.



**feel safe interacting with people from other groups (religious or ethnic)**



**do not feel safe**



**have neutral reactions**



**More men than women feel safe interacting with people from other religions or ethnic groups.**



**Adults (35-49 years) report feeling safer than youth (18-34 years) and elderly.** Lower levels among youth might be a result of prevailing feelings of marginalisation and perceptions of youth-targeted abuse and injustice by the security and justice sectors. Similarly, increased insecurity and violence across the country, such as the kidnappings of school children and the killing of youth by malign actors such as bandits and Boko Haram insurgents, are likely reasons why young people might feel less safe when interacting with other groups. For elderly people, the deteriorated security situation may contribute to their increased feelings of unsafety around interaction.

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**The Middle Belt region recorded the lowest level of safety when interacting with individuals from other groups,** compared to the North East and the North West. This is driven by the lower level of confidence when interacting with individuals from other ethnic groups (71%). As explained above, lower rates in the Middle Belt might be related to the protracted history of ethno-religious violent conflict.



24. Between Jan 2019 and Jan 2020, the number of social media users increased by less than 13%, and between Jan 2020 and Jan 2021 increased by more than 22%. See: [Datareportal, Digital 2021: Nigeria](#).

25. [UNHCR, The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced nearly 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin](#).

When asked about **feeling safe when interacting with someone from the opposite sex inside the household or private sphere:**



We did not find a gender difference; 65% of women vs 66% of men feel safe with this kind of interaction.

**People in the Middle Belt feel less safe when interacting with someone from the opposite sex.**

Plateau state, one of our sample locations, had an estimated 430 cases of gender based violence occurring every month in 2018.<sup>26</sup> This figure will have most likely increased during the pandemic. Some of these incidents have resulted in serious physical harm and fatality, and could be a possible reason for lower feelings of safety in the Middle Belt when interacting with the opposite sex.



## Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts

### Leverage trusted, and engaging communication channels at the local and national levels to mitigate misinformation while promoting social cohesion and trust

- Traditional media outlets and social media platforms are distinct and complementary channels for disseminating accurate, conflict-sensitive COVID-19 messaging and both are needed to reach different target audiences. Moreover, marginalised groups, elderly and rural communities often lack access to online media platforms; identifying and strengthening the existing, offline information channels that reach these groups remains important (i.e. local radio stations, religious leaders, etc.).
- As the Nigerian government rolls out a vaccination programme, citizens will require timely, accurate, and reliable information. As such, the government and others supporting vaccine roll-out should partner with trusted messengers, especially those that can reach marginalised groups, in order to effectively mitigate rumours while disseminating accurate information that citizens trust. Innovative partnerships with community and traditional leaders, religious leaders and FBOs, youth and women’s groups, the Nigeria Union of Road Transport Workers, commercial motorcyclists, leaders of market unions, and security actors, are an important addition to targeting traditional information providers (i.e. radio, television, social media, etc.).

### Identify safe and conflict-sensitive ways to promote social cohesion across ethno-religious divides as well as between citizens and government authorities during the pandemic

- Leaders of different faith groups should be supported to engage their followers (online and in-person) to promote cohesion and engagement between each other as well as collaborate on interfaith initiatives related to the pandemic (i.e. a joint information campaign or co-hosting an interfaith webinar to promote dialogue across groups). Regular interaction among faith leaders will also serve as a positive influence among their respective followers. Improved collaboration across groups, especially in conflict affected communities, can help mitigate pandemic related violence and/or tension that might arise (i.e. during vaccine distribution).
- Communities should be supported with platforms for dialogue across ethno-religious divides, respecting pandemic safety protocols. Local dialogue platforms can reach marginalised groups who lack access to other platforms (i.e. radio, social media, television, etc.), and they promote greater social cohesion and trust between groups. As such, dialogue platforms are particularly important for regions such as the Middle Belt. Additionally, dialogue creates opportunities to build the trust needed for joint collaboration between groups; can help mitigate rumours and misinformation; and can provide a platform for marginalised voices (such as PLWD) to express pandemic-related needs.

### Government authorities, INGOs, and local civil society organisations should work together to provide pandemic-related services that are trusted and accepted by communities

- To mitigate pandemic-related conflict and tensions, response services must be seen as equitable and inclusive across Nigeria. The government should identify strategies that ensure the equitable distribution of relief materials across all regions. Our conflict snapshot data shows that non-governmental service providers tend to be trusted more than the government. As such, the government should collaborate with trusted leaders at the community level, local CSOs, and trusted INGOs in order to develop inclusive strategies that respond to the needs of all and are seen as legitimate by citizens. A monitoring team inclusive of state government agencies, trusted CSOs, traditional institutions, youth organizations, women leaders, community and religious leaders should be identified to monitor the distribution of relief materials to prevent any conflict or violence related to distribution efforts.

26. Tearfund, *Falling on Deaf Ears: Listening to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Plateau state*, Nigeria, 2018.