

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 is implemented in 10 states selected across the six geo-political zones: Adamawa, Borno, Edo, Enugu, FCT, Kano, Lagos, Plateau, 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

SCALING UP ADVOCACY FOR EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE IN SOKOTO



WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

The case study highlights the ACT programme's capacity development support to civil society to promote gender mainstreaming approaches and processes in its operations and efforts to strengthen its role as advocates of inclusive and integrative agriculture. It focuses on the efforts of the Coalition of Women Farmers Association (COWFA), an ACT supported civil society network in Sokoto state. The coalition — comprised of 95 per cent women farmers — engages with relevant stakeholders to explore new opportunities to bolster inclusive livelihoods to contribute to the state's agriculture sector. The civil society organisations (CSOs) involved hope to guide and inspire continued and enhanced advocacy to influence policies that impact small-scale women producers, including those with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

Nigerian women play a key role in agriculture — women small-holder farmers constitute 70-80 per cent of the agricultural labour force¹. Yet, many of these farmers are overlooked by officials overseeing agricultural policies. The issue is exacerbated by unequal decision-making power as well as differences in access to land and control over agricultural productive resources. Additionally, many agri-development programmes struggle to adequately reach people with disabilities. This is a missed opportunity to improve food security and production, create income, and contribute to sustainable development.

To address the issue, members of COWFA developed and adapted an advocacy strategy based on learnings from ACT-supported trainings. The aim was to draw the government's attention not only to the

underrepresentation of marginalised groups in the agribusiness value chain, but also to the unequal access of procurement and the distribution of farm inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds.

Through this work, the engagement with key officials has positioned COWFA as a key player in state-level decision making in the agriculture sector, especially with respect to gender and disability related issues.

Evidence demonstrates that with strengthened capacity to drive targeted advocacy, CSOs have the potential to demand for more gender accountability in the agricultural sector and ensure that women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) are given the opportunity to maximise their contributions to the agricultural sector. Ultimately, agricultural growth is enhanced if both women and men are enabled to participate fully as economic actors.



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APPROACH

Training

In line with its commitment to invest in CSOs and strengthen their capacity as drivers of change, ACT designed a series of trainings to improve the CSOs internal and external systems in key areas, such as advocacy and mainstreaming gender and social inclusion (G&SI). In 2021, COWFA participated in one of the ACT tailored strategy development, coaching, mentoring and G&SI sessions to provide the organisation with knowledge of contemporary methodologies and an evidence-based approaches to guide advocacy strategies.

Advocacy

Following the training, COWFA re-designed its advocacy plan to be more informed and evidence-based, with strategies outlined to increase engagement with state-level stakeholders for greater women and PWDs' participation. In October 2021, COWFA conducted several advocacy visits to government agencies, including the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Office of the Deputy Governor of Sokoto State, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Secretary to the State Government, and the Chief of Staff to the Governor of Sokoto State. On those visits, the organisation made an urgent call to address the gender disparity in agriculture and barriers that limit women's access to farm inputs.

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/africa-myths-and-facts/publication/women-agriculture-and-work-in-africa>

Prior to the ACT training on how to conduct advocacy, COWFA was never involved in the fertiliser distribution in the state, and a lot of women were deprived of the benefits of good harvest from their farming efforts. With the advocacy carried out by COWFA to the Ministry of Agriculture, the organisation secured the buy-in of some officials, which resulted in the CSO's involvement for the first time in the distribution of fertilizers to women and network of women farmers in Sokoto state.

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Before the engagement with ACT, we did not know how to conduct advocacy. Now, we have conducted several successful campaigns to government. We are planning to advocate to private organisations in Sokoto and other neighbouring states. ”

Hafsat Dange, COWFA

RESULTS

The strategic shifts made by COWFA have influenced the government to appoint female members of the network, as well as members of the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), to the Sokoto State 2021-22 Fertilizer Distribution Committee.

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The ease of fertilizer supply reaching our women all over the state is attributed to the training received from ACT. We engaged women groups to help us with door-to-door fertilizer distribution to women farmers in our communities. ”

Maiakwai S. Tudu, Director Finance and Supply, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Members of COWFA have become actively involved in community awareness campaigns targeted at rural women farmers and the coordination of fair systems of fertilizer procurement and distribution in 23 distribution centres across 23 local government areas (LGAs) in the state. The items are now more evenly distributed reaching more women and communities that were initially isolated.

With the success recorded, COWFA has conducted campaigns that are related to health and nutrition in the Maruda LGA. Women farmers were trained on nutrition and how to make healthy meals that support children's health, breast feeding mothers, and pregnant mothers with their farm produce. This

significantly improves women's positions in the state, increases the levels of the fertilizer value chain, and ensures that women are given equitable access to fertilizer, seeds, and lighter and more modern equipment to boost production and contribute to economic development.

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We thank COWFA for their efforts to ensure that women are part of the state fertilizer distribution committee. ”

Professor Aminu Abubakar, Hon. Commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources

LESSONS LEARNED

COWFA has made great strides in ensuring genuine engagement of traditionally marginalised groups and in diversifying their membership.

Women and children in Sokoto now have access to basic needs to improve their living conditions, especially health and livelihoods, through active engagement with stakeholders, government and community members using advocacy and community mobilisation. This has led to the government's renewed commitment to not only bridge the gender gap in the agriculture sector, but also to fast-track the establishment of women and disability-friendly programmes and activities aimed at mainstreaming gender and social inclusion into agricultural activities in collaboration with relevant organisations.

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I count myself and my community among the lucky ones because COWFA has empowered us. We can now boast of our own income from the farm produce. ”

Hadiza Sani, farmer, Sokoto

With improved capacity to advocate for reforms, COWFA has also enhanced its legitimacy as a valuable partner for government officials.

This work has demonstrated COWFA's knowledge of gender-based policies in agriculture to support more informed decision making. As a result, COWFA has the potential to positively influence further service delivery for its members, other women, and PWDs.

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The capacity building support from the ACT programme has brought us to the front line of farming activities in the state. ”

Munirat Garba, Executive Director, COWFA

For sustainability, COWFA has also developed partnerships with various stakeholders to broaden public awareness on key issues and to increase government accountability.

The early engagement with local media right from the start of the COWFA's project implementation and, the subsequent partnership agreement with selected media outlets has helped the organisation to interact and carry out investigative work focused on fertilizer distribution. Outcome of the media reports has helped to foster accountability among the government and other policymakers in Sokoto State.

As a more credible source, COWFA has also explored opportunities to shift its advocacy strategy to be more data driven for monitoring government's investments in inclusive programmes and gaining greater buy-in from government officials at the national level.

Although women's representation in civil society interventions continue to increase, the representation of youth and women with disabilities, who are just as active, can be improved.

This could include lobbying for more disability representation on advisory committees, empowerment opportunities to support disability inclusion in agriculture by creating a more accessible resources, capacity building, access to disability-friendly tools and equipment, and offering farmers with disabilities paths to financial inclusion.



Find out more

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ACT@ng.britishcouncil.org

www.justice-security.ng