

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.

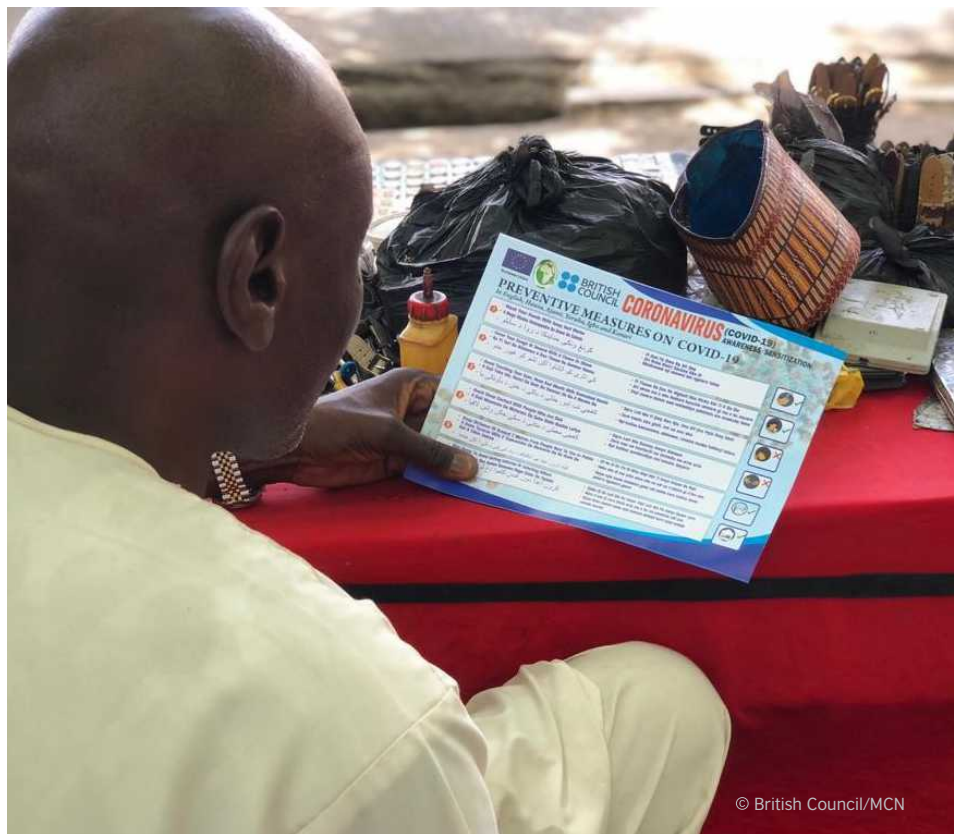
ACT will be implemented in 10 states, selected across the six geo-political zones in the country. Implementation is being rolled out in phases in selected states. We are currently working in Adamawa, Edo, FCT, Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and Sokoto.

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

CSOs' EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19:

SHARING RELIABLE INFORMATION AND INCREASING AWARENESS



© British Council/MCN

WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

This case study illustrates the greater impact that CSOs can have when they join together as a coalition to coordinate and implement an effective advocacy campaign. The change brought about by this work has the potential to positively influence the behaviour of Nigerian citizens in relation to COVID-19.

Funded by the
European Union



Implemented by
the British Council



INTRODUCTION

As one of the African countries most affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Nigeria has faced significant economic and health impacts.

At the onset of the pandemic, the government initiated a lockdown and movement restrictions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This first lockdown began on 30 March 2020 in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Lagos and Ogun states. This was followed by a nationwide lockdown in

August 2020 for four weeks. Since then, movement restrictions have been implemented nationwide and continue at the time of writing (November 2020).

The pandemic has triggered a slowdown in economic activity. With the majority of Nigerians working in the informal sector, many people risk losing their jobs, particularly if movement restrictions continue. The health sector has also been impacted with limited resources and infrastructure to cope with the new demands of the virus. With an estimated population of 200 million, curtailing a further outbreak and associated impacts in Nigeria is crucial.

BACKGROUND

Despite government efforts, the country had difficulties imposing the restrictions, talking about a disease nobody knew, while many of the people testing positive were asymptomatic. Many citizens were unaware of how serious COVID-19 disease was, and despite sensitization messages on the pandemic, some did not believe that COVID-19 was real. As a result, many people were not adhering to public health guidance on physical distancing, hand washing, and wearing of masks.

“

In Nigeria, we are a people's country; we talk, we laugh, we joke, we dance, we love music, sports, and all those things that bring people together. And all of a sudden, we couldn't do any of those things. It was hard to understand,” said Tola Ahmed, community member, Lagos. ”

Furthermore, there was stigmatization of people with COVID-19, which led to low testing rates, underreporting of deaths and the disease, and alienation of those who have contracted the virus.

APPROACH

To combat these challenges, CSOs mobilised quickly to play a role in the prevention and spread of COVID-19. With ACT support, CSOs came together in coalitions to join efforts around the issue of COVID-19 and embark on a mass coordinated advocacy campaign in FCT, Lagos, Kano and Sokoto states. The aim was to share reliable COVID-19 information and raise awareness of preventive measures and guidelines.

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 areas were identified as crucial if CSO advocacy efforts were to add value during the pandemic. These included: advocacy in emergencies and health related issues; gender and social inclusion; communication and media engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. ACT then delivered a series of virtual training sessions for over 60 CSOs to strengthen their skills these areas.

The CSO coalitions were divided into various 'action committees' responsible for: messaging, translation, production, distribution and dissemination. Due to social distancing and movement restrictions, the coalitions coordinated virtually via Zoom and WhatsApp on the development of posters, flyers, videos, radio talk shows and jingles in English and local



Animation produced by CSOs © British Council/ACT

languages (Hausa, Gbagyi, Fulani, Yoruba and Pidgin language) that were then disseminated across the four states. ACT provided small grants to the coalitions and technical assistance to implement the advocacy campaign.

RESULTS

Reliable information on COVID-19

The advocacy campaign firstly explained to Nigerians that COVID-19 was a reality and how to prevent the spread of the virus. The communication also highlighted why it was important to cooperate with public health guidance – like hand washing, wearing masks, physical distancing - and government restrictions. CSOs connected with key influencers – the media, community and religious leaders, as well as market women leaders and youth leaders - to seek their support to cascade information and ensure that all community members were aware of the virus, explain the restrictions, and adopt prevention measures.

“

The first information we delivered to people is that the Coronavirus is a reality,” said Sarkin Gagi, traditional leader, Sokoto. “Some believe that there is nothing like corona, but we, the leaders, believe there is. We told them it is a disease now all over the world and it can be transferred to another person through contact. We also shared how our families are abiding by public health guidance to lead by example. So we convinced our people to listen and better understand that the virus was real and in Nigeria. ”



CSOs participate in a radio talk show in Sokoto © British Council/ACT

Increased public awareness on COVID-19 prevention and guidelines

Community members listened. Over 67% of the population in the four targeted states were reached by the mass awareness campaign.¹ Examples of early results are already showing a change in behaviour by Nigerians.

“

I was in the local market buying bread. A woman approached me with a flyer and encouraged me to follow the 'do's and don'ts' to keep me safe from corona. It said that washing hands is the primary way to reduce the COVID-19 infection. I took the flyer home and shared it with my family. My dad went out that same day and bought a new water bucket and soap for the family home. We started washing our hands several times a day to protect us from the virus,” said Tanimu Adamu, Gwarzo community, Kano. ”

New and innovative advocacy tools were also developed to expand spaces for dialogue and conversation, and reach mass audiences, in a time when movements and social interaction were restricted. Short animation videos were produced in English and local languages (Pidgin and Hausa). One video featured a religious leader sharing information about the virus with a group of citizens. The second featured two woman discussing the virus and how to protect their families.

The videos were disseminated on social media – firstly by the CSOs from across the coalitions, and then more widely as the videos went viral with community members. The animations were also shared widely on WhatsApp platforms. With over 80% of Nigerians owning a mobile phone, this was a powerful way to reach large numbers.² The videos resonated particularly well amongst youth.

“

I received a WhatsApp message from my friend with a video. An Imam was talking about the Coronavirus. I was surprised because I didn't really think the virus was something that we had to worry about in Nigeria,” said Mal Ibrahim Hashim, Kano. “I watched the video several times and learned so much about the virus and what I can do for myself, family and friends to ensure that we are careful and don't get the COVID-19. I forwarded the video to all the contacts in my phone. ”

1. Source: ACT, Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 2020.
2. Source: Nigeria Communications Commission, 2020.

A conscious effort was made to reach vulnerable groups, particularly women and people with disabilities – who account for approximately 25 million³ people in Nigeria and are often left behind in emergencies. CSOs partnered with the media to increase awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly at the community level. Radio talk shows involved members of the disability community and covered the unique impacts of the virus. Social media was used in innovative ways to reach the deaf community with signed language video messages on Facebook, which recorded over 40K views.⁴

“

I had heard a little about the government restrictions, but I didn't really understand them. It wasn't until I heard a program on the radio explaining the restrictions and why they were important to follow,” said Blessing Ujunwa, FCT. “I learned that we should wear masks, not gather in big groups, and keep distance from each other. For a blind person like myself, this was important to hear. ”

LESSONS LEARNED

Working as a coalition strengthened CSOs' response.

As a coalition, CSOs had strength in numbers. With ACT support, there was increased capacity across the CSOs to carry out advocacy, sensitization activities and media engagement. The outreach had a stronger impact and reach as a collective than it would have had if the individual CSOs had implemented their own separate campaigns.

In times of crisis, CSOs adopted new ways of working.

CSOs relied on technology to coordinate their efforts, due to movement and physical distancing restrictions. ACT-supported trainings were delivered via Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and WhatsApp played a key role in the

coordination of the outreach campaign. Animation and other new tools played an important role in helping citizens and hard to reach groups better understand COVID-19 and prevention measures. Whilst the messaging and outreach materials were developed across the coalitions, the group then relied on coordinated dissemination via the individual CSO social media accounts and networks. Many of these approaches were new ways of working for CSOs. Their new experiences and skills will be built on and used post-COVID-19.

“

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,” said Ibrahim Nuhu, Centre for Information Technology and Development. ”



© World Bank/Ousmane Traore

3. Source: World Health Organization, World Disability Report, 2011.

4. Source: ACT, Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 2020.

Find out more

Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT)

ACT@ng.britishcouncil.org

www.justice-security.ng