

# Case studies on Nigerian mentoring

The Nigeria RSH initiated a mentor programme with a training in February 2021. The programme recruited two categories of mentors: five **external mentors**, who are independent consultants contracted to work with two or three organisations of different sizes, to provide support over a six-month period and 13 **internal mentors**, who are members of staff within an organisation selected as safeguarding champions to support the organisation to strengthen its approach to safeguarding.

These case studies represent reflections from the first three months of the mentoring programme. RSH will be capturing further reflections and learning from the mentors and organisations at the end of the mentoring programme.

## Case study 1 – Oluchi and Women’s Rights and Health Project (WRAHP)

Oluchi joined the RSH Nigeria mentor programme, as an external mentor. She had previous experiences of being a mentor, however RSH’s training in February was her first formal training on mentoring. She was paired with three organisations through the RSH mentoring programme. This case study features her experiences with one of these organisations. The organisation she was paired with has strong values grounded in human rights, and feminist principles, but nonetheless was aware that the women and girls they were supporting were experiencing sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment and they wanted to make sure they were well equipped to address these concerns and ensure they were doing no harm to the women and girls.

Oluchi felt the training provided by RSH gave her what she needed to perform her role well, she was given plenty of resources and ongoing support to help her navigate the challenges and requirements of the role:

*“RSH didn’t send me high and dry to be a mentor. I felt equipped” (Oluchi)*

Key highlights for Oluchi were learning about the *GROW model*<sup>1</sup> which enabled her to understand the distinct needs of the organisations and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Using the GROW model helped her “see each of *the organisations as individuals*” which led her to tailor the support she provided. The other highlight for her

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<sup>1</sup> The GROW model is a simple four-step process that helps to structure mentoring and coaching sessions, and is used in the RSH mentor training programme. It stands for Goal, Reality, Options, Way forward. For more info see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f3X2PEsV-Q>

was learning about *intersectionality* and how this could be used to better understand the myriad risks women and girls in the communities face based on different social and environmental factors.

RSH believes that some of the skills required of a good mentor include perseverance, flexibility, passion and curiosity. According to the organisation being mentored it is also important to have a mentor who:

*“works at our pace, listens, is consistent, asks questions, understands how we are doing, is patient, motivating and knowledgeable about safeguarding.”*  
(WRAHP)

The organisation believe that Oluchi had all of these skills and this made their mentoring sessions smooth and more productive.

The relationship between a mentor and the organisation they are mentoring is not always easy, it takes time to build trust and secure the commitment of the organisational leadership, but once you have that the relationship is more likely to succeed:

*“It was very important to get the buy-in from the ED. Once the ED has bought-in, everyone else will too.”* (Oluchi)

The organisation that Oluchi was paired with was very busy, they had a lot going on, yet the Executive Director was very committed to strengthening safeguarding across the organisation:

*“Workloads were high, but they always found a way”* (Oluchi)

RSH has developed an Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool to guide the development of an action plan which in turn provides the structure and accountability for the mentoring support. WRAHP was proactive in completing the OCA tool themselves, and found it a very useful process. According to them:

*“the OCA was enlightening – it looks objectively and critically at organisation... we were amazed that as a feminist organisation we didn’t have everything in place... the OCA helped guide us to develop an action plan. We have ownership of the OCA and the action plan.”* (WRAHP)

One thing the organisation did to support the mentoring work was to identify focal people to work with the mentor – focal points were allocated in programmes, human resources, and communications with specific responsibilities. This shared responsibility is important for securing commitment and sustainable change.

The organisation experienced quite a culture shift as a result of the work they did with Oluchi, both among individuals and also across the whole organisation. Staff reported that they became more aware of what is right and wrong, and no longer brush things off as ‘normal’. They reported developing clear boundaries with colleagues, treating each other with more respect and *“reducing careless comments”*. In addition to these significant changes at organisational level, they also reported a change in the way the communities see them:

*“Now they know we’re more concerned about them, and how to protect them – even from us - (it has) really improved relationships with community members”*  
(WRAHP)

The organisation also reported that their new knowledge around safeguarding has improved their programme quality and their reputation with donors. They now always include safeguarding in their proposals, and they believe this has given them “an edge with donors” as there are still not many organisations doing this in the country.

A number of very practical, tangible changes were experienced by both Oluchi and the organisation she was paired with in terms of increased confidence, knowledge and commitment to safeguarding, along with new policies, procedures and improved relations with colleagues, donors and communities.

But it is important to note that this type of change does not happen overnight and requires continuous conversations and reinforcements. At the beginning of the process there were still challenges for this organisation with their understanding of safeguarding:

*“Despite the training and numerous conversations about safeguarding, organisations can quickly forget what this is about and revert back to their previous understanding of safeguarding; that it is about protecting staff from physical harm, ensuring their security and protection – rather than safeguarding the people we support from sexual abuse, exploitation, sexual harassment and other forms of harm by the organisation” (Oluchi)*

RSH hopes that by the end of the six months mentoring journey organisations will have a better understanding of safeguarding and will become fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment in their workplaces.

The mentoring programme took place during COVID-19, with the restriction on movement and face to face meetings. Despite this, many important and impactful interactions took place in the virtual space, in particular among mentors supporting each other and sharing their experiences. Whilst everyone acknowledges that face to face interaction is preferable, you can still foster strong relationships through the virtual space.

## Case Study 2 – Ibiyemi and Living Hope Care for People living with HIV / AIDS Society

Ibiyemi, is the Executive Director of an organisation who applied to the Nigeria RSH mentor programme in early 2021. She joined the programme as an internal safeguarding mentor – a full time staff member of an organisation who is designated to provide ongoing mentor support to the organisation to improve their safeguarding culture and practice. This was one of two models of mentoring that the RSH was piloting in Nigeria. This case study focuses on Ibiyemi’s experiences of working in the organisation to improve practice and also features her colleague’s views of the process.

As an internal mentor, Ibiyemi’s role was to cascade the learning she received from the RSH to other members of her organisation, and to support different teams to put in place safeguarding policies and procedures that adhere to national and international standards and best practice.

The organisation identified safeguarding focal points across all the different teams to work with Ibiyemi. She trained them on all aspects of the safeguarding journey, with a particular focus on organisational practice and how to raise awareness among the community on safeguarding. They have since implemented a series of awareness raising sessions with school principals, primary health care providers, and community groups, including sex workers, people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups to provide them with new knowledge and increased understanding of their rights with regards safeguarding.

Whilst there is strong support across the organisation for this work, and the leadership of the organisation is championing this work, they see a gap in capacity at the level of their Board. The Board of Directors is supportive and passionate about the work but lacks knowledge of safeguarding requirements and their responsibilities with in that. The next priority for the organisation is to work closely with the Board to bring them along the journey with the organisation, and recruit additional members with safeguarding expertise.

Ibiyemi used the RSH Organisational Capacity Assessment tool with her staff to identify the areas that needed developing. They found the assessment a useful process and were surprised that it highlighted how much was missing from their organisational policies. Initially they gave themselves high scores, but with more training and reflection they realised that there were many gaps. Their scores went down from the initial assessment to their review. This is not an uncommon experience as Ibiyemi puts it:

*“the more we learn about safeguarding the more gaps we see” (Ibiyemi)*

This process of deep, internal reflection is a critical part of the safeguarding journey as this organisation’s experience highlights.

Another reflection that our mentor makes is around the inclusion of safeguarding into new project proposals. This is seen as an important and significant shift for the organisation, and one that sets them apart from other organisations:

*“donors will see that we are not old school, we are new school” (Ibiyemi)*

Additional reflections from on the programme:

*“Mentor meetings provide continuous education and more information” (Ibiyemi)*

- The learning from other mentors is an important aspect of the programme and really supports mentors to explore good practice, fill gaps in understanding and knowledge, and help stimulate new thinking and new strategies for moving forward.
- Having an internal mentor is useful to have a champion on the inside, but other staff members would have liked to have been able to participate more in the mentor programme, through the training and support and supervision. Whilst some cascade training was given to other staff members, this did not feel sufficient to strengthen capacity.
- Perhaps one of the most powerful and lasting changes that the RSH mentor programme has contributed to is to connect people who are similarly passionate about ensuring theirs and their organisations interventions and activities do no harm and if they do that this is identified and appropriate addressed and dealt with. The value of this community of mentors and organisations is likely to be felt long into the future.



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