

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 geopolitical 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

INCREASING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND LOCAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA



© British Council

WHY THIS CASE STUDY?

This case study illustrates the outcome of mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the plans and activities of civil society organisations in Nigeria. It points to the changes that can occur when stakeholders make deliberate efforts to make women equal partners in politics and development.

BACKGROUND

Women's participation and leadership in political and public life is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, according to the United Nations.¹ However, women are under-represented in decision-making positions across several countries, including Nigeria where women occupy less



Funded by
the European Union



Implemented by
the British Council

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

than seven percent of appointed and elected positions, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.² This percentage is far below the 30 percent affirmative action formerly recommended at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the 35 percent stated in Nigeria's recent National Gender Policy.³

Nigeria's patriarchal culture is partly blamed for the underrepresentation of women in the country's political landscape. Many communities across the country are controlled by men, leaving women and girls little or no

room to participate in leadership or decision-making. However, cultures and practices that tend to relegate women politically are being challenged by concerned stakeholders.

The Ama-Achala and Isi Agu communities are in Enugu state in the southeast of Nigeria. In these communities, political and leadership roles have been mostly held by men. Recent efforts by the Affirmative Action for Women's Initiative (NCAA) – a coalition of CSOs and an ACT CSO partner – has increased women's participation.



© British Council

APPROACH

The NCAA aims to increase women's participation in politics and public life in Nigeria. Since 2003, the organisation has been working to eliminate various forms of discrimination against women through education, research, documentation, information dissemination, and legislative advocacy. Following its partnership with the ACT programme from 2019, the NCAA has strengthened its approach to making its interventions more results oriented.

Following capacity development support training and mentoring from ACT, NCAA worked to improve its strategies for increasing women's participation in political and leadership positions.

“
We learnt that advocacy is not an activity, it is a programme.”

Virginia Onyia, Programme Officer, NCAA, Enugu

In both communities, NCAA organised a series of one-to-one and town hall meetings with community heads, religious leaders, politicians, and representatives of men, women, and youth groups. The meetings were used to present the rights of women and girls and to advocate for their inclusion in decision-making. It also cited various examples of women and girls who have positively impacted their communities due to their political and leadership roles. The organisation engaged influential people in the communities to promote similar feats in Ama-Achala and Isi Agu.

RESULTS

Women admitted to Igwe cabinet for the first time

Shortly after the series of NCAA advocacy visits to Ama-Achala and Isi Agu, and the various engagements with community stakeholders, the women began to show interest in taking up leadership roles. Some women advocated for the council of the Igwe – the highest decision-making organ of the traditional ruler – to be expanded to include female members. This was a bold demand by the women as the Igwe's council had always been an all-men body. Some men, apparently due to the advocacy and sensitisation by the NCAA,

² National Bureau of Statistics, NBS (n.d.). Monitoring participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Paper presentation by Oloyode Oluoyemi (NBS). Available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Finland_Oct2016/Documents/Nigeria_paper.pdf

³ Premium Times, 'Affirmative Action: Court orders Nigerian govt to reserve 35% of public offices for women', 6 April 2022. Available at <https://bit.ly/3X129Nb>

supported the women and even lobbied community leaders to make the ruling council more inclusive. This encouraged the women and after a few months of advocacy, the Igwe acceded to their demands. Four women leaders from Ama-Achala and three from Isi Agu were admitted to the Igwe's cabinet at a colourful coronation ceremony on 30 July 2022.

“

I am happy to be admitted into the Igwe's cabinet. ”

Virginia Agbaede from Ama-Achala

“

We are happy to see our women appointed to the Igwe's cabinet. ”

Edith Ugwuanyi and Mary Agbedo from Isi Agu

More women win local government elections

More community women began to show interest in local politics and demanded accountability from the current legislator representing both communities at the state assembly. In addition, more women than before showed interest in vying for political offices. At least three women from each community emerged during the 2022 party primaries as ward counsellor candidates at the next local government elections in 2023.

LESSONS LEARNED

Barriers stem from long-held traditions and cultural practices

A key learning for the NCAA was understanding that most of the barriers that prevent women and girls from participating in decision-making in communities stemmed from long-held traditions or cultural practices. These had not been challenged. The NCAA soon learned that the barriers or cultures that tend to relegate women to the background are not insurmountable or unchangeable. Better understanding of the constitutional rights of women and girls – including to participate in decision-making or to contest for elected positions – and the desire and right approach can impact change.



© British Council

Advocacy for change is not a one-off activity

The NCAA learned that advocacy for change is not a one-off activity, but a series of activities that must be followed through until the desired outcomes are achieved. The NCAA staff realised quickly that they had to go back to the communities a few times to meet with stakeholders. Many did not initially welcome the idea of empowering women to take up leadership roles in the communities. It was only after repeated visits and advocacy that these stakeholders started to change their minds and eventually supported the initiative.

“

Advocacy for change is not a one-off activity, but a series of activities that must be followed through until desired outcomes are achieved. ”

Virginia Onyia, Programme Officer, NCAA, Enugu

Effective community engagement requires a thorough stakeholder analysis

For the NCAA, it was important to conduct a thorough stakeholder analysis to identify all stakeholders to engage with during advocacy and sensitization visits. In addition to decision makers, key influencers – such as clerics, youth and women leaders, and market leaders – who can shape opinions and actions of decision makers were equally engaged in advocacy efforts. For example, the NCAA's advocacy to religious leaders in Ama-Achala and Isi Agu helped in increasing awareness about the importance of women's participation in decision-making among various congregations.

Find out more

Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT)

ACT@ng.britishcouncil.org

www.justice-security.ng