



'Building Back Better' in Borno state

Adapting the Foundation Year Programme for conflict-affected Borno state



The UK aid-funded Women for Health (W4H) programme has been working since November 2012 to improve the number and capacity of female health workers in five states in Northern Nigeria (Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Zamfara and Yobe). At the same time, W4H is contributing to women's empowerment and gender equality in communities and institutions in the North. In April 2018, an extension phase of W4H launched in Borno state, a state profoundly affected by ongoing armed conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis.

In this challenging context, where many communities have fled their homes and most people have direct experience of violence, W4H's established approach to setting up a Foundation Year Programme (FYP), an educational sponsorship and access course to support rural women to gain the qualifications they need to enter professional health education, has had to evolve and adapt. W4H developed a safeguarding, mental health and psychosocial support strategy for FYP in Borno. Among its aims are to give female FYP students the trauma and psychosocial support they need to succeed in their studies, career and life. Additional modules have been added to the FYP course to address the humanitarian crisis facing Borno so that graduating health workers will have an understanding of how to support communities with trauma and mental health issues, as well as a grounding in topics such as gender, self-esteem, gender-based violence, negotiation and mediation.

The wider aim of the trauma strategy is for W4H to seek ways to contribute to improving mental health support throughout the state. At the time of writing, W4H's FYP implementation in Borno is still in its early stages. From the first cohort of 119 students who began training, so far 88 are enrolled in professional nursing and midwifery courses, and a further 20 being considered for health technology courses. A second cohort is being recruited.

"Since completing secondary school in 2013, I had lost hope of further education due to the loss of my parents in an insurgent attack. I had nothing to look forward to but being enrolled into FYP has transformed me. I now once again dream of achieving something with my life by helping others in my community." Borno FYP student

"I had lost hope of further education due to the loss of my parents in an insurgent attack... I now once again dream of achieving something with my life by helping others in my community."

Borno FYP student

The challenge

The Women for Health (W4H) programme responds to a severe shortage of female health workers in a region where there are social and cultural barriers to women being seen by male health workers and the rural retention of health workers is an ongoing challenge.

The programme's ultimate aims are to increase women's access to and use of health services and contribute towards progress on delivery of Universal Health Coverage for Nigeria. The Foundation Year Programme (FYP) is an important element of the W4H approach that aims to help potential female health workers, chosen and sponsored by their communities, to meet the required entry standards for professional courses at health training institutions and then support them through their study to become qualified health workers. The FYP students are bonded to return to their communities as health workers to provide a minimum of two years of service.

In all the states supported by W4H, a significant challenge to increasing the number of female health workers is the low level of education among young women from rural communities. The situation is particularly acute in Borno, which has been the epicentre of the conflict between armed opposition groups, government security forces and community militia groups, with its

impact being felt in all areas of the state. Therefore, in addition to the significant challenges faced by young women aspiring to higher education in W4H-supported states, many of those in Borno were forced by violence to flee their communities. Many have been displaced multiple times, as they move to stay ahead of the conflict, and have experienced shortages of food, water, shelter and health services. As well as having their education disrupted and experiencing high levels of insecurity, most young women in Borno have witnessed or directly experienced violence. Being hosted by communities or living in one of Borno's 163 Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps (which together are home to an estimated 731,240 Internally Displaced Persons) or informal settlements has increased these young women's already high chances of suffering rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence.

W4H is entering its final year and is in the process of scaling back activities in the five original Northern states with health and government stakeholders taking on an established, sustainable system. The exceptions will be in Borno and the conflict-affected part of Yobe state, which is also particularly affected by the influx and movement of IDPs (More than 1.7 million people are internally displaced in the Northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, with 78% living in Borno¹).

The need for a FYP

In the other W4H-supported states, the full-time FYP courses were established to enable young women to raise their level of education to the standards required by health training institutions for entry into accredited training courses. The FYP is made up of a nine-month Bridging Course, for those who had not achieved five credits in the school exams, and a three-month Preparatory Course, for those who already had five credits. Those on the Bridging Course automatically move on to the Preparatory Course, which aims to prepare all students for entry process to training schools and to increase their chances of succeeding in their professional studies.

In the original five states participating in W4H, a slightly different approach was required for each to establish the essential partnerships with state government and community stakeholders; to build the local ownership, to win funding commitments that would make the programme sustainable, and to ensure the necessary legal framework was put in place. At a local level, W4H



worked with communities to make it possible for young women to leave their families and go away to train. W4H supported health training institutions to fund, build female-friendly hostels and create facilities such as crèches, and courses with enough trained staff to teach them. The programme included pastoral support to the young women while they were studying and mentoring during their transition to professional life in their sponsoring community. The W4H integrated approach had an explicit empowerment dimension, to help the FYP students make the most of the exceptional opportunity to become role models and agents for change in their own communities. (See How to Establish a Foundation Year Programme at www.women4healthnigeria.org).

Integrated mental health and psychosocial support

W4H's integrated approach to educational and wellbeing support was developed further in Borno. As most of the potential FYP students in the state would have experienced or witnessed violence – and with research² indicating that past trauma can affect learning outcomes, W4H needed to consider this trauma and mitigate the possibility of doing harm. As a result, an integrated Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Safeguarding approach was developed. An important point of reference was WHO's 'Building Back Better'³ report showcasing approaches to sustainable mental health care after emergencies.

To inform development of its MHPSS approach, W4H carried out a trauma assessment⁴ among the first cohort of FYP students in Borno. In total, 101 students took part in one-to-one interviews with older women, many of whom were or had been teachers and who were given special training. Standardised assessment forms were used, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents came from 20 out of the 27 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno and ranged in age from 17 to 34 years old, with 94% under 25 years, 80% unmarried, and with only 13% having children. A mixed methods approach was used to analyse the resulting quantitative and qualitative data.

"I have started throwing away some of my negative thoughts that I had been harbouring" FYP student

The assessment revealed the trauma that many had experienced, with some 56% of respondents saying they had witnessed or experienced one parent being killed, 22% both parents, and 14% a sibling or siblings. Only 8% had no experience of a close family member being killed. Other findings included that: some 36% of respondents had seen armed groups killing people and burning houses; almost 10% of respondents said they could not locate some of their family members. Respondents spoke about how what they had experienced continued to affect them: some 36% said they were personally, mentally and psychologically disturbed, 17% that they found it hard to focus on their studies, and 33% said they had experienced a sense of fear and insecurity. Most continued to worry about family members who have returned to their

community, fear future attacks and think about how life should have been without the violence.

The response

W4H's Safeguarding, Mental Health and Psychosocial support approach

Responding to the findings of the trauma assessment, W4H's MHPSS strategy included four main psychosocial support elements:

- To build capacity and systems in W4H's Borno team around MHPSS;
- To design and implement a programme of support for FYP students to mitigate the impact of the violence they had experienced or witnessed;
- To build partnerships with governments and others to scale up mental health support to reach beneficiaries of other programmes in Borno; and
- To advocate and collaborate to strengthen mental health provision in Borno, in part by training health workers on trauma and mental health provision.

A one day workshop on trauma healing for all W4H staff was organised to ensure they were equipped to deliver the both FYP programme and the other elements of the trauma strategy in a sensitive and an appropriate way – and to mitigate risk of any vicarious trauma they might experience through interactions with FYP students.

In terms of trauma support for the first cohort of Borno FYP students, a package of support was designed, including: a counsellor was appointed to work with FYP students; FYP teachers were given training and guidance materials on violence, conflict, trauma, gender and self-esteem; an intensive one-week trauma healing workshop was organised with the students divided into groups of 20 (and later sub-divided according to their experiences and specific needs); and a referral system for follow-on individual counselling sessions was put in place. This package of support for FYP students is being refined and further developed for the second and subsequent cohorts. In addition, a humanitarian curriculum was added to the FYP course with a focus on mental health service provision, trauma and service provision relating to health issues that might come about as a result of violence, rape, and gender-based violence.

A total of 113 FYP students attended five training and healing workshops, held in five day cycles of rigorous intervention sessions, practical exercises, simulation exercises, counselling sessions, and behavioural, cognitive and cultural interventions. A pre-training assessment found that 80% (90) of the participants met the criteria for a PTSD diagnosis while only 20% (23) were located within the normal range. At the midway point in the training, with participants reliving difficult experiences, the PTSD rate showed a slight increase, with 85% (17) meeting the PTSD criteria with only three people in the normal range. However, after the training, the trend was reversed with 65% (13) having scores below the PTSD threshold criteria while only 35% (17) had scores qualifying them for a PTSD diagnosis.

Many students said the training and trauma healing sessions had helped them: "I have started throwing away some of my negative

thoughts that I had been harbouring," said one. "I feel very light now, because I opened up on what I thought was a serious problem," said another. "My problems melted away after I heard the stories of other participants," another added.

The final two elements of the W4H trauma strategy relate to scaling up the MHPSS approach beyond the FYP student cohorts to have a wider impact within Borno and are currently being developed. W4H aims to draw on its experience in health systems strengthening and the partnerships it has developed in Borno to play a role in addressing the low levels of mental health service provision in the state. FYP graduates, once they return to their communities as professional health workers, can play a role in this. With appropriate training, supervision and support on MHPSS, the FYP cohorts of female health workers will be equipped to address the mental health needs of rural communities in addition to their physical needs in the coming years. MHPSS has been integrated into the FYP curriculum and in the future W4H aims to strengthen health training institutions on MHPSS so all students can benefit.

Strategic partnerships

In setting up the FYP in Borno, the W4H team established strategic partnerships at state level with the College of Nursing and Midwifery, and the state Ministry of Health and other ministries, including those of Education, Local Government & Chieftaincy Affairs, Women's Affairs, Youth & Sports, and the Local Government Service Commission.

As it had in the other states, W4H established a state FYP working group, a high-level committee with members from several ministries, the State House of Assembly and Emirate council. The working group collaborates with W4H to advocate for policy changes, funding and other critical decisions need to establish the sustainability of the FYP.

The W4H team is developing a positive partnership with state legislators, which experience from phase 1 of W4H has shown is crucial in ensuring support for the establishment of the FYP and its long-term sustainability. To date a series of joint meetings have been held with the legislators (House Committee on Health) with the aim of developing a sustainability strategy for the FYP in Borno State.

Community engagement

Recruiting young women from rural areas with the potential to become health workers was particularly challenging in Borno, where large numbers of people in the areas targeted by W4H had fled their homes and were living in other communities or Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. W4H worked with the communities hosting IDPs and the leadership structures in the IDP camps, including leaders of the displaced communities within the camps, to spread the word about the opportunity W4H offered to young women and their communities through the FYP. W4H organised community dialogue sessions with families to raise awareness of the need for health workers, answer questions about FYP, allay fears and overcome resistance⁵. Initial meetings were held with community leaders, followed by group meetings with family heads, and later community wide advocacy efforts. In total to date, some 305 community ward representatives have been engaged in a series of meetings in communities and IDP camps.



To ensure that the dialogue remained open during the FYP training, a parents' forum was set up and meets annually to keep the parents up-to-date on the students' progress and to address any issues academic or pastoral issues affecting the students or any individual concerns. In addition a smaller parent-teacher forum was also set up, with responsibility to monitor the day-to-day implementation of the FYP program and serve as communication channel between the W4H programme and the community. The forum's key responsibilities include advocacy on behalf of the FYP with relevant ministries and advising the college and W4H on issues affecting the implementation of FYP. These fora are crucial to establishing FYP ownership within communities.

Selection of candidates

In recruiting students in Borno, W4H specifically targeted potential candidates from the rural areas most affected by the conflict and with the most acute shortages of health workers. The FYP students so far recruited come from 19 of Borno's 27 LGAs. The selection criteria, similar to other W4H-supported states, also prioritised candidates from families that could not afford to fund further education – and those who already had the required minimum qualifications to enter the FYP. The FYP also includes financial support to students to cover their basic needs during the FYP course and further professional training.

For the first cohort of candidates, academic selection was based on a written test – with those who passed the test then being interviewed. For the second cohort, the selection process was changed and an extensive interview was used to select the candidates (with a written test being used once they began the FYP to assess their educational needs). The selection strategy was changed in part because many students had been out of education for several years but also because many of the potential candidates for the first selection round were found to be linked to the community leaders putting them forward. The candidate recruitment and selection process was altered in order to focus the FYP on young women from deprived, rural areas.

The results

In view of the challenging context in Borno, W4H has made rapid progress in setting up a FYP, with a second cohort of students now being recruited. W4H's wider ambition to contribute to improving mental health provision in other programmes and across the state is in its early stages. Notable results so far include:

- Adapting an established FYP programme approach to respond to the conflict-affected situation in Borno, with special provision to take account of the reality that most people in Borno have experienced, witnessed or participated in violence and live with its long-term impacts.
- Developing key strategic partnerships with state government and other key stakeholders to ensure the legal and financial framework is in place to ensure the FYP is firmly established and sustainable.
- Informing, engaging with and developing trust with community representatives and families so that communities put forward potential candidates and commit to supporting those selected.
- Recruiting a first cohort of 119 students, of which 88 are in the process of enrolling on professional health training courses. Recruitment of a second cohort of students is underway with 60 enrolled so far.
- Developing an integrated programme of educational and wellbeing support for the FYP students, including specific support to help them overcome trauma experienced and a 'humanitarian curriculum' designed to equip them to help their communities with mental health and trauma when they return to work as qualified health workers.

"I have made it a personal goal to spread the light of hope in my community with this opportunity, and many people see me as the epitome of a better future after the horrific experience of war that shattered so many dreams."

Borno FYP student

1. UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, quoted by www.MSF.org, June 2018.
2. Maura McInerney and Amy McKlindon, 'Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Transformational Schools,' (Paper, Education Law Center, date unknown).
3. Building Back Better: Sustainable mental health care after emergencies, WHO (2013).
4. W4H Trauma assessment and Response, 2019.
5. More on community sensitisation in How to establish a Foundation Year Programme, W4H (2018)



The W4H programme is funded with UK aid from the UK government.



The programme is led by DAI Global Health (incorporating Health Partners International and GRID), in partnership with Save the Children.



For further information contact: W4H National office: No 1 Adamu Dankabo Close, off Tukur Rd, Nassarawa GRA, Kano, Nigeria

Visit: www.women4healthnigeria.org Email: w4hinfo@women4healthnigeria.org Twitter: [@W4HNigeria](https://twitter.com/W4HNigeria) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/W4HNigeria) August 2019