

AGENTS FOR CITIZEN-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION

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

Our work focuses on the following areas:

- Strengthening the system of civil society organisations, networks, 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.

We work with CSOs in 10 states selected across the six geopolitical zones in the country: Adamawa, Borno, Edo, Enugu, the federal capital territory (FCT), Kano, Lagos, Plateau, Rivers and Sokoto. We also focus on providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue for an improved, effective, and inclusive regulatory environment for the operation of the CSO in Nigeria. This work is implemented across the 36 states and the FCT.

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



Participants at the M&E training for CSOs in Plateau state.
Source: ACT

Funded by the European Union

Implemented by the British Council



KEY ACTIVITIES

This newsletter highlights the key activities undertaken by the programme in August to October 2021.

Summary of key activities include:

CSO system strengthening:

- Kano state CSOs learn how to fundraise effectively
- Peer learning platform launched for CSOs in Rivers state
- JDPCI strengthens M&E and secures grant from Expertise France
- Strengthening CSO-media collaboration

CSO regulatory environment:

- CSOs and FIRS engage on tax responsibilities and compliance

CSO spotlight:

- CLICE Foundation

CSO SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

Kano state CSOs learn how to fundraise effectively

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme organised a workshop for civil society organisation (CSO) partners in Kano on fundraising and resource mobilisation. The workshop was held from 7-9 April 2021 and was attended by 22 CSOs.

Participants learned how to prepare and respond to calls for proposals, develop concept notes, write budgets, and build/sustain donor relations.

During the workshop, CSOs highlighted the challenges faced when preparing and submitting comprehensive proposals, including poor quality of writing, late submissions and not adhering to guidelines for content, format, and/or length. These challenges were highlighted as some reasons why grant proposals often are rejected.

ACT CSO partner, the Centre for Advocacy in Gender and Social Inclusion (CAGSI), shared that the organisation was recently unsuccessful with ten proposals. After the workshop, CAGSI reported that the new skills helped them package a proposal that was successful in securing a small-scale grant from Search for Common Ground to fund a project on COVID-19 response.

CAGSI also joined other CSOs (as a cluster) to apply for a USAID-SCALE grant on WASH and electoral reforms. The proposal is now in the final stage of the application review and pre-award phase. CAGSI works in Kano state to empower socially excluded groups (i.e. people with disabilities, women and adolescent girls).

“ACT support opened doors of development opportunities for us as an organisation. We can serve more citizens better by applying for more grants and engaging with donors in the process.”

Maryam Usman, Executive Director, CAGSI

Peer learning platform launched for CSOs in Rivers state

On 8 September 2021, the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme launched a peer learning platform for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Rivers state. The launch was held in Port Harcourt and attended by 35 representatives from 19 CSOs, including networks, coalitions, and community-based organisations.

Participants were introduced to two concepts of peer learning: (1) the Benchmarking Club – a platform for likeminded CSOs to discuss their strengths in different areas, share best practices and, through mutual support, seek to increase their levels of performance or set benchmarks in the sector; and (2) the Action Learning Set – a participatory platform to support members in finding practical ways to address organisational challenges and to support learning and development. The process encourages insightful questioning to help the member decide what actions to take. The participants were guided through a mock session of both concepts.

At the launch event, four peer learning groups were formed, and each group developed a roadmap for subsequent engagements. Excited by the growth opportunities offered by the platform, the participants acknowledged the uniqueness of this capacity development support, as it offers greater synergy amongst CSOs for sustainable impact.

The initiative augments ACT’s capacity strengthening support for CSOs. With participatory trainings for CSOs, ACT understands that expertise exists within the CSO sector and establishing a standard peer-to-peer learning platform for experience sharing will lead to long-term change for sustainable development.



Participants at the M&E training in Edo state. Source: ACT

The Justice Development Peace and Caritas Initiative strengthens M&E and secures grant

The Justice Development Peace and Caritas Initiative (JDPCI) – an ACT CSO partner – is putting learnings into practice. The CSO recently participated in a capacity strengthening workshop in Edo state organised by the ACT programme. The workshop focused on developing and institutionalising monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices.

Participants were trained in conducting effective performance monitoring and generating evidence that can be used for improved service delivery, accountability, as well as good governance.

Learnings from the training helped JDPCI to review its M&E approach and clearly define performance indicators and tools.

JDPCI applied the new M&E principles to a grants proposal submitted to Expertise France and were successfully awarded a grant for 116, 000 EUR. The project will be implemented over 16 months and will focus on countering trafficking through sensitisation, advocacy and dialogue in 25 communities across 5 LGAs in Edo state. The initiative will target vulnerable groups, including victims of trafficking, potential migrants vulnerable to trafficking, young persons in secondary school, community leaders, and caregivers of vulnerable young persons.

JDPCI also reviewed its internal governance and expanded its M&E team to include a new M&E Officer to coordinate and implement the M&E plan for the project.

JDPCI benefited from the ACT workshop that was organised in Enugu state on 15-16 September and attended by 37 CSOs. A similar workshop was held on 21-24 September in Plateau state with 10 CSOs in attendance.

It is ACT’s aim that these CSOs will continue to adapt learnings from ACT capacity strengthening initiatives and report back on positive success stories, similar to JDPCI.

“The M&E training has set us on the right path to address key social challenges. The knowledge gained has helped us to develop a proposal that won us a grant from EXPERTISE France.”

Michael Iyoriobhe, Programme Manager, JDPCI

Strengthening CSO-media collaboration

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme commenced a series of workshops for selected journalists and CSOs across target states. The workshops were themed: “Harnessing media power to strengthen development interventions.” The aim is to support media to enhance the credibility and role of CSOs as drivers of change for sustainable development in Nigeria.

The first workshop was held on 24-25 August in Abuja. It brought together the first batch of journalists representing leading national media organisations and stations, including News Agency of Nigeria, AIT, NTA, Leadership Newspapers, Nigeria Info, as well as other state-level media. CSO representatives from the Kano, Sokoto and Lagos were also in attendance.

The training helped journalists to better understand the reporting of CSOs, the regulatory environment in Nigeria, challenges and gaps in media-CSO relations. A constructive dialogue focused on how to improve CSO-media collaboration.

The sessions were highly participatory and involved experience sharing, panel discussions and syndicate group sessions on rebuilding the narratives of CSOs in media reports for advocacy, awareness, and behaviour change. Participants also developed individual and state action plans to strengthen CSO-media partnerships.

From 12-13 October, ACT conducted a training for the second batch of journalists and CSOs from Adamawa, Rivers and Edo states. Plans are underway to conduct the final training for stakeholders in Enugu, Plateau and Borno states in the coming months.

“The media can support CSOs to deliver messages to their beneficiaries. We can also help CSOs find solutions to different challenges by holding duty bearers accountable.”

Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director, International Press Centre



Participants at the CSO-media relations workshop in Abuja. Source: ACT

CSO REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

CSOs and FIRS engage on tax responsibilities and compliance

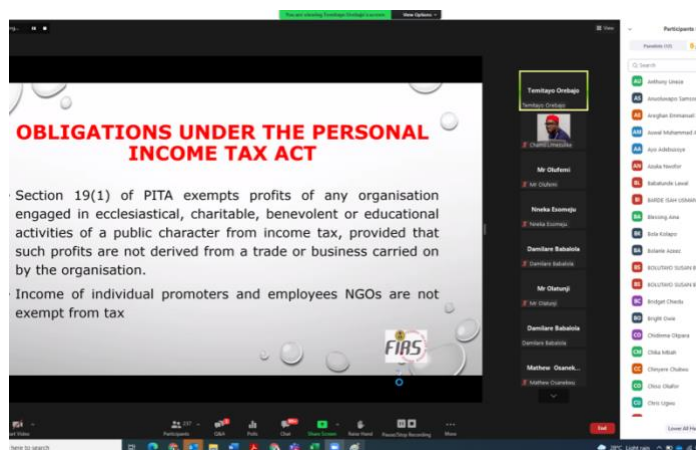
On 16 September 2021, the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme, in collaboration with the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), organised a webinar themed: “Q&A on CSOs’ tax responsibilities and compliance.” The aim was to increase the understanding and knowledge of tax responsibilities, improve compliance and enhance the engagement between civil society and FIRS. The virtual event brought together 371 participants including CSOs, MDAs, donors, the media and others.

CSOs are obligated to operate within various legal and regulatory frameworks, including the companies income tax act; the companies allied and matters act; the money laundering act; and pension laws. However, these regulations are complex for many CSOs. For example, some CSOs have shared that they do not understand the types of returns. And although CSOs are tax exempt, they are required to submit corporate income tax returns, as well as PAYE tax, withholding tax and VAT annually. Due to this confusion, CSOs sometimes fail to comply with these guidelines and default on payment.

For ACT, the event served as an opportunity to work collectively to challenge and enhance the regulatory environment for civil society actors so they can exercise their rights fully and without unnecessary or arbitrary restrictions.

“This collaboration will increase CSO compliance. CSOs are now expected to understand the overview of taxation, the incentives available to CSOs and general tax obligations.”

Dick Irri, Coordinating Director, Compliance Support Group, FIRS



Webinar on CSO tax responsibilities and compliance. Source: ACT

CSO SPOTLIGHT: CLICE FOUNDATION



The Comfort Literacy Intervention & Capacity Enhancement (CLICE) Foundation is a non-profit organisation that operates in Rivers state.

CLICE provides social development interventions that focus on inclusive education, livelihood enhancement for low-income households, economic empowerment, capacity development and system strengthening for self-reliance, and sustainable development of Africa.

Since July 2020, CLICE has been an ACT CSO partner. The organisation has benefited from a series of capacity strengthening activities: project management, gender & social inclusion, and resource mobilisation. CLICE is putting some of the learnings from these trainings into practice. New ways of working are starting to benefit the organisation.

ACT asked the Executive Director of CLICE, Comfort Onyaga, how ACT support has helped to strengthen capacity within the organisation.

“Before our partnership with the ACT programme, we faced some challenges with our organisational policies. Through the trainings, we have learned how to create a sound financial policy, which has enabled us to better manage our day-to-day operations. Our focus on gender and social inclusion has made us more responsive to the needs of women, girls and persons with disability. We even created a new role for a gender and social inclusion assistant to help us deliver on this mission. And finally, with a clear roadmap for fundraising, we hope to secure more grants to make our activities more sustainable and expand our work in different areas.”

For more information: www.clicefoundation.org



CLICE staff in the field. Source: CLICE Foundation

FACTS & FIGURES:

(May 2019-
October 2021)

Number of CSOs
benefiting from
capacity
strengthening

164

Number of trainings
delivered

52

States covered by
ACT

10

OTHER ACTIVITIES COMPLETED WITHIN THIS PERIOD

- Social research and analysis training for CSOs in Kano
- Collective bargaining training for CSOs in Lagos and Plateau
- Ongoing coaching support on finance and strategy for CSOs in Plateau state
- Continued coaching and mentoring for emerging and developing CSOs in FCT, Lagos, Kano, Edo, Rivers, Sokoto, Enugu, Borno, and Adamawa
- Continued support to the Centre for Democracy and Development on a grant to conduct research on the impact of civil society operations in Nigeria
- Continued support to the Federal Inland Revenues Service, the Pension Commission and the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundry on improving CSO compliance to their regulations

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Political and economic analysis training
- Peer learning meeting with CSOs in the FCT
- Human resources training for CSOs in the FCT
- Advocacy and rights-based strategy training CSOs in Enugu
- Continued coaching and mentoring for emerging and developing CSOs in FCT, Lagos, Kano, Edo, Rivers, Sokoto, Enugu, Borno, and Adamawa
- National stakeholder consultative meeting on CSO self-regulation
- Continued support to the Centre for Democracy and Development on a grant to conduct research on the impact of civil society operations in Nigeria
- Continued support to the Federal Inland Revenues Service, the Pension Commission and the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundry on improving CSO compliance to their regulations

Find out more

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