RSM
Risk and Strategic Management, Corp.

Partner Liaison Security Operations [PLSO] Nigeria

Security Focal Points in Nigeria: Building a Community of Practice

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Introduction

Security risk management (and at the strategic level organisational resilience) functions both vertically, spanning from the most junior member of the team at the grassroots level within Nigeria, up to the most senior member of the headquarters team at the executive level. And, it functions horizontally, across technical functions, activities and localities within Nigeria.

Within the community of risk practitioners resides the Nigerian Security Focal Point, a designated person who is commonly responsible for the tactical and operational day-to-day management and coordination of actions which seek to control their team's exposure to security and safety risks.

Where clusters of humanitarian aid and development organisations work it is common for Security Focal Points to form their own loose community of practice, and this is found within various forums in Nigeria, as well as through the support offered by the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) meetings hosted by the US Embassy RSO monthly. This allows those working within an important, but often ill-defined and under-supported remit, to share experiences and information on security risk management issues, as well as critically provide a mechanism by which to communicate time-sensitive threat reporting on emergent or occurring security risks.

While such a community of practitioners can exponentially increase the individual's capacity by drawing upon the knowledge and experiences of others, it is often not enough for organizations to rely upon such informal mechanisms. Rather, in order to fulfil their duty of care towards staff, organizations must ensure that Security Focal Points are given opportunities for professional learning and development, and the practical tools to be successful. And, where Nigerian focal points or security professionals operate within the same space as their international counterparts, then the opportunity for the cross-pollinisation of knowledge, skills and experiences should be leveraged.

Gaps and challenges for Nigerian Security Focal Points

The Security Focal Point role in Nigeria is pivotal in identifying and addressing risks to people, facilities, assets, information, operations and the reputation of their activity, their organisation, and (indirectly) external stakeholders such as donors, other implementing partners and local counterparts.

The knowledge and skill requirements of the job are layered, with a common nucleus of need consistently found across organizations, activities and operating environments. The role can vary, depending on the nature of the work being conducted, and the influence of internal and external stakeholders. The environments and communities in which work is performed, and the influence of emergent threats that generate unforeseen risk, also drive proactive or reactive risk management measures by those leading security risk management efforts.

The forces that shape and direct the work of an organization's Security Focal Point also comprise static factors, where risks are well-recognised and more or less consistently present. In Nigeria this may include longstanding conflict between herders and pastoralists, established military action between the Nigerian military and armed opposition groups, consistently high levels of crime, and commonly found violence occurring during elections. The Security Focal Point can therefore be seen as working within a continuum of vulnerability and potential disruption that, at the extreme, is characterised by great dynamism where risks can emerge or surge, and then may decline or disappear with little forewarning. This demands an approach to field security risk management that must be scalable, understanding that no two Security Focal Points are necessarily alike, and that risk conditions are inherently fluid.

Formalising capacity-building

The technical knowledge and ability to contextualize risk controls through experience varies widely within the Security Focal Point community in Nigeria. Some practitioners have prior military, police or professional security knowledge and skills, while – as is more typically the case – many assume the role as a secondary function, with little to no training or experience. This variation presents a challenge to not only the Security Focal Point whose capabilities either protects or exposes their team to risk... but their competency can also protect or conversely expose their organization to risk as an incident in Nigeria can result (if mismanaged) in an organizational crisis.

The case for a minimum standard of training and capacity building within the aid and development sector for Security Focal Points – and the risk management practitioner community at large – is well-recognized across the sector. The complexity of the role, especially in Nigeria, requires a defined competency framework focused on core areas of commonly required knowledge and skill. The process of analysing what competencies are required for the Security Focal Point is a useful management exercise, helping teams to effectively align risks to competency needs. Core areas of competency for Security Focal Points in Nigeria might include:

- Risk assessments and analysis
- Critical event planning
- Activating the local incident team
- Emergency communications
- Stakeholder and interagency engagement
- Developing document systems
- Family liaison during an emergency
- Investigations management
- Training and exercising

- Facility security and safety
- Travel risk management
- Guard force management
- Hibernation, relocation and evacuations
- Selecting hotels and guesthouses
- IED and bomb threat management
- Responding to natural disasters
- Medical emergency management
- Active shooter and armed aggressor attacks

Formalising capacity-building: the means

When developing an approach to up-skilling, the Security Focal Point management team must define the prioritized outcomes within the competency framework. Training ideally should be accompanied by exercising the skills learnt in order to ensure that standards and practices are truly understood, and critically are reinforced. Training without exercising will likely fail to build strong understanding and competency at the outset, and will likely result in knowledge and skill fade over time. As such, a supportive programme must be developed to enable the Security Focal Point to put their knowledge into action – not only as an individual, but ideally within their Local Incident Management Team as well.

The question of how to implement a Security Focal Point training and capacity building programme can be complex. Considerations may include whether to conduct in-person or online training and exercises, and whether the programme should be formally recognized through external accrediting bodies. External certifications or accreditations can add value not only by motivating participation, but also by providing credibility and, in so doing, adding a layer of protection from reputational and litigation risk for Implementing Partners.

Regardless of the approach used, Security Focal Points hold an important position within organizational resilience – and specifically in Nigeria – within the field of security risk management. They act as the voice and driving-force for security risk management, actively controlling risks. By developing a learning programme for Security Focal Points then implementers can also demonstrate an investment into human capacity, as well as a focused effort to protect both their people, as well as their donors' goals. An investment into Security Focal Points is an investment in protecting

people, operations, facilities and assets, business and the reputational interests of organizations working in Nigeria.

How can the PLSO team help…

The Partner Liaison Security Operations [PLSO] team can help Implementing Partners and their Security Focal Points by providing access to:

1. An extensive eLearning program, addressing core areas of technical competency.
2. Video tutorials on how to develop security document systems.
3. Local Incident Management Team exercising to test and validate knowledge and skills.
4. Real real-time threat alerts [ISER], SMS texts and WhatsApp alerts.
5. Useful tools, including succinct risk reviews, daily security PowerPoint briefings, and studies.
6. Useful reports and studies to aid with the development of knowledge and awareness.
7. Peer support and mentoring on risk issues.
8. Useful security document templates and tools.
9. Security and safety posters and handouts.
10. Forums where Security Focal Points may share ideas and experiences.

And all of these support mechanisms are free.

Please contact the PLSO team for free support!