

AGENTS FOR  
CITIZEN-DRIVEN  
TRANSFORMATION

## ACT Learning Series: Knowledge Share Fair 2023 *Nigerian CSOs: Translating Knowledge to Capacity and Impact*



February 2023

Funded by the  
European Union



Implemented by  
the British Council



# INTRODUCTION

## ACT Lesson Learning Series 2023: Knowledge Share Fair

The Agents for Citizen Drive Transformation (ACT) Programme Lesson Learning Series is a number of interactive events aimed at learning and knowledge sharing within the civil society sector. The dynamic events are designed around relevant themes impacting civil society and serve as a vehicle for civil society organisations (CSOs) and partners to promote their work, analyse issues, and share experiences.

At the events, diverse methods are used to bridge social, hierarchical, and technological gaps through various participatory formats. These range from presentations to conversations, open space gatherings, and CSOs sharing their stories of change and success stories.

Since 2019, the outcomes and lessons from ACT have been identified, captured, documented, and shared at different forums and platforms, and via a range of knowledge and communication products. These events bring together a collection of these products and partners to learn, experience and share opportunities with wider stakeholders including donors, private sectors, and government agencies.

### Nigerian CSOs: Translating Knowledge to Capacity and Impact

The ACT Programme hosted the first 'Knowledge Share Fair' and Lesson Learning Series on 16 February 2023 in Abuja. It brought together CSOs and stakeholders to exchange learnings and expertise on strengthening the capacity of CSOs in Nigeria. Participants were drawn from civil society groups, government agencies, development partners, the media, academia, the private sector, and others active in Nigeria's civil society sector.

The theme of the event was 'Nigerian CSOs: Translating Knowledge to Capacity and Impact'. The focus was on enhancing CSOs' capacity to act as more effective agents of sustainable development. It highlighted the results of ACT's four-year lifespan and focused on two key outcomes: (1) capacity strengthening of 200 chosen CSOs in ten states, and (2) promoting collaboration between CSOs and other stakeholders to create an inclusive regulatory environment for the industry.

Welcoming guests at the event, ACT Programme Manager, Dammy Babalola, highlighted that the event was an avenue for CSOs to see how the requests placed on them over the years are translated into knowledge. "So far, the ACT Programme has increased the ability of 202 CSOs to manage their operations, empowered over 2,800 staff in organisational growth, trained 690 civil society network leaders in leadership skills, and provided 86 grants to CSO partners. This has had a demonstrable positive influence on their communities." He also highlighted that the regulatory environment for CSOs has improved. Self-regulation mechanisms and platforms have been established, and the operational efficiency in regulatory agencies, such as the Corporate Affairs Commission and the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering, has been enhanced.

Jude Ilo, Senior Director, the Advocacy Centre for Civilians in Conflict at the Hague in the Netherlands, delivered a keynote speech. It focused on translating knowledge capacity, challenges, and prospects to improve CSO operations in Nigeria.

**"The biggest marker of success is how the work of CSOs improve the lives of Nigerians."**

Jude Ilo, Senior Director, the Advocacy Centre for Civilians in Conflict



Tolase Olatinwo, ACT Knowledge Management Lead. Source: ACT

She said, "The success of the ACT Programme must be found in the enhanced capacity and ability of CSOs to be sustainable, compliant to the laws, regulations, and effective in their programming. The biggest marker of success is how the work of CSOs improve the lives of Nigerians."

The event culminated with the launch of an e-learning platform: Civic Action Platform - a one-stop learning portal for CSOs, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders. It was born out of the need to have a viable, functional, and operative learning platform within the civil society space, as well as other learning tools for CSO capacity building for better operations across Nigeria.

**This bulletin summarises the actions carried out at the event.**



# SPOTLIGHT ON SESSIONS

## Launch of e-learning platform for CSOs

At the event, ACT launched a one-stop learning website for CSOs, researchers, and other stakeholders. It was developed in response to the demand for a sustainable, effective, and operational learning platform for Nigeria's civil society sector.

According to a needs assessment of the sector, CSOs in Nigeria are lacking the capacity required for effective operations and long-term sustainability.

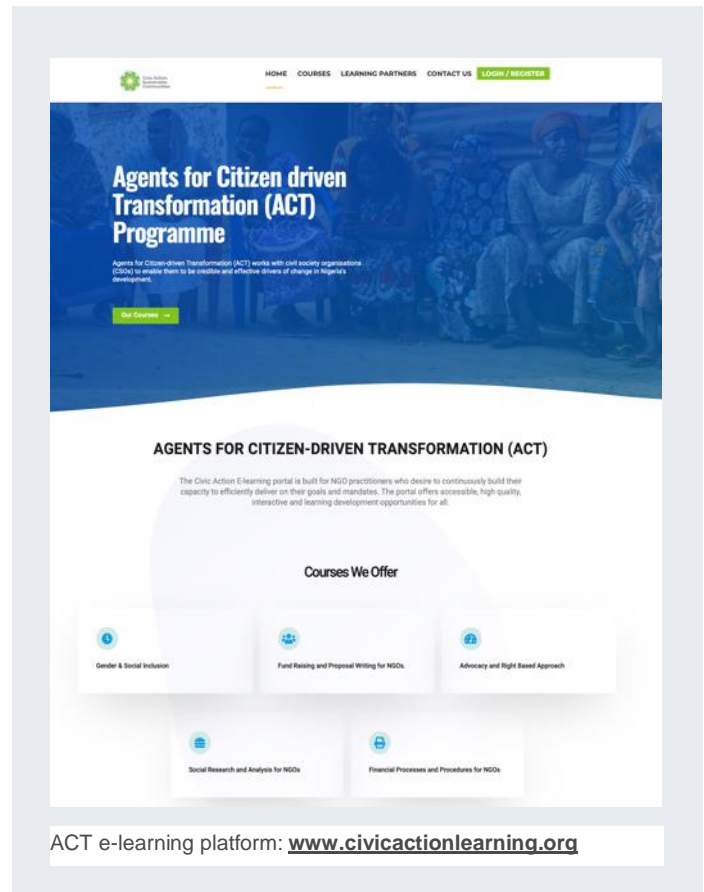
The aim is that the new learning platform will help CSOs function more effectively. CSOs will be empowered to increase their visibility, strengthen their ability to demand and lead change, and sustain their operations so they can function without limitations.

The platform enables CSOs to learn at their own pace, and set a new standard for the organisation at a low cost. Courses include financial management, procedures, and fundraising; proposal writing, social research and analysis; advocacy and a right-based approach; gender, and social inclusion.

Presentations were made at the Knowledge Share Fair, including demonstrations of the e-learning resources.

The platform is a collaborative effort between the ACT Programme and civil society groups who are experts in various fields and locations, to raise awareness, mobilise support for the activities of CSOs, and increase the ability of civil society groups to take sustainable action.

To learn more, visit [www.civicactionlearning.org](http://www.civicactionlearning.org)



## Keynote Addresses: Translating Knowledge into Capacity and Impact

Two keynote addresses set the scene for the event and focused on translating knowledge to capacity and impact. Both keynote address speakers also helped to set the agenda for future discourse on the issue of Nigerian CSOs translating their knowledge to impact.

Jude Ilo, Senior Director, the Advocacy Centre for Civilians in Conflict at the Hague in the Netherlands, delivered a keynote speech virtually. It focused on translating knowledge capacity, challenges, and prospects to improve CSO operations in Nigeria. She focused on bringing an international perspective to the subject matter.

The second keynote address was delivered by Oyebisi Oluseyi, Executive Director of the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNGO) who brought in the perspective from Nigeria. His speech was theme: *Translating Knowledge to Impact: Issues and Opportunities in CSO Regulatory Environment*. Oyebisi highlighted that the biggest yardstick for success for CSOs is their ability to effectively stand in the gap between the citizens and government, but that the current state of the nation whereby the rule of law is not duly adhered to including by the government itself, poses a serious challenge to CSOs attaining this level of success.

Nonetheless, he noted that CSOs can face the current challenges by deploying as much learnings as they can, including the learnings from the ACT programme; investing in intergenerational transfer of learning; and putting more emphasis on partnership and collaboration to maximise their knowledge and skills.

He noted that there are presently about 54 regulations guiding the operations of CSOs in Nigeria. Complying with these regulations poses a huge challenge to the CSOs. Non-compliance with these laws undermines CSOs results in issues such as lack of trust, accountability, and transparency. These issues in turn make it difficult for CSOs to effectively use their knowledge and skills to contribute to the desired change in the society.

CSOs should leverage their current learnings to drive the conversations on how regulations could support their work to become change agents., and this Knowledge Share Fair provides such an opportunity. CSOs should endeavour to have strong internal governance system / self-regulation and find a balance between statutory and self-regulations towards gaining public trust. Oyebisi advised that the easiest way to hold government accountable is to be compliant with regulatory procedures. CSOs should sustain the relationship that has been established between them and the regulators so that the CSOs could be supported as much as possible in their efforts at using their knowledge to impact their communities.



## Trails of Success: CSOs Share Stories of Change

The event provided CSOs and other stakeholders with an effective forum to discuss how they had used their expertise to benefit their communities. The Knowledge Share Fair part of the event was designed for civil society stakeholders present to interact, learn, and deepen their understanding of recent interventions and successful approaches for developing the capacities of CSOs in Nigeria.

It included the ACT Trails of Success Gallery Tour, CSO poster exhibition, a video documentary, knowledge product display and an opportunity for CSOs to network.

ACT CSO partners and capacity development providers (CDPs) - capacity building institutions working with ACT to develop the manuals on the e-learning portal - used a booth exposition to show how they had learned through training, coaching, mentoring, and other creative measures to overcome significant obstacles preventing them from being change agents. The interactive exercises gave the CSOs and CDPs a chance to discuss things they either did not know before partnering with ACT or things they knew but weren't able to do anything about until they did so. They also shared examples of how they had used their newly gained knowledge and abilities to support sustainable development in their local communities. The stories ranged from how CSOs successfully pushed for school funding to how they stopped adolescents from immigrating illegally.

Regulatory agencies - the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the National Pension Commission (PENCoM), and the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering (SCUML) - similarly discussed their encounters and experiences with CSOs and lessons learned. They discussed how their increased understanding of CSOs as a result of participating in the ACT course has aided them in better addressing or responding to CSO regulation in the nation as the primary government entities responsible for overseeing CSO operations in Nigeria.



The trails for success poster chronicling the work of ACT-supported CSOs. Source: ACT



CSOs talk through their work with posters and other knowledge products. Source: ACT



CSOs showcase their work. Source: ACT

## Knowledge Creation and Sharing

A panel from ACT was convened to discuss the programme's strategies for knowledge creation and sharing. Panellists included: National Programme Manager (Damilare Babalola), Component One Manager (Idem Udoekong), and CSO Advisor (Jan Knight). The panel was moderated by ACT's Knowledge Management Lead (Tolase Olatinwo).

Discussions focused on the following themes:

- Innovative approaches
  - Wide consultations across the six geopolitical zones to build consensus on the issues affecting CSOs in Nigeria and on possible solutions to the challenges.
  - Political Economy Analyses were carried out to provide rich information and sound understanding of the political and economic situation peculiar to each state the programme was targeting to intervene in.
  - Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA), a self-assessment process, was facilitated by ACT and undertaken by supported CSOs to show the level of growth and development of individual CSO. This led to the classification of the CSOs as emerging, developing and matured thereby enabling tailored response based on the needs of each CSO.
  - Action plans were co-developed with the CSO partners to address their challenges and meet their needs. These plans led to the provision of tailored training, coaching and mentoring sessions for the CSOs across the 10 states, which in turn led to knowledge creation and sharing among the CSOs and other stakeholders.
  - ACT has been facilitating structures for dialogue between regulators, lawmakers and the CSOs, and providing platforms for CSOs to drive the process of legislative engagements on bills regulating CSOs in Nigeria.
- Sustainability through involvement of capacity development providers (CDPs) and Peer Learning Platforms:
  - Ensuring CSO partners are represented by senior staff and thematic / technical staff for every training area and encouraging step-down trainings has helped to address staff attrition and loss of institutional memory, which are critical to sustainability.
- Improvement in the CSO regulatory environment:
  - ACT has been facilitating structures for dialogue between regulators, lawmakers and the CSOs, and providing platforms for CSOs to drive the process of legislative engagements on bills regulating CSOs in Nigeria.
- Mainstreaming gender and social inclusion:
  - Capacity of ACT CSO partners was built in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion (G&SI) in their internal structure and programming, who in turn have been reaching the marginalised groups e.g., women and youth, people with disability.



Panel of representatives from the ACT Programme. Source: ACT



Damilare Babalola, ACT National Programme Manager. Source: ACT

## MEDIA

### Media Corner



[EU, British Council Call Collaboration to Create Enabling Laws and Increase Compliance](#)

[Why CSOs, govt must collaborate — EU, British Council](#)

[CSOs: Why FG needs to sensitise non-profit organisations on relevant regulations](#)

[British Council Partners with CSOs for Sustainable Development](#)

# FEEDBACK

## Highlights from Participant feedback

- The knowledge share fair was a useful way for CSOs and other stakeholders to share how they have translated their knowledge into impact in their communities. The CSOs were able to use the posters and other materials to capture their learnings as well as the outcomes and impact of such learnings. Many participants said they found the share fair an interactive and constructive way to engage with stakeholders. Some participants, especially from outside of the 10 states where ACT is intervening, said they have learned lessons that they can go back to their organisations or states to apply.
- Besides the knowledge sharing that the share fair afforded participants, it also provided ACT, the CSOs and CDPs good visibility as they were able to showcase the results and impact of their work and efforts. Participants commended the ACT programme and partners for the many stories of change shared during the event. Many CSOs felt they were able to raise their profile as civil society organisations through their participation in the event.
- Some participants noted that considering the ways the ACT CSOs were able to translate their knowledge into capacity and impact, the emerging or developing CSOs are bound to become matured CSOs soon. Some even added that the matured CSOs which are presently sub-grantees have the potentials to become implementing partners if they continue to leverage their knowledge the way they have demonstrated it during the event.
- However, some participants believed the absence of donor organisations at the share fair denied the CSOs an opportunity to be properly recognised or positioned to receive future grants / support. They suggested that for future events, donor agencies should be well represented so they can appreciate first-hand how CSOs are making significant difference and impact in the society.
- Virtually all participants noted that the knowledge share fair provided them opportunity to network with other stakeholders in the civil society space and identify areas of collaboration and partnership in the future.

**“Since 2017, we’ve had interest in regulating the CSO sector. It is both a threat and an opportunity to ensure CSOs have an enabling environment for the good work we do across communities.”**

Oyebisi B. Oluseyi, Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs

## CONCLUSION

With the successful debut of the Knowledge Sharing event, ACT will now make it a quarterly initiative going forward. The event will serve as a platform to highlight major results, outcomes or impact of the programme.

**“This event is about taking the work of ACT over the last four years and putting it out there for CSOs to use and adopt.”**

Wynyfred Achu Egbuson, Programme Manager, European Union, CSOs & Youth



Participants at the concluding session of the Knowledge Share Fair. Source: ACT



Participants at the Knowledge Share Fair. Source: ACT