

# AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme works with civil society organisations (CSOs) to enable them to be credible and effective drivers of change for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Our work focuses on strengthening the system of CSOs, networks and coalitions to improve their internal, external and programmatic capabilities. We also focus on providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue for an improved, effective and inclusive regulatory environment for the operation of CSOs in Nigeria.

ACT will be implemented in 10 states, selected across the six geo-political zones in the country. Implementation is being rolled out in phases in selected states. We are currently working in Adamawa, Edo, FCT, Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and Sokoto.

The four-year programme (2019-23) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.

This case study and other ACT publications are available at [www.justice-security.ng](http://www.justice-security.ng)

CSOs' EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19:

## ADVOCATING FOR ACCOUNTABLE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT SERVICES



### WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

This case study illustrates the impact of coordinated CSO action to enhance the accountability and responsiveness of the government to address COVID-19 related concerns, and ensure transparency and the efficient use of financial provisions by the federal and state government for COVID-19. The change brought about by this work has the potential to positively influence the relationship between government and Nigerian citizens in relation to COVID-19.



## INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and related government measures is having great impact in Nigeria. Since 27 February 2020, when the federal Ministry of Health confirmed Nigeria's first case of COVID-19 in Lagos state, there have been fears as to what the spread of the pandemic means for citizens.

The country required a rapid scale-up of critical food and water supplies, as well as shelter and health services, among other urgent efforts, to address pre-existing needs and new vulnerabilities triggered by COVID-19.

In response, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced a fiscal stimulus of N500bn (\$1.3bn) - designated as a COVID-19 Intervention Fund - aimed at upgrading healthcare facilities, supporting sub-national government interventions, financing public works projects and funding social interventions.<sup>1</sup>

A key element of the COVID-19 Intervention Fund provides for the distribution of palliatives - such as food, water supplies, soap, hand sanitizers, masks, and personal protective equipment - to be distributed across Nigeria and targeted at poor and vulnerable populations.<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

In Lagos state – where the most COVID-19 cases were recorded in Nigeria – the government unveiled an economic stimulus package for the most vulnerable people in March 2020. Under the Governor's 'Emergency Food Response Programme' the following measures were announced: one meal per day to 100,000 youths, an unconditional cash transfer to 250,000 people, and food kitchens established in all the local government councils. The aim of the package was to cushion the effects of the lockdown, a 14-day stay-at-home government directive to curb the spread of the virus in the state.

Despite government efforts to divert public funds towards mitigating the impact of the pandemic and increasing access to basic health services and supplies, there was widespread disbelief in the messaging, highlighting a lack of trust between government and citizens.

Due to lack of clarity on selection criteria, what defined a 'vulnerable' person and based on past experience, many people believed the distribution of palliatives in particular was based on political connections. People questioned where the diverted funds and supplies were going. This led to more distrust between government and citizens and, in some locations, even looting of government supplies.

## APPROACH

At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, ACT performed a rapid assessment of its CSO partners and their ability to conduct effective advocacy campaigns during emergencies. Four strategic areas were identified as crucial if CSO advocacy efforts were to add value during the pandemic. These included: mainstreaming gender and social inclusion; effective monitoring and evaluation; effective communication & media engagement; and planning and implementing effective advocacy campaign during emergency. ACT then delivered a series of virtual training sessions for over 60 CSOs to strengthen their skills these areas.

Following the trainings, CSOs mobilised quickly to bridge a gap between government and citizens in the delivery of the state's COVID-19 response. With ACT support, CSOs worked together to design an advocacy campaign that would create awareness about government policies and interventions on COVID-19 and enable platforms to ensure transparency and accountability on the implementation of government engagement plans for the COVID-19 pandemic.

CSOs grouped together in a coalition to collectively monitor, track and engage the Lagos state government on the implementation of the COVID-19 stimulus fund, and to advocate for transparency and inclusive access to the government services provided. A significant effort was made to ensure that the distribution of palliatives was inclusive, and facilitated the representations and voice of women, people with disabilities, and others significantly affected but often marginalised from decision-making. ACT provided a small grant to the coalition and technical assistance to implement the advocacy campaign.



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1. Source: AfrInvest, "Nigerian Economic and Financial Market Outlook, July 2020.

2. Source: One Acre Fund, "From Seed to Soap, Delivering a Health Response to COVID-19, 2020.

## RESULTS

### Collective action across civil society

The initiative was led by the Lagos Civil Society Participation for Development (LACSOP). The initiative was led by the Lekki, Ifako-Ijaiye, Igando-Ikotun, Kosofe, Mainland, and ShomoluMore. The coalition was established from across community-based organisations, non-government organisations, associations, and religious bodies that had been part of the palliative distribution (whether observing or active).

A **strong monitoring system** was developed and provided consistent evidence for CSO advocacy efforts. The focus was on being proactive with real-time tracking of expenditures and palliative distribution. Information was harvested from government departments, key informant interviews, and unique data collected from a Google form questionnaire. Scorecards were developed to monitor progress. Civil society then assessed the information based on the type and numbers of palliatives shared, and the gender and inclusiveness implications.

“

Tracking the palliatives aimed to ensure there was accountability and transparency in the distribution by government,” said Gabriel Okeowo, BudgiT Foundation. ”

The collaborative tracking of the disbursement and distribution of COVID-19 palliatives enabled CSOs to amplify their work across the state. The vision was that this collective action would influence the government's actions, provide greater transparency in the use of public resources, and reduce opportunities for mismanagement.

“

Working together with other CSOs helped us to have a stronger voice. We tapped into the strengths of each CSO to make our efforts more effective,” said John Akiola, Freedom Foundation. ”

### Government responsiveness and accountability

A **solid evidence base** helped CSOs to have constructive dialogue with government about the distribution of palliatives. This led to more trust between government and civil society, leading to greater consultation and coordination of the delivery and distribution of government palliatives.

For example, political leaders in the Agege LGA openly invited CSOs and the media to witness the handover of palliatives to communities. This resulted in more accountability and transparency of the government's efforts.

### Citizen engagement

CSOs led an outreach campaign to engage citizens and raise awareness about the monitoring effort. The **local communication campaigns** were led by CSOs with reach to different groups (including those excluded from current government-led information campaigns). The campaigns provided a **two-way flow of information** on public health guidance, monitoring data, grievances, and impacts of government action. The aim was for community members to gain a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities, in order to mobilise collective power to hold duty bearers accountable for the delivery of public services and goods.

CSOs worked with community leaders and religious leaders to **address grievances** by supporting these leaders to engage in the outreach to explain measures taken, invite sharing of concerns, and act by finding ways to address leaders' involvement in the diversion or politicisation of palliatives and engage media platforms to discuss openly.

These platforms were also an opportunity to open a **dialogue with government officials**. Citizens shared grievances with relevant state government officials and advocated for them to be addressed, and improve palliative programmes via call-in sessions on the radio and on television.

### Anti-corruption

**Social media** advocacy was targeted at anti-corruption agencies and relevant government ministries, departments and agencies on tracking COVID-19 funds and palliatives. The purpose was to reduce the likelihood of corruption, increase transparency in government decision making, and reduce opportunities for mismanagement.

### Inclusion

CSOs worked to amplify the voice of marginalised people, including women, girls, the elderly, and people with disabilities, to fight for their rights and partner with government to improve services and the predictability of resources for these groups and individuals.

“

We played a role in advocating for our members so that they did not get left behind in the distribution of palliatives,” said a representative from the Joint Association of Persons With Disability. ”

In Lagos, when CSOs approached the state government about the specific needs of people with disabilities (PWDs), the governor ensured that there was an allocation of palliatives for PWDs in the state. According to the CSOs' monitoring programme, over 53 percent of all palliatives distributed in Lagos state went to PWDs.<sup>3</sup>

3. Source: Lagos Civil Society Participation for Development, 'Assessing COVID-19 Pandemic Palliatives in Lagos State', November 2020.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### **A collaborative approach between civil society and government strengthened the COVID-19 response.**

The CSO coalition successfully 'worked with' government agencies rather than against them to strengthen the COVID-19 response. This collaborative approach, based on the monitoring programme and evidence collected, built trust between civil society and government, led to more meaningful engagement between both groups, made the distribution process more transparent, and ultimately improved government accountability and responsiveness, particularly for marginalised groups.

“

We tracked the government's palliative distribution during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The aim was to present the results and lessons learned to the Lagos State Government, in order to contribute to a collaborative response strategy,” said Dede Kadiri, LACSOP. ”

### **A two-way flow of communication is essential for meaningful government and citizen engagement.**

The outreach campaign led by CSOs ensured that citizens better understood their rights and responsibilities, but also provided an opportunity for citizens to address grievances in an open and constructive dialogue with government via a two-way flow of communication on radio and television. Citizens felt heard and government officials had an opportunity to explain their actions. These actions increased the mutual understanding between CSOs and the state government.



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### **Find out more**

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