

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 will be implemented nationwide. Pilot activities have already commenced in Lagos, Kano and FCT. Implementation will be 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.



High table at the ACT launch event (left to right): Bob Arnot (British Council), Ketil Karlsen (European Union) and Hafsat Mustafa (ACT). Source: ACT

KEY ACTIVITIES

This newsletter highlights the key activities undertaken by the programme in July 2019 to January 2020.

Summary of key activities include:

Cross-cutting:

- Launch of the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation programme
- Inauguration of Technical Advisory Committee

CSO system strengthening:

- Political economy analysis of the CSO operational context in the North West and South East
- Organisational capacity assessment of selected CSOs in FCT, Lagos and Kano

CSO regulatory environment:

- ACT collaborates with the network of CSOs to improve the regulatory environment

CROSS-CUTTING

The European Union and the British Council launch the ACT programme

The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) Programme was officially launched on 24 September 2019 in Abuja. The overall objective of the programme is to contribute to more inclusive, effective, accountable and gender responsive development in Nigeria.

Stakeholders from across the civil society sector attended the launch event, including: development partners (EU, British Council USAID), international NGOs (Action Aid, OSIWA, MacArthur Foundation, OXFAM), national and subnational civil society organisations (CSOs), the media, government ministries and agencies (Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning), amongst others.

‘Despite the gains, vibrancy and remarkable efforts of CSOs, there are still gaps in the capacity of CSOs in Nigeria.’

Ketil Karlsen, EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS

Funded by the European Union

Implemented by the British Council



‘The EU-ACT Programme is in line with the Cotonou Agreement. The programme recognises the contributions of non-state actors in the development process of Nigeria.’

Kurt Cornelis, EU Head of Development Cooperation

‘Post-programme sustainability is planned. ACT will support academic and capacity development organisations in Nigeria so that they support CSOs through training and mentoring after the programme has ended.’

Bob Arnot, British Council, Portfolio Lead, Sub-Saharan Africa



A cross section of participants at the ACT launch event.
Source: ACT



Civil society representative speaking at the ACT launch event.
Source: ACT

Technical Advisory Committee inaugurated

The Agent's for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme inaugurated a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which is the highest governing body of the programme. The eight-member committee were inaugurated in January 2020 in Abuja. Members include representatives from the Ministry of Budget and National Planning, the Corporate Affairs Commission, the European Union, the British Council, civil society, EU member states and academia (one representative from each).

ACT's National Programme Manager, Damilare Babalola, said in his presentation that because ACT is a relationship between the EU and the Nigerian government, the advisory committee is composed of diverse actors and ACT is expected to draw from the experience of the members.

Damilare added that ACT is a learning and development programme, which hopes to inject innovation and experience from the members and to leverage on their local and contextual developments experience.

He said that membership of the committee is structured in a simple way so that decisions are made swiftly, and meetings can easily be convened. While expressing appreciation to the members, he urged them to bring their wealth of experience in performing their duties.

In his remarks, the EU Programme Manager for ACT, John Onyeukwu, said that unlike other sectors where people acquire certifications and degrees, the civil society sector has no such opportunity. The people that work in civil society come from different backgrounds and learn about the operations and dynamics of the sector through workshops and short courses. This is why the EU is supporting and empowering people working in the civil society sector.

Committee members will support and ensure that the objectives of ACT are met and encourage synergies with the activities of government.

‘As much as the government and civil society work together, it is also important to note that there are responsibilities.’

Elizabeth Egharevba, TAC Co-Chairman



Select members of ACT's Technical Advisory Committee.
Source: ACT

CSO SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

Understanding the operational context for civil society organisations in Nigeria

Globally, civil society organisations (CSOs) are recognised as important non-state agents of development. They are saddled with multi-faceted responsibilities of providing social welfare, economic empowerment, humanitarian services, political participation, enabling effective democratic governance, and the rule of law.

In Nigeria, CSOs operate under weak and complex regulations and this has hindered their effectiveness and limited their potential.

To increase the understanding of the context in which civil society organisations operate and to better understand the challenges, the ACT programme conducted a political economy analysis (PEA) with selected CSOs, community-based organisations, and faith-based organisations. Findings from the PEA are expected to inform the design and implementation of the programme support for CSOs over the next four years.

Additional PEAs will be conducted across other states in Nigeria, including the South-East and North-Central.

‘There is limited understanding of the complementary roles that NGOs could play with government.’

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women Affairs, Sokoto state

‘The first set of rights-defending CSOs were mainly domiciled in the South-West. After the annulment of the June 12 election, pro-democracy solidarity groups began to emerge across Nigeria.’

Dr Atiku Nuhu Koko, Former Executive Director, Shehu Shagari Foundation, Sokoto

Over sixty CSOs assessed for capacity system strengthening

A key objective of the Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) Programme is to support the strengthening of CSO capacity through innovative approaches. This includes peer learning and tailor-made support as opposed to a “one size fits all” approach.

The programme commenced this work by conducting an organisational capacity and system assessment (OCA) for potential civil society partners, including NGOs, CBOs, networks, and coalitions. The initiative was primarily a self-reflection exercise for each organisation. The aim was to identify and categorise the strengths and weakness of individual CSOs, networks and coalitions.

From July to February 2020, over 60 CSOs were assessed in Lagos, Kano and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. These locations will form the three pilot states for the implementation of the programme, which will then be rolled out in phases to other regions.



Cross section of participants at the capacity assessment exercise in Kano. Source: ACT

‘This is unique for us – it has not only revealed our strengths and setbacks as an organisation, but also proffered innovative and goal-oriented solutions to the gaps highlighted during the process.’

Mandate Health Empowerment Initiative

‘The exercise has helped us to identify areas of strength and weakness in our capacity. It has supported us to amend certain aspects of our human resource management, policy and leadership structure.’

Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism

‘The reflection process is essential to our growth and development. It has also broadened our horizon towards global best practices.’

International Society of Media in Public Health

‘The reflection process was highly productive and useful in identifying gaps and opportunities for us to strengthen our organisational capacity.’

CLEEN Foundation

ACT meets EU programme implementers in Abuja

The Agents for Citizen Driven Transformation (ACT) Programme met with CSOs directly implementing EU programmes to share information about ACT programme intervention.

Presentations at the meeting were focused on the ACT CSO engagement strategy, which highlighted the technique the programme will adopt in the engagement with CSOs, networks and coalitions. Other presentations highlighted ACT's expectations of support from the CSOs implementers of the EU programmes.

The EU representatives spoke about the significance of CSOs in the sustainable development of Nigeria and strengthening their capacity to enable them to perform optimally. According to the EU delegation, part of the purpose of the meeting was to make clear the programme approach, and the role that ACT will be playing within the circle of the EU implementers.

Through a robust collaboration, the EU programme implementers stand to benefit from the ACT programme, particularly those who often find it challenging to effectively engage with CSOs, due to the existing capacity issues.

The meeting which was attended by representatives from eight CSOs and the European Union, including the Head of Delegation, Ketil Karlsen; EU Cooperation, Kurt Cornelis, and the EU Section Lead, Governance and Democracy, Clement Boutillier.

ACT was designed in collaboration with the British Council and started operations in 2019. The EU implementers are key stakeholders of the ACT programme, particularly because they work with CSOs to implement programmes.

CSO REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

ACT collaborates with network of CSOs to improve regulatory environment

Recently, the Nigerian government has made several efforts to regulate the operations of civil society organisations, which have generated debates, for and against. This began when the Nigerian 8th National Assembly (2015-2019) introduced the Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) Regulatory Commission of Nigeria Bill 2016 which was intended to control the activities of NGOs. However, the bill was later dropped due to condemnations from civil society leaders and the general public.

On 24 September 2019, Nigeria's House of Representatives resolved to revisit the same bill, which again has received divergent reactions. Many government agencies have been interrogating the subject matter from different perspectives, while the understanding of the subject matter even among the civil society organisations (CSOs) varies.

CSOs are the centre point of the debate but are yet to become visibly engaged in shaping the narrative on NGO regulation. It was on this basis that ACT and the Nigeria Network of Non-Governmental Organisations (NNNGO) facilitated a discussion for CSOs to share their various perspectives on the issue and to develop strategies for engaging with other stakeholders.

Participants included BudGIT, CDD, Civil Society For HIV/AIDS in Nigeria-CiSHAN, EIE Nigeria, Food Basket Foundation International, Global Rights, INGO Forum, OSIWA, PLAC, Sesô Empowerment Foundation, SERAP, Spaces for Change, CSJ, and Women Advocate Research and Documentation Centre.

At the meeting, an agreement was reached that the existing regulatory laws for CSOs are sufficient. A need was identified to strengthen compliance and raise awareness for CSOs at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the development of a code of conduct or ethical guideline for CSO operators would enable effective oversight of the sector. ACT is providing a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue for an improved and effective regulatory environment for the operation of CSOs in Nigeria.

It is expected that through the work of ACT, the issue of weak regulation and lack of coordination amongst CSOs would be addressed through effective advocacy.

OTHER ACTIVITIES COMPLETED WITHIN THIS PERIOD

- Political economy analysis of the civil society environment
- Organisational capacity assessment for civil society organisations

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Capacity development of CSOs in Kano, Lagos and the FCT
- Political economy analysis of the CSO operational environment
- Recruitment of mentors and coaches
- CSO stakeholder consultation on CSO/NGO regulation
- Stakeholder consultation in Lagos and FCT
- Assessment of capacity development institutions in FCT, Lagos, Oyo, Kano and Sokoto

Find out more

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