

# 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.



Representatives from the civil society sector in Nigeria. Source: ACT

## KEY ACTIVITIES

This newsletter highlights the key activities undertaken by the programme in August to October 2020.

Summary of key activities include:

### CSO system strengthening:

- Capacity building to improve CSO internal systems
- Launch of CSO e-learning programme
- Civil Society Advisory Group inaugurated

### CSO regulatory environment:

- CSO and government dialogue on Nigeria's new Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020
- Collaboration with the National Assembly for effective CSO regulation
- Survey reveals CSO regulatory laws lacking at state level
- Civil society network seeks amendment to constitution

## CSO SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

### Capacity building to improve CSOs internal systems

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme continues to build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in focal states, despite constraints due to COVID-19. Since August, eight training sessions have been delivered virtually via Microsoft Teams for CSOs in Abuja, Kano, Lagos, and Sokoto.

The training areas were developed according to the results from the CSO organisational capacity and system assessment (OCA) carried out during the inception phase of the programme. The OCA was primarily a self-reflection exercise for CSOs to identify and categorise their strengths and weaknesses. A training needs analysis was implemented as part of this process.

The virtual trainings were delivered on the following subject areas: advocacy; rights-based approach to development; stakeholder mapping and analysis; financial control management; project cycle management; and gender and social inclusion; monitoring and evaluation. The trainings were delivered mostly in English and local languages.

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Feedback from participants indicated that CSOs are beginning to improve their processes and adopt new practices to enhance the internal systems in their organisations.

**‘I would like to extend my appreciation to ACT for the opportunity to participate in the financial management and M&E trainings. I look forward to using the new skills and knowledge acquired to improve my work.’**

Farouk Umar Garba, Kano Civil Society Forum (KCSF)

**‘The OCA process was very constructive for CLEEN. We took steps to review various policies (human resources, administration, gender and social inclusion, sexual harassment and finance) and held a retreat to train staff on each policy.’**

**‘We hired new staff in human resources and communications.’**

**‘We developed a manual to improve the financial management of the organisation. We also now perform periodic internal auditing.’**

CLEEN Foundation

## Launch of CSO e-Learning programme

A key element of the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme is to provide capacity building support to civil society organisations. As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, the programme had to adapt and rethink ways of working by exploring different approaches to trainings, coaching, and mentoring using e-Learning platforms.

ACT pivoted quickly and designed a new online training programme, which commenced in August 2020. Through the new virtual platform – implemented via Microsoft Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp - CSO partners could access course content in different formats (text, images, sounds) and interact with trainers, mentors and colleagues via message boards, forums, chats, video conference, and other types of communication tools.

Feedback from the trainers and participants is positive. Many indicate that the training methodology is easy to use; safe / secure; and conducive for learning. Participants particularly like the flexibility of the new platform, which enables learners to access coursework from anywhere at any time. Whilst some participants noted internet connectivity challenges with the new online approach, they also indicated that it has exposed them to better ways of working. The programme is currently considering ways to address the connectivity issues for future trainings.

**‘The virtual trainings helped us to improve our knowledge – which we would not have been able to do during COVID-19.’**

Lagos State Civil Society Partnership (LASCOP)

**‘Learners can access coursework online from anywhere at any time.’**

Life Helpers Initiative, Sokoto

**‘The virtual training gives participants ample time to learn from video presentations and time to go through the presentations on their own time.’**

The Albino Foundation, Abuja

## Civil Society Advisory Group inaugurated

The Agents for Citizens-driven Transformation (ACT) programme inaugurated the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) in October 2020. The group is mandated to provide advisory support to the programme on its CSO engagement strategy.

The CSAG is made up of 12 members drawn from across the sector. Six CSO members are currently engaged with ACT, and the other six were selected through a competitive call for expressions of interest.

Members will support the programme implementation team to review annual plans and ensure that proposed activities are in line with objectives. They will participate in the programme’s periodic reviews and reflections to identify risks and proffer mitigating measures. Members will also support the programme in generating information on the political and socio-economic dynamics of the country and the impact this might have on programme implementation.

Members of the CSAG include: Atinuke Odukoya, Director CEWIN; Josephine Ngozi Ogazi; Dr. Benson Olugbo, CLEEN Foundation; Hajiya Aisha Gidado, DAWOS; Rukaiya Mamman Children and Family Support Initiatives; Emmanuel Acha, the Enugu State Network of CSOs; Talatu John, Jomurota Community Care Initiatives; Jake Epelle, The Albino Foundation; Bose Ironsi, WRAHP; David Anyeale, CDD; and Prof Gabriel Sunday Umo, Africa Development Centre.

**‘The CSAG will set the pace for development partners to deliver seamlessly in the CSO sector.’**

Bose Ironsi, Women’s Rights and Health Project (WAHP)

## CSO REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

### CSOs and government dialogue on the 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.

As part of this effort, ACT collaborated with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to organise a virtual town hall meeting on Nigeria’s new Companies and Allied Matters Act, 2020 (CAMA 2020), which was enacted in August 2020.

The theme of the meeting was: *‘CAMA 2020: Regulation or Repression?’*. When the law was enacted, it was met with

controversy amongst the civil society sector. Although the amended law has been welcomed by the country's business sector, various sections of the law pertaining to the regulation of civil society organisations (grouped under non-governmental organisations as NGOs and Non-Profits), were deemed contentious. For example, Part F of the CAMA 2020 covers governance and guidance on the incorporation of trustees for NGOs and Non-Profits, and section 839 gives the CAC the power to suspend and remove trustees who are involved in misconduct.

The meeting provided a platform for civil society and government to dialogue and discuss the features of the law, particularly areas of concerns raised by the CSOs. The virtual town hall meeting was attended by 150 participants drawn from government, civil society, the donor community, human rights lawyers, academia, and the media (from within and outside the country). The programme was also on broadcast live on Radio Nigeria and streamed live on Facebook.

As a result of the meeting, there was better understanding of the CAMA 2020 amongst CSOs and the associated effects on the civic space in Nigeria. It also provided an opportunity to consider the way forward for non-profits and made recommendations on addressing the problematic parts of the law.

A key outcome of the meeting was the consensus that the discussion should be moved to the negotiation table and led by a small but effective multi-stakeholder team established to further dialogue and negotiations with government, especially the National Assembly.

As part of ACT's mandate, the programme is facilitating the process of bringing together CSOs, NASS, CAC /other regulators, and development partners to streamline such multi-stakeholder engagements. The Programme is also exploring future areas of support and collaboration with the CAC with respect to their management of CSO operations in Nigeria.

## Collaboration with National Assembly for effective CSO regulation

In September 2020, the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme met with key stakeholders from the National Assembly to discuss the outcomes of the town hall meeting and explore areas of collaboration on broader issues that may enhance the civil society regulatory environment.

Stakeholders included the Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Civil Society and Development Partners: Honourable Kabiru Idris; and the Special Adviser on NGOs to the Deputy Senate President (DSP): Princess Modupe Ozolua.

During the meeting, Honourable Kabiru Idris stated the National Assembly's readiness to support public consultations and discussions on broader issues of the civil society regulatory environment, including proposals that may come up to NASS for the amendment of CAMA 2020.

The meeting also explored mechanisms and options for establishing a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform that will facilitate regular and constructive engagements on issues of the civil society regulatory environment with a view to spotting the gaps /overlaps and resolving problematic areas. Also discussed was the need to carry out a strategic review of civil society regulatory frameworks at the national and sub-national levels and involving CSOs in the country's law-making process.

The Special Adviser to the Deputy Senate President on NGOs disclosed that a database is being developed by the Ministry of Finance, Budget, and National Planning, in collaboration with the Office of the DSP and other bodies to document CSOs and development partners across the country. Act will be invited to participate in the development. She stated the readiness of the Office of the DSP to play a role in a functional multi-stakeholder platform, which will contribute immensely to strengthening the civil society regulatory environment.

## Survey reveals CSO regulatory laws lacking at state level

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme collaborated with the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGO) to commission a survey to identify sub-national regulatory trends and emerging demands for civil society across the country. The survey was completed by 42 CSO networks and coalitions across 31 states in Nigeria.

The focus of the survey was to understand the regulatory issues, concerns and demands that CSOs at the state and sub-national level face and how they can be supported through capacity strengthening for compliance with sub-national regulators and regulatory agencies.

### Key findings:

- **Awareness of legislation/laws that regulate CSOs in their respective states:** The survey highlighted that 75 percent of respondents believe there are no legislations/laws that regulate CSOs in their respective states. While only 25 percent of respondents believed they have such laws. Those states where respondent networks said there are laws that regulate CSOs include Bauchi, Sokoto, Katsina, Enugu, Rivers, Kogi, Nasarawa, Lagos and Benue.
- **Registration of CSOs:** The survey revealed that only 26.2 percent of respondent networks/coalitions are registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC); 50 percent are registered with state ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs); 16.7 percent are not registered at all; and a small percentage (7.1 percent) are reportedly registered with both the CAC and state MDAs.
- **State-level MDAs that register CSOs:** Typically, the MDAs who register CSOs at state level include: the State Ministries of Community Development, Women Affairs and Social Development, Youth and Sport, Local Government, Budget and Economic Planning, Education, States Planning Commission, and Office of the Coordinator of NGOs.
- **Multiple registration of CSOs:** This was another key issue mentioned by a number of respondents, especially those from Enugu, Abia, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ogun, and Osun.
- **Demand for new laws to regulate CSOs in states:** 82 percent of the respondents said there have been no such demands since 2019.

To validate findings of the survey, ACT and the NNNGO organised regional webinars for civil society. Participants generally agreed with the survey findings and adopted the survey report. The webinars also provided an opportunity to discuss and collect relevant data on self-regulation dynamics and practices from the sub-national networks. A national webinar is being planned for early 2021.

Findings from the survey will be used to develop a capacity strengthening framework to support sub-national networks/coalitions and their members in areas such as advocacy, constructive engagement with lawmakers/regulators and other stakeholders. This is expected to contribute to constructive multi-stakeholder engagement in the identified areas, towards achieving an appropriate regulatory environment for civil society operations in the regions.

## Civil society network seeks amendment to constitution

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme facilitated a consortium of forty-two (42) sub-national networks/coalitions of CSOs in September 2020. This was organised against the backdrop of the call for memoranda for advancing credible positions for the Nigerian Constitution Review by the National Assembly (NASS).

The aim was to prepare and collectively submit a memorandum to NASS calling for an amendment of Item 32, Part 1 of the 1999 Constitution to recognise CSOs registered by state or by local government as a legal or corporate body that can sue and be sued.

This section of the constitution does not recognize CSOs registered by state governments as a legal entity, which has prevented key stakeholders (including development partners) from offering support and working with CSOs registered with state or local governments. Many sub-national networks/coalitions of CSOs working with ACT fall in this category.

The consortium of CSOs will continue to receive technical support from the ACT programme to monitor the process and progress of the Constitutional Review to ensure that positions and recommendations submitted by civil society are considered.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES COMPLETED WITHIN THIS PERIOD

- Capacity building toolkits developed
- CSO partners reflection meeting
- Capacity strengthening of CSO partners on Covid-19 advocacy
- Validation of sub-national survey on the CSO regulatory environment and network

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Training manuals for the kick-off of e-learning trainings with CSO partners
- Virtual trainings on financial management for CSOs in Kano state
- Coaching and mentoring for emerging and developing CSOs in FCT, Kano, Sokoto and Lagos
- Finalise concept note and budget for a study on the impact of CSOs operations
- Continued support to CAC: Finalise scoping/feasibility assessment of CAC online filing system

### Find out more

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