

AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION

Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) works with civil society organisations (CSOs) to enable them to be drivers of change in Nigeria's development.

Our work seeks to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the national development priorities in the Nigeria Vision and Economic Transformation Blueprint.

ACT is implemented nationwide, with work already underway in Lagos, Kano, Abuja, FCT, and others. Implementation is being rolled out in phases in selected states across the six geopolitical zones in the country.

Our work focuses on the following areas:

- Strengthening the system of civil society organisations, networks (CSOs) and coalitions to improve their internal, external and programmatic capabilities.
- Providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue for an improved and effective regulatory environment for the operation of CSOs in Nigeria.

The four-year programme (2019 – 2023) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.



Jake Epelle (CEO/Founder of the Albino Foundation) at a radio discussion programme to raise awareness about preventative measures of Covid-19. Source: ACT

KEY ACTIVITIES

This newsletter highlights the key activities undertaken by the programme in April to July 2020.

Summary of key activities include:

CSO system strengthening:

- CSOs implement emergency advocacy on Covid-19
- Launch of mental health support toll-free line during Covid-19 lockdown
- Re-focusing the strategy for the CSO umbrella coalition in Lagos state

CSO regulatory environment:

- Coordination platform for the CSO regulatory environment in Nigeria
- First webinar dialogue to improve the CSO regulatory environment and sustainability

CSO SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

CSOs implement emergency advocacy on Covid-19

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme provided financial and technical assistance to six CSO advocacy partnerships comprising 58 CSOs across the programme locations, including Kano, Lagos, Sokoto and the FCT to drive advocacy and public enlightenment against the spread of Covid-19 during the lockdown period.

Through an intensive capacity strengthening process, the CSOs worked together to provide awareness and sensitisation based on the needs of their respective states. Each advocacy partnership benefited from capacity development training in four areas: mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in advocacy; effective communication and media engagement in emergency period; monitoring and evaluation of emergency advocacy; and conducting effective advocacy campaigns in emergency periods. The trainings were delivered in May and June 2020.

The six advocacy partnerships also received small grants to support the implementation of campaigns, which enabled the CSOs to rapidly design and implement activities during the Covid-19 lockdown.

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Activities focused on providing accurate messaging and information on causative, preventive and treatment measures; creating awareness on government policies and interventions on Covid-19; enabling platforms (such as media organisation and networks) to call for transparency and accountability on the implementation of government palliatives to communities.

Other engagements focused on a strategic and constructive partnership with the mainstream media, especially radio stations, to increase awareness on the Covid-19 pandemic at the community level; and the strategic use of social media platforms to expand the space for dialogue and conversations on emerging issues as a result of Covid-19.

The partnerships are beginning to yield results, as ACT's CSO partners are taking the lead in advocating for the enforcement on the use of masks. In Kano state, the government mass produced face masks and distributed to citizens in the state at no cost. Partners in Sokoto are tracking and sharing information on precautionary measures against Covid-19 to citizens on daily basis through social media platforms, such as twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and bulk SMS. In the FCT, ACT's CSO partners have created toll-free helplines to provide psycho-social support to citizens during the lockdown period, and supported members of the disability community with relevant information and awareness to limit their exposure, and protect their mental health.

'The training and financial support provided by ACT has encouraged and enhanced our advocacy efforts during the pandemic. Already, there are significant changes to people's perception of Covid-19.'

Ibrahim Nuhu, Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)

Launch of mental health support toll-free line

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme provided funds and technical support to the Mandate Health Empowerment Initiative (MHEI) to address mental health issues. The CSO has over 200 health care practitioners that work across the country.

The partnership is a result of ACT's organisational capacity and system assessment (OCA) carried out earlier this year. The initiative was primarily a self-reflection exercise for CSOs to identify and categorise their strengths and weaknesses.

To address the increase in mental health issues and sexual and gender-based violence reported during the Covid-19 lockdown, MHEI launched a helpline for Nigerians experiencing depression, abuse, isolation and other forms of mental disorders. The toll-free help line enables individuals facing anxiety, depression, domestic violence, or sexual abuse to access a free online chat for emotional support and counselling. The helpline provides access to trained mental health professionals, counsellors and experts online 24/7.

MHEI also established a working group, comprised of experts from the fields of education, mental health and psychosocial support, to monitor mental health issues and the concerns of citizens, and to provide support to address the mental health and psychosocial aspects during and after Covid-19 lockdown.

MHEI has trained over 20 healthcare providers in the management of mental health issues, including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers.

'With ACT support, we are even more resolute in our commitment to providing psychosocial support for people going through mental health crisis, especially at this time when the country is battling the Covid-19 pandemic.'

Ameh Zion Abba, Executive Director, MHEI



Banner ad on the MHEI website to promote the new Covid-19 mental health line, supported by ACT

Re-focusing of engagement strategy for CSO umbrella coalition in Lagos state

The Agents for Citizens-driven Transformation (ACT) programme is providing technical assistance to the Lagos State Civil Society Partnership (LACSOP), a coalition of CSOs.

The programme conducted a five-day training session for the LACSOP Steering Committee in organisational development.

The committee, comprised of executive members, who were trained to prepare terms of reference, work plans and a framework for monitoring and evaluation. Functional committees were established to work closely with the 100+ members to implement recommendations and address grievances. This initiative is first of its kind for the organisation.

The committee also worked to re-define the organisation's mission statement ('Promoting citizens' voice, building partnerships and establishing a culture of inclusive and participatory governance in Lagos State through citizens' engagement, research and issue-based advocacy') and strategic goal ('To institutionalise LACSOP as a functional partner in 10 MDAs, five Legislative Committees and Citizens groups in the 57 LGAs/LCDAs in Lagos State by the year 2025').

'ACT has helped us to redefine and reposition LASCOP. The impact will be with us for a long time.'

Henry Balogun, Executive Member, LASCOP

CSO REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Coordination platform for the CSO regulatory environment in Nigeria

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme is working to provide platforms for structured and regular multi-stakeholder engagements for an improved and effective civil society regulatory environment. The programme has facilitated the emergence of civil society organisation (CSO) coordination platforms to promote constructive dialogue among CSOs and with other stakeholders on how to improve the current complex regulatory environment for CSO operations in Nigeria.

Between November 2019 and April 2020, the programme supported consultative and planning meetings for over 30 CSOs. This effort led to the formation of a Steering Committee that developed the “Road Map of Action (RMOA) on Strengthening the Civil Society Regulatory Environment”. The committee will provide oversight and a working group will drive the implementation of agreed actions.

The Steering Committee is made up of 30 members (Nigerian CSOs, international NGOs, donor/development partners, etc). The working group has 11 members: Open Society for West Africa (OSIWA), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Paradigm Initiative, Sesor Empowerment Foundation, and Nigeria Network of Non-Governmental Organizations (NNGO). Other members are; BudGIT, Socio- Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Food Basket Foundation International (FBFI), CLEEN Foundation, and Transparency and Development Information Initiative (TDii).

The working group met in April to formally adopt the RMOA and agreed to implement key activities: a national conference to focus on the civil society operational environment; a web portal for civil society self-regulation and compliance with existing regulations; awareness on CSO compliance; and strengthening current regulations, alongside other key issues.

This is the first time a comprehensive and mutually agreed action has been developed by a coordinated CSO platform to engage on the civil society regulatory environment in Nigeria.

These coordination platforms provide the context for constructive dialogue among CSOs and between CSOs and other stakeholders, such as donor agencies and international organisations.

‘We are grateful for ACT’s coordination efforts. CSOs in Nigeria stand to benefit greatly.’

Oyebisi Oluseyi, Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNGO)



Consultative meetings with CSOs across Nigeria on the regulatory environment. Source: ACT

Webinar to improve CSO regulatory environment and sustainability

The ACT Programme provided technical and financial support to the Working Group to organise an inaugural webinar series on “Strengthening CSO Regulatory Environment and Sustainability in Nigeria” on 29 July 2020. Over 170 participants attended the virtual event, including civil society, donors, government, academia, and the media.

The panel discussion was aimed at addressing the challenges facing the Nigerian civic space, in relation to regulations, sustainability, and the looming economic and financial crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The latter is triggering a funding crisis, and affecting future aid budgets and funding for CSOs.

The webinar provided a platform for leading civil society experts to interact and proffer solutions on the impact of Covid-19 on the civil society community. Discussions focused on civil society structural challenges, funding issues and sustainability, as well as how the regulatory environment is affecting the ability of CSOs to adequately address the challenges. Some of the points raised during the webinar included: regulatory issues, addressing the knowledge gap within the sector, professionalism, credibility, alternative local funding sources, good research and advocacy, improvement in the use of technology, among others. The discussion generated clear ideas and innovative solutions towards addressing some of the challenges, highlighting opportunities for local funding sources.

Key outcomes included: an urgent call to action for CSOs to invest time to engage with key stakeholders including the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (NASS); the need for CSOs to redefine their purpose and mission to align their mandates with the current realities and context; and the need for CSOs to improve on their awareness and compliance to regulations.

‘CSOs should be innovative in finding alternative means of local funding for sustainability and to reduce their dependency on international donors.’

Webinar participant

OTHER ACTIVITIES COMPLETED WITHIN THIS PERIOD

- Organisational capacity assessment for CSOs in Lagos, Kano, and Abuja
- Capacity strengthening of CSO partners on Covid-19 advocacy
- Sub-national survey on the regulatory environment & network

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Capacity development of CSOs in Kano, Lagos and the FCT
- Roll-out of coaching for emerging CSOs in FCT, Lagos, Sokoto, and Kano
- Finalise organisational capacity assessments in Edo state
- Working group on civil society regulatory environment Borno CSO Law Taskforce
- Airing of Covid-19 awareness jingles in Hausa, Fulbe and English on four media stations: Garkuwa, Alu Yagode, Caliphate and Rima FM
- Training manuals for the kick-off of e-learning trainings with CSO partners

Find out more

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