

AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION

DRIVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION



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BACKGROUND

In 2019, the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) Programme started working with and supporting civil society organisations (CSOs), networks and coalitions in Nigeria to strengthen their internal, external and programmatic capabilities. The programme also started facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues towards improving the regulatory environment for civil society operations in Nigeria. Precipitating the programme's interventions was the need to address critical challenges that had been limiting the full potential of Nigerian CSOs to be credible agents of sustainable change and development.

Globally, CSOs play a critical role in promoting better societies. However, at the inception of the ACT programme, many CSOs in Nigeria were grappling with limited organisational capacity, complex regulatory environment, less productive relationships with government, and weak participation in policymaking processes. Further, and very noticeably, the development projects of the CSOs aimed at empowering communities, often excluding women (49% of the population), persons with disabilities or PWDs (15% of the population), and other traditionally marginalised groups. In other words, the CSOs were not always focused on addressing exclusive attitudes and behaviours amongst the communities that represent their primary constituents and stakeholder. They were not regarding gender and social inclusion (G&SI) as integral to their development projects partly because of their weak understanding of G&SI as a human rights issue. Furthermore, the Nigerian government was not implementing the relevant G&SI legislation and affirmative actions it signed up to, thus exacerbating the challenge of mainstreaming G&SI in the country.

In response to this, the ACT programme introduced some innovative solutions. Progress has been recorded in the mainstreaming of G&SI in and by ACT-supported CSOs policies and practices. For instance, ACT-supported CSOs are now integrating G&SI principles and practices in their operations, programmes and projects. They are also influencing wider stakeholders to be inclusive, and advocating for the implementation of government G&SI policies. In this paper, ACT shares its experience, including challenges faced and lessons learned, in facilitating this progress across 10 states and at the national level. ACT hopes that other development programmes, implementing partners, donors and government agencies, and a wide range of other civil society stakeholders will find this experience useful in promoting G&SI in the civic space in Nigeria and similar settings.



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THE ACT APPROACH AND INTERVENTION TO G&SI MAINSTREAMING

Gender and social inclusion was integral to all organisational capacity development support that ACT provided to its CSO partners throughout the programme's interventions

This has ensured that not only did each of the 203 CSO partners receive specific training on G&SI, but the additional organisational development (OD) support provided to the CSOs all contained important elements of G&SI. ACT ensured that the training, coaching, mentoring and peer learning was facilitated across the OD domains and each category included elements of G&SI. Using this approach enabled ACT to reach over 2,800 CSO personnel across 10 states, increasing their understanding of the importance of G&SI mainstreaming in their organisations' processes and procedures.

ACT provided G&SI support to ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

In addition to supporting CSOs on G&SI mainstreaming, ACT also directly supported selected government MDAs. This was done through conducting G&SI research with these MDAs, including the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC, which is responsible for the formal registration of CSOs and other entities in Nigeria); the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS, which oversees tax compliance by CSOs and other bodies); the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering (SCUML, which was created to prohibit money laundering), and the National Pension Commission (PENCOM, which exists for effective regulation and

supervision of pension as it relates to CSOs and other organisations). The research produced recommendations for improving G&SI in these key MDAs. ACT also commissioned research into the state of G&SI within the national and sub-national CSO frameworks in Nigeria. The studies and results contributed to the development of an inclusive model self-regulatory framework for CSOs and partnering MDAs in Nigeria.

ACT supported the incorporation of G&SI into CSO regulatory frameworks.

ACT supported the incorporation of G&SI into the development and revision of CSO regulatory frameworks in Nigeria. This intervention was to ensure G&SI mainstreaming in CSO self-regulation was an integral part of compliance requirements with key regulatory agencies. This strategy was also to empower regulatory bodies to become more responsive by increasing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards G&SI. It is anticipated that this will also ensure that G&SI becomes a sustained regulatory requirement for CSOs in the country after the programme is concluded.

ACT developed G&SI training materials.

Besides offering G&SI training, coaching, mentoring and peer learning platforms, ACT also developed training materials to synthesise and present the principles and practices of G&SI in tangible formats. ACT designed a G&SI Toolkit as a resource for ACT CSO partners, as well as for those CSOs beyond the ACT Programme's reach. The Toolkit provides guidance on the use of the G&SI lens, how to mainstream G&SI, and G&SI analysis. ACT has also developed video presentations, information sheets, a G&SI checklist (guidelines) to leverage multiple channels to reach as many stakeholders as possible with information on G&SI mainstreaming.

ACT provided capacity development grants on G&SI.

ACT supported CSOs with capacity development grants to implement interventions targeted at G&SI mainstreaming and equality. This was to ensure that by implementing projects that directly address G&SI, or by including G&SI in projects across sectoral areas, CSOs were able to gain hands-on capacity development in planning and implementing G&SI-responsive programmes. This approach also helped CSOs to mainstream G&SI in their internal operations as well as their day-to-day programme implementation activities.

ACT empowered women with disability (WWDs) and girls with entrepreneurial skills.

ACT conducted digital literacy training for 50 CSOs (youth, women and PWD-led organisations) to improve their capacity development efforts. These CSOs are now better placed to promote G&SI engagements more widely in Nigeria.

KEY OUTCOMES OF ACT'S SUPPORT TO G&SI MAINSTREAMING

ACT's interventions in G&SI mainstreaming led to some remarkable results for CSOs, government MDAs and policymakers, and CSO constituents.

OUTCOMES FOR CSOS

Increased commitment by CSOs to G&SI mainstreaming.

The ACT-supported CSOs are now able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of G&SI beyond an understanding of women/girls' and PWDs' participation in programme interventions. In a survey conducted by ACT, 97% of CSO partners reported improvements in their staff and volunteers' understanding and competencies to mainstream G&SI. The CSOs are demonstrating an increased understanding of how under-represented groups at the community level can be marginalised, and this has led to increased commitment by the CSOs to ensure inclusion and to support these marginalised groups.

CSOs now have organisational policies, procedures and human resources for G&SI.

As a result of the support provided, many of ACT's CSO partners have organisational policies for G&SI in place and being implemented. About 77% of ACT CSO partners did not have G&SI policies in place before the start of the engagement with the ACT but have now developed policies

from scratch following their engagement with the programme. Many of CSOs have also recruited G&SI focal officers, and some have established G&SI desks. These actions are contributing to improved diversity in CSO governance (e.g. increased diversity in the composition of their Boards of Trustees). CSOs also recorded increased disaggregation of G&SI data in activities, as well as the use of G&SI monitoring tools. G&SI analysis has become routine in project implementation by CSOs, and budgets now reflect G&SI considerations.

CSOs engaged with ACT are increasingly implementing initiatives that empower marginalised groups through CSO community development initiatives.

ACT implemented small-scale grants specifically addressing the rights and access of the most marginalised people, including orphans, women and girls, PWDs, and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Up to 92% of ACT's partners are demonstrating increased inclusion of women, PWDs and others who are traditionally marginalised in the communities where they work. Again, about 91% of ACT's CSO partners stated that senior management takes responsibility for mainstreaming G&SI in their organisations.

OUTCOMES FOR MDAS AND POLICYMAKERS

G&SI is a CSO regulatory requirement in MDAs in Nigeria since engagement with ACT.

G&SI has become a key component of regulatory compliance for CSOs in Nigeria. The CSO self-regulatory frameworks will continue to ensure that the gains of G&SI are maintained as part of the requirements of CSO administration in Nigeria.

MDAs have designated G&SI officers in place.

There has also been an increase in the number of G&SI support officers and/or gender desks in key agencies since the onset of the ACT programme. This demonstrates an increased commitment to G&SI by the MDAs that ACT engaged with, including: CAC, FIRS, SCUML, and the Federal Ministry of Budget and Planning.

Policy makers and decision makers demonstrate increased understanding of G&SI.

ACT supported a deeper understanding of G&SI, beyond women/girls' participation in the MDAs (and with the legislators) they engaged with. It is a positive development for the country when key actors in policy and decision making are rightly in tune with G&SI. For instance, the MDAs now implement G&SI considerations towards the achievement of national frameworks and international legislation on inclusion.

RESULTS FOR CSO CONSTITUENTS

ACT CSO partners achieved increased women's inclusion in traditional structures. For instance, in South Eastern Nigeria, through ACT support to CSOs, 26 women were included in the traditional Igwe's (Chief) cabinet across two communities. This outcome was unprecedented in this region of Nigeria. The result demonstrates how G&SI can be improved upon through sustained community engagement.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ACT support to CSOs for mainstreaming G&SI in their processes, programmes, projects has not all been a success. ACT encountered some challenges which are worth sharing, not least for stakeholders to be cognisant of for future planning and decision-making. Based on ACT's experience over the past five years to support G&SI mainstreaming in Nigeria, ACT also has some recommendations from its learning.

1. Social norms in relation to traditional practice(s) are challenging to address (e.g. leadership continues to be male-dominated, and attitudes are often seen as intractable which perpetuates inequalities and contradicts government policies of equality). This can be demotivating to those

committed to G&SI mainstreaming. However, ACT's results have demonstrated that with sustained engagement change is possible.

2. Exclusion is often entrenched in stigmatisation and discrimination – based on gender, disability, ethnicity, age, religion, or sexual orientation. These forms of discrimination undermine the dignity, rights and well-being of many individuals, limiting their full participation in society. Discrimination and stigmatisation are often the result of fear and misunderstanding. Through mainstreaming G&SI across its OD strengthening support to ACT CSOs, increased understanding of the benefits that inclusion brings has changed attitudes and practices across CSOs.
3. Many CSOs, at all levels of experience and across all sectors, have the mistaken belief that G&SI is a 'women-focused' issue only affecting those CSOs that are working in the gender sector – so it is, therefore, 'not their problem'. By advocating for G&SI as an integral responsibility of all in Nigeria, it is critical for CSOs and government agencies to challenge this widespread notion.
4. A large proportion of the Nigerian population are women (49.6%) and youth (70% under 30 years). As such, there are significant resource implications to mainstream G&SI in Nigeria. However, it must be highlighted that it is only through G&SI mainstreaming that sustainable development is possible in Nigeria.



5. Affirmative action remains an area with insufficient progress in obtaining positive results over the years. The implementation of affirmative action policies at the national and sub-national levels should be a key influencing priority for CSOs to meet the target set. CSOs should continue to advocate for the full implementation of affirmative action policies at national and sub-national levels, as committed by the Federal Government of Nigeria.
6. Owing to economic inequality, women and other marginalised groups often face significant economic barriers resulting in them constituting a larger proportion of poor people in Nigeria. This hampers G&SI equality in political representation because poverty denies women and other excluded groups the financial and human resources required to participate in decision-making and to take up leadership positions. Addressing women's empowerment is crucial to G&SI efforts.
7. G&SI is a human rights issue and without G&SI mainstreaming traditionally marginalised groups are excluded from being able to exercise their fundamental human rights. G&SI mainstreaming should be treated as a human rights issue.
8. MDAs and policy makers are violating the rights of women, girls, PWDs, and other marginalised groups in Nigeria by not implementing national and state G&SI policies that are either in place or require revision. For sustainable development, activating these policies must be a top priority at national and sub-national level.
9. Attitudinal and behavioural change takes time. It requires long-term engagement and commitment by CSOs to bring about sustainable change through G&SI mainstreaming.
10. Mainstreaming G&SI support to both CSOs and policy makers has demonstrated how effective ACT's partners can be in influencing positive change. However, the breadth of outcomes to date is minimal in terms of the coverage required to reach a critical mass that can change attitudes and behaviours across all states.
11. Capacity Development Providers should adopt a rights-based approach to G&SI mainstreaming in all their support to CSOs across Nigeria. This will ensure that capacity development support and services for CSOs continue to include G&SI principles as integral to their OD support.
12. MDAs and policy makers should lead by example by implementing G&SI policies across all sectoral support and applying a G&SI lens across all budgeting at the state and local government area (LGA) levels.
13. CSOs, civils society (CS) networks and policy makers can access the ACT G&SI Toolkit to support their understanding and capacity to conduct a G&SI analysis, to use a G&SI lens in all planning and monitoring, to mainstream G&SI across all activities, and to promote G&SI through monitoring and evaluation. In addition, CSOs and policy makers should promote G&SI in human resource/people management, communications, and social networking.



CONCLUSION

G&SI mainstreaming remains an important tool to drive sustainable change, and sustainable development. The unique role of CSOs/CS networks cannot be over-emphasised in their potential as effective advocates to promote G&SI mainstreaming across their extensive stakeholder networks. Although the effectiveness of ACT partner CSOs to adopt G&SI mainstreaming may be seen

as 'a drop in the ocean', ACT partners have demonstrated their capacity to change the attitudes and behaviours of others – when provided with the information and tools required to implement and influence inclusive change. Small changes have already demonstrated success. If 233 ACT-supported CSOs/CS networks can influence inclusive practice through mainstreaming G&SI, rolling this out across the sector would significantly contribute to the ACT goal towards the achievement of SDGs in Nigeria.



Find out more

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