



CSOs and the Nigerian Civic Space in 2021

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PLAC: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organisation committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making processes. The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy.

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REFERENCES

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Action Against Hunger/Action Contre le Faim -ACF

Action Group on Free Civic Space - AGFCS

African Centre for Entrepreneurship and Development – ACIEDEV

African Continental Free Trade Area – AfCFTA

Amnesty International - AI

Catholic Relief Service – CRS

Centre for Fiscal Transparency and Integrity Watch -CeFTIW

Centre for Media Law and Advocacy - CMLA

Civil Society Coalition on Audit in Nigeria - CSCAN

Civil Society Organisations – CSOs

Coalition Against COVID-19 – CACOVID

Connected Development – CODE

Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution – CHRRCR

Coronavirus Disease - COVID-19

Designated Non-Financial Institutions -DFNIs

Early Warning Early Response Project – EWER

Economic Community of West African States – ECOWAS

Enough is Enough (EiE)

Faith-Based Action for Scaling up Testing and Treatment for the Epidemic Response -FASTER

Food and Agriculture Organization - FAO

Foundation for Investigative Journalism – FIJ

House of Representatives - HoR

Independent National Electoral Commission – INEC

Initiative to Resist Institutional Slavery and Exploitation - IRISE

Internally Displaced Person(s) – IDP(s)

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent – IFRC

International Nongovernmental Organisations – INGOs
International Organization on Migration - IOM
International Press Centre – IPC
International Rescue Committee -IRC
Joint National Association of Persons Living with Disabilities -JONAPWD
Media Rights Agenda – MRA
Ministries, Departments and Agencies – MDAs
National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons – NAPTIP
National Democratic Institute - NDI
National Human Rights Commission – NHRC
National Poverty Reduction with Growth Strategy -NPRS
Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room - NCSSR
Nigeria Network of NGOs -NNGOs
Nigeria Solidarity Support Fund – NSSF
Nigerian Humanitarian Fund – NHF
Nigerian Red Cross Society – NRCS
Nongovernmental Organisations – NGOs
One Billion Rising – OBR
Open Government Partnership – OGP
Paradigm Initiative - PIN
Paradigm Leadership Support Initiative – PLSI
Persons with Disabilities -PWDs
Police Service Commission - PSC
Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre - PLAC
Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism – PTCIJ
Sexual and Reproductive Health – SRH
Strengthening Civic Advocacy and Local Engagement -SCALE

Tap Initiative for Citizens Development – TICD
The Carmelites Prisoners’ Interest Organisation - CAPIO
The Civil Society Legislative and Advocacy Centre -CISLAC
The Foundation for Investigative Journalism – FIJ
The Foundation for Resilient Empowerment – FRED
The International Centre for Not- for-Profit Law – ICNL
The Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering -SCUML
The Stakeholder Democracy Network -SDN
The UN Refugee Agency - UNHCR
The United States Agency for International Development - USAID
The Women’s Rights and Health Project -WRAHP
United Nations Children’s Fund - UNICEF
United Nations Development Programme – UNDP
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – UNOCHA
United Nations Population Fund Youth Participatory Platform -UNFPA
United States Agency for International Development – USAID
World Food Programme -WFP
Yoruba Council of Elders -YCE
Yoruba Ko’ya Leadership and Training Foundation – YKLTF
Youth Empowerment Solution (YES)

Executive Summary

Activities of Nigerian civil society organisations (CSOs) in 2021, form the basic thrust of this report and highlights key areas of intervention. The report explores the operational climate in Nigeria during the year under review by looking at the challenge of rising insecurity, the spill over of the EndSARS protests which included the harassment of key emerging protagonists and institutions in Nigeria's activist space, the rise of separatist agitations, regulation of CSO operations in a declining economy and the censorship of the digital media which got to its zenith with the controversies surrounding the Twitter ban.

Major achievements within the year are subsequently explored to include how CSOs have been working to assuage the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by pushing enlightenment campaigns, supporting vaccine rollouts, distributing palliatives, and promoting transparency and accountability in the disbursement of donated funds and materials. Many organisations have also contributed to ensuring the reduction in poverty and inequality in the country by helping to develop infrastructure, providing essential materials (including educational materials and medical aids), and setting up a task force to collaborate with the government in achieving its target of poverty reduction with the set timelines. They have also

contributed to alternative means of managing conflict in the country through engagement with community members and government stakeholders, memory initiatives, and provision of support for security operatives to assist them carry out their role of protecting lives and properties in the country. In terms of transparency and accountability, CSOs have continued to invoke the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill to demand accountability from the government on various budget allocations and projects, while building the capacity of youths to demand accountability and good governance through anticorruption campaign platforms.

As the country advances towards the 2023 general elections, CSOs working in the governance and human rights space have been deeply involved in ensuring a credible process as noticed in the passage of a new legal framework for elections in the country by the National Assembly i.e., the Electoral Bill 2021. This proposed law creates a legal basis for the use of electronic transmission of election results among other provisions such as stiffer punishment for electoral offenders, and improved provisions that strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections. These organisations have also carried out advocacy on citizen participation to tackle voter apathy and integrate marginal communities into the electoral process. There

are also efforts to help enhance the participation of vulnerable groups like women and youths in vying for elective positions, while advocating for the rights of prison inmates to vote. Other efforts include election observation activities and promotion of peaceful conduct of the elections by making the aspirants commit to a peaceful process. In terms of inclusion, Nigerian civil society actors have also been working on gender-responsiveness to the peculiar plight of women including protections from Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and human trafficking, supporting the rights of the girl-child to education and economic empowerment for women, promotion of equity via participation of women in governance, enlightenment on gender-responsive budgeting, as well as the domestication of the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act) across the different states in the country.

Disability rights have also been one of the core areas of interventions of CSOs including advocacy for the implementation of the provision of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, which saw the establishment of a National Commission for Disabilities and a Standing Committee on Disabilities in the House of Representatives last year. In 2021, CSOs have continued to advocate for further legal amendment to help harmonise some provisions in the Act to aid the implementation process. There have also been efforts at increasing the scope of inclusion of PWDs in formal workplace, while developing disability-

friendly curriculum to aid their learning in schools and requesting specific customer service points at medical centres to aid ease of access care. Some CSOs have been involved in the provisions of materials and essential supplies to help them navigate through daily lived experiences. Such initiatives have included the conduct of research projects to create a disaggregated database for PWDs to help guide evidence-based interventions by the government, and empowerment of PWDs through entrepreneurial skills to expand their scope of operations.

The inclusion of youth participation in the Nigerian civic space took two broad dimensions of empowering them to participate, and the youths themselves taking the up leadership in terms of advancing their inclusion in governance. One major achievement in 2021 was the launch of the National Action Plan to domesticate the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security. There are also several youth mentorship programmes implemented in the year such as the “Speak Up Stand Up”, PLAC’s Legislative Internship Programme, and Open Mind Young Voices initiatives that support economic empowerment and political participation of youths. Youth organisations have also been monitoring government projects implementation across the country to track progress, while also engaging in advocacy against police brutality, climate change,

and bad governance. With the emergence of Activism 2.0 (online activism), a lot of CSOs have increased their activities using the new media for advocacy from mobilization for protests, through oversight to fundraising, countering fake news, and mobilization for other causes.

A significant topic explored in this study is the operational challenges of CSOs in Nigeria today. This includes how the COVID-19 pandemic has led to remote operations, postponement of project implementation, restriction of movements, reduction in funding and staff income, risk exposure to humanitarian workers, and mental health challenges. Unfortunately, the sector is witnessing an increase in the scope of its regulatory framework, which has led to further shrinking of the civic space, as well as aggression from state agents following unsubstantiated allegations of illicit activities and support for terrorism made against targeted organizations. CSOs have continued to resist these attempts in various ways i.e., by documenting these actions, speaking about their experiences publicly, making presentations at public hearings in opposition to the proposition of suppressive bills, mobilizing for collective action towards an agreed CSO regulatory framework, and engaging with lawmakers on amendments of unfavourable provisions of some laws. In terms of managing the threats to democratic governance,

there is a momentum building around the protection of the civic space through enlightenment campaigns, filing lawsuits against perceived acts of impunity by the government, capacity building on engagement strategies between government and the CSOs, and participation in the electoral process to ensure improved governance processes in the country. Also, the changing funding climate in the country is discussed with the need for a sustainability plan beyond reliance on foreign aid, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic increasing the spate of foreign donor transitions.

The study concludes by pointing out the need to prioritize some CSO interventions as essential services based on how reliant recipients are on them, integrate civil society into decision making processes, as well as the need for more specializations within the sector and better coordination with government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) to maximize the impacts of several isolated interventions.



THE NIGERIAN CIVIC SPACE IN 2021

Photo Credit: Emmanuel Ikwuegbu from Unsplash.com

1.0 THE NIGERIAN CIVIC SPACE IN 2021

1.1 Introduction

Roberts and Ali (2021: 11) defined civic space as ‘the public spaces where citizens can freely exercise their human rights.’ This definition arguably captures what the civic space is about with key components such as the location of expression, exercise of human rights, legislation on the protection of these rights, citizen participation and national sovereignty. Within the context of this study, the civic space is defined as a locale (both physical and virtual) that citizens consider a legitimate space for contributing to national, regional, and global governance, through proactive interventions, as well as reactive actions in the exercise of their rights.

Following from the definition of what a civic space is, it is important to highlight the operational context of citizens as major actors within the civic space. As noted above, citizens as major stakeholders act as individuals or groups.

However, an understanding of the nature of these actors was provided by the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan during the Conference for the signing of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crimes in 2000. He noted that the civic space encompasses both the civil and uncivil elements within the society. In defining the ‘civil’, he maintained that it entails efforts from centuries of learning for development, tolerance, respect for diversity and the civil society comprising citizens such as ‘groups, businesses, unions, professors, journalists, political parties and others who have an essential role to play in the running of any society.’ He also delineated other actors within the civic space as the ‘uncivil society’, who are the ‘terrorists, criminals, drug dealers, traffickers in people and others who undo the good works of civil society...(and) thrive in countries with weak laws and institutions.’ With this background in mind, presented below are major highlights of issues that took centre stage in the civic space in 2021.



Photo Credit: PLAC



Photo Credit: The Guardian Newspaper from Google

Northeast with the majority of casualties taken from mass abductions in schools, highways, and marginal communities. The kidnap of 344 boys from the Government Science Secondary School (GSSS) in Katsina in December; was an early warning sign that banditry had become a major problem targeting students in Nigeria. It has thus become a thriving revenue source for hoodlums with about N11.4bn has reportedly being demanded for ransom during the eight-month period, even as the government is yet to clearly define a strategy for managing the menace. The abduction of school children for ransom highlights the prevalence of the violation of children's rights owing to insecurity in schools and consistent attacks on educational facilities since over a decade of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Save the Children International put the total number of children kidnapped at 1000 between January and August 2021 as it continued its advocacy for a safer school environment and the protection of women, girls, and children during the commemoration of the International Day to Protect Education from Attacks in September. The intensity of the challenge of insecurity was highlighted in

1.2 Banditry and Attacks on School Children

“The kidnap of 344 boys from the Government Science Secondary School (GSSS) in Katsina in December 2020 was an early warning sign that banditry had become a major problem targeting students in Nigeria”

In line with Kofi Anan's description of the civic space and the actors therein, the Nigerian civic space has been populated by members of both the civil and uncivil society. The year had witnessed the rise in insecurity across the different parts of the country with the prevalence of the kidnappings as the terms 'banditry' and bandits became part of the registers for news reportage since the turn of the year. Ojiego (2021) noted that about a hundred and eleven (111) incidents of kidnapping were reported between January and August drawing media sources on cases reported by the police and eyewitnesses. The cases were prevalent in the Northwest and the

Amnesty International's (AI) August 10, 2021, Communique which documented 112 deaths and 160 hostages in Kaduna and Plateaus states within one month alone. Kidnapping, as a major source of insecurity, remains prevalent in the country with schools being targeted with a recent incident taking place at the University of Abuja during which two professors were kidnapped alongside their family members. The incident also confirmed earlier indications that Niger's State is a major hub harbouring syndicates of kidnapers as the ongoing investigations show (see Garko, 2021).

1.3 EndSARs as A Continuum

The Nigerian civic space was the centre of global attraction as a video tweet on October 4, 2020, publicising the shooting of a man in front of a hotel in Delta State led to weeks of agitation as Nigerian youths took to the streets to demand the disbandment of SARs and Police reform in the country. The nationwide momentum garnered by the spate of protests which were populated by the youths were particularly instructive with the character of resistance aptly captured by

the label 'Sorosoke', which translates as 'Speak up' in Yoruba. The protests, which extended to the Nigerian Diaspora, saw a transformation from the perception of Generation Z as docile to making five major demands from the government including the release of all arrested protesters, justice for the victims and their families, the establishment of an independent investigation body to monitor the prosecution of complicit officers, improved welfare of police officers and the psychological evaluation of members of the

disbanded unit. However, while the President committed to meeting up with the demands of the protesters, the repressive nature of engagement played out on October 20, during which soldiers attacked harmless protesters who were picketing at the Lekki Toll Gate, where people reportedly lost their lives. After 100 days of this assault, Amnesty International (AI) in January documented how the government is clamping down on those affiliated with the protests through intimidation, harassment, torture, freezing of bank accounts and smear campaigns, while some have been fled the country.¹ In October, a coalition of CSOs evaluated the compliance of the government to its commitment to meeting up with these demands after a year and noted several shortfalls including that six northern states (Kano, Zamfara, Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi and Zamfara) refused to set up inquiry panels. As of mid-October, only three panels of the 21 states that had concluded sittings had submitted their reports. More so, despite the findings of panels of inquiry, quite a number of those who protested



Photo Credit: Emmanuel Ikwuegbu from www.unsplash.com

¹ See Nigeria: Denials and Cover Up Mark 100 Days since Lekki Shooting. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/nigeria-denials-and-cover-up-mark-100-days-since-lekki-shooting/>

are still being held and charged to court both for their online activities and physical participation at protest grounds.

It is however instructive that one of the major fallouts or lessons from the EndSARS protests is what could be considered the spontaneous nature of its organization, which has come to assume what some refer to as 'leaderless.' A key example of this context was the conversation of the Network of Civil Society Organisations and the Nigerian Labour Congress on Channels Television, where both organisations confirmed that their lack of participation at this year's Democracy Day protests was because the organisers were unknown to them². The Democracy Day celebrations were marked by protests in Abuja, and across the country – especially in the Southwest including Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, and Osun states. The participation of the Southwestern states is understandable because of the Yoruba ethnic alliance with the president-elect, Chief MKO Abiola whose defence of his mandate inspired the replacement of May 29 with June 12 as Nigeria's

² See Democracy Day: Police Shoot Teargas at Protesters in Abuja, Lagos. Channels Television. <https://www.channelstv.com/2021/06/12/democracy-day-police-shoot-teargas-at-protesters-in-abuja/>

Democracy Day through an amendment of the Democracy Day Bill signed into law on June 11, 2019. The implication of this is the emergence of new actors assuming leadership position in the protest culture in the country – in line with global popular culture, especially with influencers on social media assuming referential power to mobilise their followers for physical protests. It is worthy of note that protests marches have been countered by pro-government supporters, especially in the Federal Capital Territory who enjoy the privilege of congregating around otherwise banned locations such as the Unity Fountain (see Obiezu, 2021). Apart from the #EndSARS protests, the government has not also been tolerant of other forms of opposition. For instance, AI in its April 23 research³ reported the assault, torture, and detention of two protesters in Kogi State for voicing out against corruption, human rights abuses in Nigeria and using posters to criticize the president.

³ See Nigeria: Activists Beaten and Jailed for Protesting: Larry Emmanuel and Victor Anene Udoka. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/3996/2021/en/>

1.4 Separatist Agitations

In the face of allegations of discrimination, bad governance, dwindling economy and insecurity, there has been a recent clamour for the need to renegotiate the terms of Nigeria's corporate existence, with factions divided over different arguments on the possibilities for restructuring, true federalism, and/or constitutional review. The agitations have largely



Photo Credit: Ayanfe Olarinde from www.unsplash.com

“The kidnap of 344 boys In 2021, the face of these agitations Namely Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho have been in the middle of controversies having been in confrontation with the government.

garnered momentum in the South with the clamour for a Biafra Republic in the Southeast and the Oduduwa Republic in the Southwest. In 2021, the face of these agitations Namely Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho have been in the middle of controversies having been in confrontation with the government. Both were in the news for extradition attempts which saw Nnamdi Kanu arrested in a country purported to be Kenya on charges of treason, while Igboho’s extradition bid from Benin failed after he fled during a house raid. He, on the other hand, has been charged with stockpiling weapons (see Campbell and Quinn, 2021). Suffice to state that the ethnically driven agitations have also been tailored towards the management of insecurity in the country with the formation of the militant arm of the Eastern Security Network in late 2020, while Igboho gave the herdsmen ultimatum to leave some parts of the South-west and declared an Odua Republic in March.

In June, a statement was released by a joint force of the Biafra and Oduduwa Volunteer Force for the Liberation of Southern Nigeria, basically to protect the South from the aggression of Fulani

herdsmen. The resort to self-help due to the rise in insecurity has also strained the relationship between the Borno State government and an INGO, precisely the French-based Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), in the north. Also in June, the activities of the organization were suspended in Borno for engaging its staff in self-defence training which included the use of firearm simulators as reported by residents in the neighbourhood. As was reported, ACTED had resulted to training its staff from previous kidnapping experience and break-in into some of their offices (Momoh, 2021). There has also been a prevalence of regional security outfits as stop gaps in the advocacy for the creation of State police, popular among which are Hisbah/Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the North, Ebube Agu in the East, Amotekun in the South-west, while the South South governors were proposed in an October 2021 meeting to set up a regional outfit soon (see Igwe, 2021).

There are also those that have been opposed to the secessionist agitations including members of the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) and Yoruba



Ko'ya⁴ Leadership and Training Foundation (YKLTF) in the Southwest. The YKLTF organized a webinar on: Retreat on Resetting Nigeria, in commemoration of Democracy Day. The group resolved to opt for peaceful intellectual engagements with the government on the need for true federalism through regional governance as opposed to secessionist agitations (see Olumide, Agboluaje and Daniel, 2021). The Niger Delta Rights Advocates, Niger Delta Peace Coalition and South-South Reawakening Group also discarded Igboho's March pronouncement as a political gimmick for a Yoruba Presidency in 2023 (see Oyadongha et al, 2021). In a similar vein, the Igbo Lawyers Association are serving as defendants in a suit filed by some Northern elders for the Federal High Court to compel the Senate and House of Representatives (HoR) to initiate steps to actualize IPOB's secessionist bid (Ejekwonyilo, 2021).

⁴ This literary translates as 'The Yoruba reject suffering' implying a progressive ideology

In June, a statement was released by a joint force of the Biafra and Oduduwa Volunteer Force for the Liberation of Southern Nigeria, basically to protect the South from the aggression of Fulani herdsmen.



Photo credit: The Nation Newspaper Website

1.5 Regulation of NGO Operations in a Declining Economy

The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics reported that the economy grew by 0.5% during the first quarter of 2021 with the non-oil (agriculture and industrial) sectors accounting for about 91% of the GDP, as the country recovered from recession in the last quarter of 2020 resulting from the COVID-19 and drop in oil prices. Despite this, inflation, unemployment, poverty, and national debt have continued on an upward trajectory amidst the growing insecurity in the country. This instability has scared away potential investors, with a negative return on investments and an unstable currency while the country continues to be dependent on oil.⁵ In its October report, the World Bank noted the attempts of the government at managing the challenges on the economy through the harmonization of exchange rates, removal of subsidies on gas, cost-effective electricity tariffs, reduction in non-essential spending, debt management and

transparency in the public sector.⁶ As part of the transparency initiative, the government has also taken measures to regulate the non-public sector through a unit of the Economic and financial crimes commission. The Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering (SCUML) was created by the federal government in September 2005 to counter the crime of money laundering and has focused on countering terrorism financing. In September, the Director of SCUML requested that the list of beneficiaries of IDP intervention funds be made available by both local and international NGOs to aid the fight against the aforementioned crimes in Nigeria. Specifically, SCUML demands Cash Notification Forms to be submitted to its command for vetting and approval while threatening adequate sanctions against erring NGOs and INGOs.⁷ While the SCUML is charged with monitoring, supervising, and regulating the activities of Designated Non-Financial Institutions (DNFIs), the inclusion of NGOs and INGOs under a unit of the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment is ill-suited to the operational context of non-profits.

⁵ See NESG Q1 2021 Economic Report: Nigeria Needs More Than an Economic Rebound. <https://www.proshareng.com/news/Reviews%20&%20Outlooks/NESG-Q1-2021-Economic-Report-Nigeria-Needs-More-Than-an-Economic-Rebound/57731> uploaded June 18, 2021

⁶ See Nigeria: Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview#1>

⁷ EFCC Charges International NGOs on Transparency, Accountability. <https://www.scuml.org/efcc-charges-international-ngos-on-transparency-accountability/> Posted September 18, 2021



Photo credit: Wolfgang Filser from Google

Development partners also decried the ban with a joint statement from the governments of the United States, Canada, Ireland, Norway, and the European Union noting that the ban restricts access to information and business transactions.

1.6 Twitter Ban/Digital Surveillance

On June 4, 2021, Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed announced the ban of Twitter, a widely used microblogging platform, in Nigeria. The purported reason for this was that it promoted activities that threatened the country's corporate existence, though the ban was pronounced shortly after the platform deleted a tweet by the President which was considered a violation of its policy on hateful conduct.⁸ The minister in his press briefing also noted that social media platforms will now require registration as local organisations and will have to be regulated by the Nigerian Broadcasting. Earlier on April 12, Twitter had announced that it was opening its Africa Office in Ghana due to a shared democratic culture and embrace of the open internet, protection of free speech and online freedom, in addition to being the secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

⁸ The president had tweeted that he would respond to the attacks on government installations in the Southeast by speaking to IPOB in the 'language that they understand', which was reminiscent of the carnage of the Nigerian Civil War.

Twitter's side-lining of Nigeria in its choice of headquarters, in spite of having about 85.5million internet users compared to Ghana's 14.8million as of January 2020, stimulated reactions among Nigerians who bemoaned political instability, insecurity and unfavourable business climate as reasons for the snub (see Ezezi, 2021). Shortly after the ban, the Attorney General of Nigeria, Mr. Abubakar Malami ordered its enforcement through the prosecution of people who utilized Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to access the platform. The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Projects (SERAP) had noted in a lawsuit against the Federal government that the ban violated Article 19 in both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights signed by Nigeria (Akoni, 2021). In the same vein, five NGOs (namely Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ), International Press Centre (IPC), Paradigm Initiative (PIN), Tap Initiative for Citizens Development (TICD) and Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and four journalists sued the federal government at the ECOWAS Court seeking a declaration that the Twitter ban was a violation of human rights guaranteed under international law,

and as such the government should retract its decision and compensate them for the violations (Agency Report, 2021). Development partners also decried the ban with a joint statement from the governments of the United States, Canada, Ireland, Norway, and the European Union noting that the ban restricts access to information and business transactions. The Nigerian Network of NGOs, among other things, pointed out how the ban could foster abuse by police officers as Twitter facilitates oversight on the police.⁹ Apart from the deprivation of freedom of expression, the Twitter ban also implied more threats to the economic instability in the country with the country reported to have lost about \$1.2bn within the first three days, and subsequently around \$250,000 per hour (Akinyoade, 2021).

The ban reflected the expansion of the increasing closure of the Nigerian Civic Space beyond the physical to the digital space as practiced by several censoring authoritarian regimes including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Columbia. The Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) also reported that the Nigerian government has initiated

⁹ See The Nigeria Network of NGOs is concerned about the ban on Twitter by the Federal Government. <https://nnngo.org/the-nigeria-network-of-ngos-is-concerned-about-the-ban-on-twitter-by-the-federal-government/>

discussions with its Chinese counterpart in the bid to create an internet firewall in the country (see Obiezu, 2021). This attempt was not the first as the government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan had been documented to have contracted the Israeli-based Elbit Systems in 2013 for digital surveillance in the country. The Nigerian Communications Commission in its 'Technical Framework for the Use of Social Media in Nigeria' had recommended that Organisations in the country adopt the use of online monitoring tools and teams to prevent being implicated by their employees' posts on social media. (Oladapo and Ojebode, 2021).

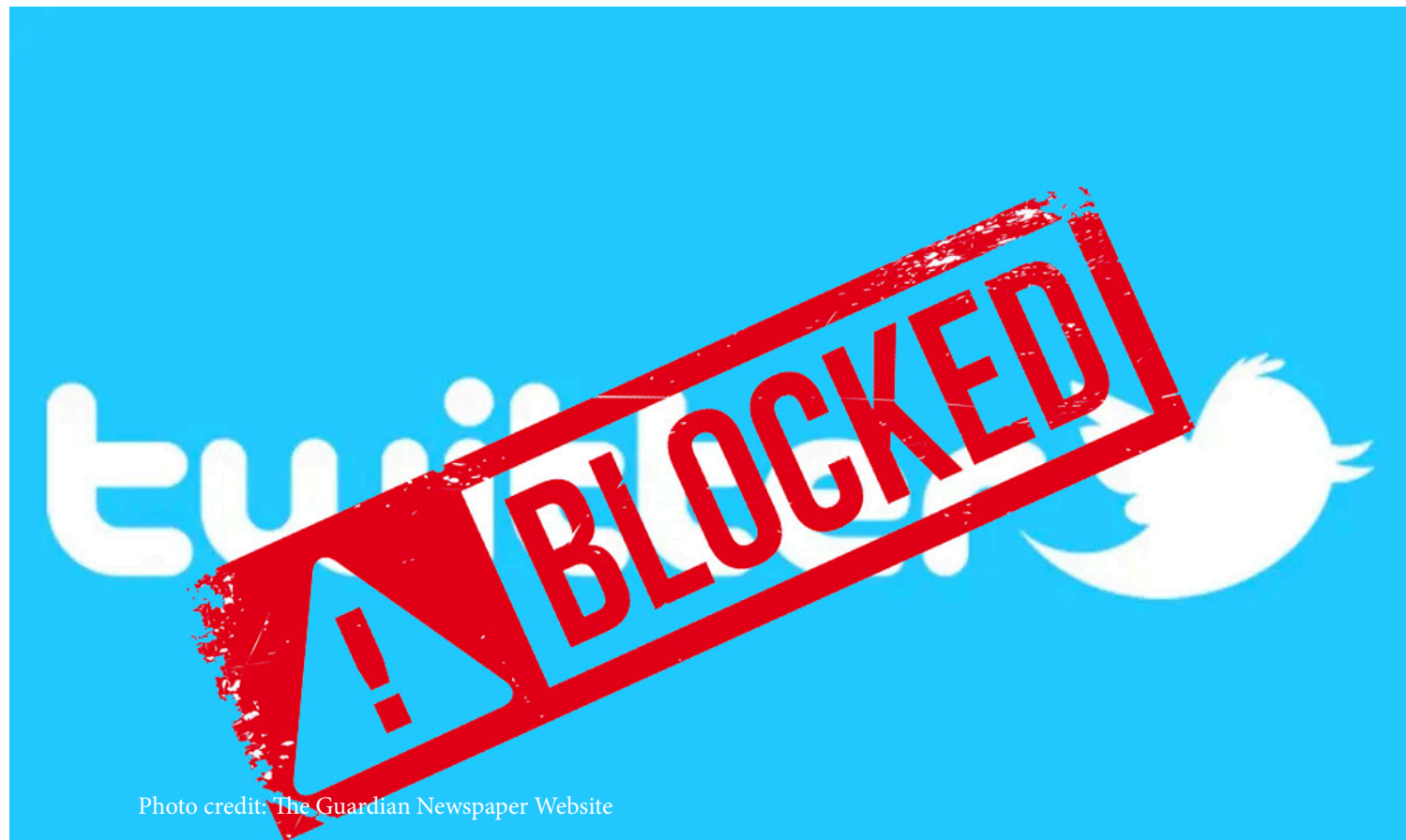


Photo credit: The Guardian Newspaper Website



HIGHLIGHTS OF NGOs INTERVENTIONS & ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2021

Photo credit: PLAC

2.1 Preamble

The role of the NGOs in the protection of human rights, humanitarian interventions, election and governance, policy advocacy, cultural and environmental activism, education, conflict management and other areas of development in any democracy cannot be overemphasized. The etymology of the word dates back to the WWII in 1945, when the term was used as a designation for non-state actors that had consultative status during the proceedings of the UN. However, the term has been expanded to encapsulate independent private initiatives which are not profitmaking and have different scopes and frames of interventions to advance development, especially for the disadvantaged in the society. Within the Nigerian Civic space, NGOs have continued to be a major part of development efforts building resilience as they continue their efforts to protect the civic space. For our purpose, we shall consider the broad categorization of NGOs based on the World Bank's categorization of NGOs as either operational or advocacy-based organisations (See Malena, 1995). While the former represents the role of these

organisations in carrying out activities that enhance the lives of citizens in general, with specific attentions to those who enjoy less privilege, the latter represents engagement with relevant stakeholders, including decision-makers in government as well as others that can influence policy. Suffice to state that the scope of coverage of this report does not entail the mention of the entire CSOs in Nigeria and their specific operations but adopts a thematic approach to highlight the major areas of impact within the Nigerian civic space in 2021.

2.2 Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The breakout of the new coronavirus with the acronym (COVID-19) affected the operational dynamics of different layers of the nation-state as governments, corporations, small scale businesses and individuals designed new means of carrying out their activities. One major guideline for the containment of the adverse effects of the spread of the virus has been the maintenance of social distancing, which has come with different measures of enforcement



Photo credit: Premium Times Website

including total and partial lockdowns, closure of public spaces, restriction of numbers at gatherings, and restriction on movements. The public health situation also affected the NGO sector with different organisations carrying out advocacies and delivery of aids, while putting coping mechanisms in place to adjust to the new normal.

In September 2021, the AISH Initiative, an Abuja based NGO, partnered with the National Ministry of Health and National Orientation Agency on a vaccine sensitization programme to the IDP Camp in Abuja to counter the disinformation on the coronavirus which projected that the vaccines were implantations of the microchip (Obiezu, 2021). As of November 2021, the PTCIJ has carried out not less than 45 factchecks to debunk myths surrounding the vaccination project of the coronavirus, with an operational standard that is guided by the principles of the International Factchecking Network. They have dealt with topics around the impact of pain killers after vaccinations, powering of light bulbs, adverse impacts of impotence, as well as enlightenment on the types of vaccines being administered in Nigeria.¹⁰ In a similar vein, The Centre for Information Technology and Development

¹⁰ See <https://dubawa.org/tag/coronavirus/>

(CITAD) organized several Twitter chats in March to debunk the myths, as well to restore the trust of the citizens in the government's interventions.¹¹

The Bakhita Initiative in Sokoto State also did some public sensitization on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting low-income earners, especially women. They highlighted how the measures of curtailing the pandemic have influenced incidents of violence against women, while engaging religious leaders to help tackle the effects. These initiatives are very important considering the low vaccination levels. According to the updated data by the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Nigerian government approved the AstraZeneca and J&J Moderna Vaccines with a total supply of 19,077,780 which caters for about 4.6% of the population. However, of these supplies, only 46.8 of the vaccines have been administered with just 1.53 of the population fully vaccinated as of November 10, 2021.¹²

¹¹ See <https://www.citad.org/?s=covid>

¹² See <https://africacdc.org/covid-19-vaccination/>

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) also carries out a factchecking project which includes debunking the myths surrounding the COVID-19 Vaccine and disseminating counter-facts on social media platforms to combat vaccine apathy. As part of the resettlement plans in the Northeast, the UNHCR work with local partners to conduct about 260 awareness campaign sessions as of September, reaching about 32, 495 IDPs, returnees and host communities in order to foster their adherence to COVID-19 protocols.¹³

¹³ See North-East Nigeria Operational Update dated September 2021.



Photo credit: Lagos Food Bank

With the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, tech CSO Budgit has been tracking the interventions against the spread of the virus to include the impact on the economy, allocation of funds, distribution of palliatives, warehousing, and distribution of palliatives. It also tracked the process of distribution of palliatives in five states namely Lagos, Kano, Rivers, Ogun, and Niger states. They noted that there was orderly distribution in some parts of Lagos with the use of QR codes to access rationed sizes, while politicians were reported to have hijacked



the palliatives in other parts. The hijack of the distribution of palliatives was reported in virtually all of the states except in Rivers where meagre rations as low as a cup of rice, beans and garri were reportedly distributed (Okeowo, 2021).

The UNDP has also been very active in supporting CSOs through different initiatives to manage the fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, in November, it supported the initiative of Reboot, Nigerian Health Watch and EpiAFRIC to support innovations regarding the disposal of wastes that are generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴

The rise in the increase of domestic violence during the lockdown has also been a major concern as reflected in several cases reported in different parts of the country. The Youth Alive Foundation thus initiated a project it tagged SAVE-19 which is designed to help people who are suffering from violence during the pandemic to get some help. The organization has dedicated lines that these people can call, and they provide access to different forms of psychosocial support.

CITAD has also been at the forefront of advocacy for the management of COVID-19. In

¹⁴ See ng.undp.org

February, the organization issued an advisory as a template to guide to conduct of secondary school students as the schools were gradually resuming in-person lectures, while calling out the government in the need to provide safety kits including facemasks and hand sanitizers in Kano State. Similarly, the organization is working on enlightenment campaigns to support vaccine rollout across the three regions in the North through its engagement with the Nigerian Governors Forum, influencers, religious leaders, traditional rulers, and other key stakeholders in creating a synergy of interventions during the vaccination drive.

Also, within the month of February, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) continued its advocacy on accountability and transparency to aid the effective management by directing a probe on allegations of corruption at the Ministry of Water Resources, as this could hamper the provision and availability of water needed to comply with the regulations of handwashing to prevent the spread. It also initiated a suit against the President regarding a purportedly missing N3.8bn fund which allegedly affected the ability of citizens to access healthcare and deprived

health institutions of incentives to manage the new coronavirus. They also urged the President to probe the alleged spending of N90.7m by the Kogi State government on a software application to track cases of infections of COVID-19 in the State.

The efforts at curbing the impact of the virus are still ongoing with the Nigeria Solidarity Support Fund (NSSF) committed to developing collaborations to raise complementary funds for augmenting extant interventions. The organization is carrying out advocacy for vaccine equity, strengthening Nigeria's Health Institutions and building the capacity of healthcare workers. As of November, it donated N300m to contribute to the availability of vaccines by providing an additional one million doses as the country continues its third Phase of the vaccine rollout.¹⁵ The Youth Empowerment Solution (YES) initiative also carried out a Me 2You Project in communities to support vulnerable youths in cushioning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project targeted 1000 beneficiaries including 600 households and 4000 individuals equally drawn from both male and female gender. These efforts are important

¹⁵ See Group Advocates Collaborative Efforts to Tackle COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/11/01/group-advocates-collaborative-efforts-to-tackle-covid-19-pandemic/>

complements to the initial effort of the Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACOVID) comprising members of the private sector who mobilised funds and other essential items in support of state governors to take care of the vulnerable population in their states.

2.3 Poverty and Inequality

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) state that most communities in the Northern part of the country are suffering from acute food insecurity. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) acute malnutrition analysis (IPC AMN), Northeast Nigeria has reached alarming levels of food insecurity with) States projected to reach a critical stage of malnutrition (phase 4). This follows from the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency that has affected the region for over a decade.

Quite a number of people have been displaced from access to their major means of livelihood, with a predominantly agrarian-based economy



Photo credit: Action Against Hunger Website



as they could no longer go to their farms, even as the communities are still unsafe for resettling. In addition to insecurity, the Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation rates and the effects of climate change have continued to hamper livelihoods across the country, with about 4.4 million projected to face acute food shortage in the BAY¹⁶ states alone, with about 775, 000 of the population stated to be vulnerable to extreme hunger.¹⁷ The internally displaced persons have suffered from health crises during the COVID-19 pandemic as most are overcrowded and it has become difficult to keep the public health protocols. Apart from this, they also suffered from disasters caused by dysfunctional facilities as was the case with the suspected fire outbreak from makeshift cooking stove which destroyed about 100 shelters. In July 2021, the Salient Humanitarian Organisation, which has been helping in managing the affected Madinatu and El Miskin camps in Borno, helped with rebuilding the shelters as well as supplying essential house supplies like soap, detergent, kitchen utensils, buckets, and mattresses to improve their living conditions. This initiative was

¹⁶ Borno, Adamawa and Yobe

¹⁷ See Joint Efforts to Fight Hunger in North-east Nigeria. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/joint-efforts-fight-hunger-north-east-nigeria>

supported by the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund that is being managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

In June, President Muhammadu Buhari inaugurated the National Steering Committee to steer the national project on poverty eradication through the National Poverty Reduction with Growth Strategy (NPRSG). The committee is being chaired by the Vice President, Prof Yemi Osinbajo, and is charged with collaborating with development partners, the civil society, and the private sector to eliminate the underlying causes of poverty, partly by establishing the Nigeria Investment and Growth Fund, with the target of lifting 100 million Nigerians out of poverty in about 10 years (NAN, 2021). In August 2021, humanitarian organizations in Nigeria partnered to form a task force to respond to the challenge of food insecurity in Nigeria. The task force is made up of mainly international organisations and INGO partners carrying our humanitarian interventions in the Northeast to include Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization on Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),

the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), Action Against Hunger/ Action Contre le Faim (ACF), CARE International, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), and Save the Children. The task force is partnering with the government to make multisectoral interventions as it relates to food security, nutrition, health, protection, and WASH.¹⁸

In terms of legislative involvement in ensuring social justice, PLAC works with the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions and the House of Representatives Committee on Public Petitions who carry out oversight on the Public Complaints commission especially regarding the provision of technical support for creating an effective engagement strategy that provides an equal platform for every citizen to access redress against administrative injustice, particularly in the time of the COVID-pandemic.

The Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS), with the support of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), is

currently working on making interventions in 7 States within the Northcentral (Benue, Nasarawa and Niger) and Northeast states region targeted at 5,000 beneficiaries to be provided with food and livelihood support. The support covers the provision of cash grants, farming kits, medical kits, trainings, and skill empowerments among other interventions.¹⁹

In the Southwest, Action Aid made some interventions in the educational sector including the mobilization of community sponsors to kit pupils and students of primary/secondary schools (with school wears, bags, and educational materials) in Badagry West LGA, Lagos State. The organization also provided start-up kits and facilities alongside skill acquisition training for 1,500 youths across communities in Kogi and Nasarawa State while providing empowerment support for 500 victims and survivors of End SARS during the second quarter of 2021.²⁰ Also in Lagos, The Destiny Trust Foundation, which is focused on the education of overaged children through its back-to-school campaign targeted at

1000 children paid for the appendicitis surgery of a young hawkler who could not afford the operation, after a story was put out by the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) (see Oladipupo, 2021).

In Adamawa State, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has been supporting the government to manage the Cholera Treatment Centres/Units with medical kits (Environmental Health/WASH kits, Cholera PPEs) and provide incentives for public health workers across Yola South, Yola North, Shelleng, Larmurde, Numan Local governments. It also partnered with the Education Above All (EAA) Foundation on the Educate a Child project to provide education for out of school children in the Northeast. This project supports non-formal learning centres to ensure they are well equipped and safe, provides funds to augment school fees and creates a context-based content to aid the understanding of school children.²¹

¹⁹ See Operation Update Report no.1. Nigeria: Hunger Report

²¹ EAA Extends Partnership with The IRC to Improve Education Access in Nigeria. <https://educationaboveall.org/#!/news/eaa-extends-partnership-with-the-irc-to-improve-education-access-in-nigeria>

Similarly, The Destiny Trust has supported about 1000 homeless and less privileged children drawn from Taraba, Lagos, and Abuja since the start of the 2021/2022 academic session. They provided supplies of school wears and writing materials while also paying their tuition. Outside of the Northeast, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have also been championing the fight against stigmatization of vulnerable groups especially those who are living with HIV/AIDS by implementing the Faith-Based Action for Scaling up Testing and Treatment for the Epidemic Response (FASTER) project. The project is to help actualize the triple zero target in reference to zero missing of appointments, zero viral load and zero missed medications by providing a community support group for those suffering from infections (Umeasiegbu, 2021) with Ogun State as one of the states for implementation. The organization also helps in the rebuilding project of the Northeast by training farmers on improve practices to maximize yields from farming and providing access to loans for empowerment through its Stabilization and Reconciliation in the Lake Chad Region (STaR) project (Umeasiegbu, 2021b).

Global Rights also carries out an important advocacy on environmental health in the Niger Delta and continued to use the media platform for calling up the government on the implementation of the Ogoni Clean Up and the importance of protecting artisanal miners.

2.4 Conflict and Insecurity

The longstanding insurgency in Nigeria's Northeast that has spanned over a decade is instructive of the challenge of insecurity in the country. As it stands, the country has been battling insecurity on different fronts especially with the prevalence of kidnapping across the country, which has been reportedly perpetrated by some non-state actors that have been captioned as bandits. This climate of insecurity has been a major bane of the administration with various agitations from the need for police reform, through the advocacy for community policing and the creation of regional security outfits in different parts of the country. CSOs in Nigeria have lent their voice and efforts towards the management of this challenge through different advocacy programmes, community dialogue and Memory initiatives.



Photo credit: The Guardian Newspaper Website

In September, the Peace Ambassadors Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Empowerment (PACHE) organized a policy dialogue in Maiduguri focused on the reintegration of people associated with the Boko Haram insurgents in the Northeast, with the support of the British Council, as part of the commemoration of the International Day of Peace. The gathering of relevant key stakeholders advocated for proper screening of returnees, transparency in the reintegration process, a shift in focus of interventions from perpetrators to the victims and a comprehensive transitional justice framework to support the reintegration process.²²

In the same vein, the United States Institute for Peace created the Nigeria Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance constituting influential Nigerians from the National Peace Committee and Inter-Faith Initiative for Peace that engaged in high-level dialogue with the civil society and government actors on issues of inclusive governance, electoral violence, and

²² See Policy Dialogue Sets Requirements for Successful Reintegration. <https://www.justice-security.ng/policy-dialogue-sets-requirements-successful-reintegration>

Farmer-herder conflicts as a way of managing public distrust in the country.²³

The Centre for Civilians in Conflict also carried out a memory initiative for documenting atrocities in Northeast Nigeria as part of its activities for commemorating World Peace Day. This was done through a photo exhibition in Abuja as part of its advocacy to raise public awareness on the issues as well as engage with the government in carrying out its primary responsibility with is the provision of security and the maintenance of law and order (Obiezu, 2021).

The CLEEN Foundation has been at the heart of supporting security reforms in the country and conducted security threats assessments in the states that held governorship elections in the country. It has also continued its engagement with different stakeholders in the security sector to improve civil/military relations, build the capacity of security agents and enhance the mainstreaming of gender in the sector. In November 2021, it partnered with the University

²³ The Current Situation in Nigeria: A USIP Fact Sheet <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/08/current-situation-nigeria>

of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Toronto to launch the Village Monitoring System Project where it put an Early Warning Early Response (EWER) system in place to track security developments in 16 communities across four North-western and Northcentral states of Kaduna, Plateau, Zamfara and Taraba states.

In the aftermath of the EndSARS protests, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) engaged with multiple stakeholders including CSOs, and government representatives from the Police Service Commission (PSC), and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)



Photo credit: thenationonlineng.net

by organizing a forum to examine the oversight functions of the PSC and integrating CSOs into the implementation of police reform in the country (see Powell and Suerte-Cortez, 2021).

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) is carrying out a conflict management program tagged the *Sulhu Alheri Ne* project in Northeast Nigeria which is a transitional justice mechanism for enhancing healing and forgiveness in the region. This includes community dialogue, radio programs, capacity building trainings on peacebuilding for both state



and non-state actors rendered in both Hausa and Kanuri to build an important connection with marginal communities in the region. In October, it also carried out a conflict-sensitive capacity-building reporting workshop in Abuja for editors within the Nigerian media to upscale the skills of media practitioners in setting agenda for peace other than the escalation of violence through their reportage. And as part of their conflict prevention strategy, both the PTCIJ and CDD have a robust factchecking projects tagged *Dubawa* and CDD Fact Check projects respectively. The projects basically focus on countering fake news and disinformation peddled in the media, including print, broadcast, and new media by consulting with verified sources and experts as mechanisms for preventive measures by correcting information that could result in violence.

Search for Common Ground is one of the major INGOs that also carries out community-based conflict management advocacies, as well as carrying out human rights monitoring across Northcentral and North-eastern Nigeria. As part of its strategies for intervening in the Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Adamawa State, it initiated a radio partnership on radio drama tagged

Wurro Lafiya which airs on two radio stations, GOTEL FM and Pulaku FM which is to help in the promotion of peace within the communities. It also recently convened a national stakeholders dialogue on emerging security challenges in urban areas of the country. The convening was strategically designed to position youths in terms of assuming responsibilities for preventing violent conflict in the country, as well as using technology and social capital for collaborations on conflict management interventions. It has an online toolkit that is contextualized within the Sudano-Sahel region to guide policy makers, development partners and other funding agencies, as well as practitioners to guide them on the prevention and management of transborder conflicts between pastoralists and farmers.

The Civil Society Joint Action on Insecurity in 2018 began the commemoration of a National Day of Mourning to protest the incessant killings in the country after a meeting of over 100 CSOs. The annual nationwide demonstration entails protest marches to the legislature and symbolic

institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission with the demand that the government be more proactive in managing the incidents leading to fatalities in the country. This year, 5 action plans were designed to include a demand of action from the legislature at the federal and state levels, dissemination of victims' narratives across the social media, congregation in clusters of 49, donning black outfits, roll call of victims at the National and State Houses of Assembly, and symbolic religious actions on May 28 and 30 (Ehigiator and Fache, 2021). The coalition, in partnership with Global Rights also has a project tagged 'Nigeria Mourns' which tracks the number of deaths from extrajudicial killings, and other mass atrocities and disseminates as a means of holding the government accountable regarding its primary responsibility of securing lives and properties.

“In Kano, CITAD tracks the progress of project implementation in the state through a radio program tagged ‘Report a Project.’ “

2.5 Anti-Corruption

The incumbent administration rode on the mantra of anticorruption in campaigning for votes during its first dispensation and had projected anticorruption as one of its core missions. However, a report by Transparency International (TI) released in April maintained a low ranking for Nigeria in its Corruption Perception Index for



Photo credit: Anadolu Agency from Google

2020 as the country was ranked 149 out of a total of 180 countries contained in the index. The Civil Society Legislative and Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), which currently houses TI's country office is involved in a series of anticorruption projects including the organization of public sensitization programs on corruption in the build-up to the 2023 elections as a way of helping the electorate to choose credible candidates for political offices across the nation. It specifically focuses on marginalized voices within to integrate their voices into the anticorruption

crusade in the country. In achieving this, it partnered with the Fiscal Responsibility Commission in July to conscientize university students in Lagos tertiary institutions to serve as vanguards of anticorruption (Ewepu 2021b). Later on, in September, the organization launched Strengthening Accountability Networks Among Civil Society (SANCUS) in Nigeria, which is one of the 21 countries in which TI launched the project. The project focuses on strengthening civil society actors to works towards the entrenchment of transparency and accountability through the independence of anticorruption agencies, improve oversight of the legislature, promote the enforcement of laws and demand for accountability in the funding of political processes (Ewepu, 2021).

In November 2021, a group of journalists banded together to form the Media Anti-corruption Initiative, which is designed to leverage on various media platforms for advocacy for transparency and accountability within the Nigerian private and public spaces to enhance peaceful coexistence.

The Centre for Fiscal Transparency and Integrity Watch (CeFTIW), in its own stead, has developed several databases to track accountability within Nigerian public institutions including MDAs. This includes the Transparency Integrity Index which was officially presented to the public in September. It is also currently implementing the Strengthening Anti-Corruption in Nigeria Project which includes a collaborative evaluation of stakeholder bills in July, provision of technical support to the Senate Committee on Anti-Corruption and Financial Crimes on the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2017 – 2021) while engaging with other critical actors in government to enhance transparency in public office.

In Osun State, Urban Alert carried out investigations on the procedure of metering and has been calling out discos on fraudulent practices by some of its staff. It currently partners with Rave FM on a community program called ‘*Oju Eleri*’ (Eyewitness) which extracts reports from members of the public on issues of accountability and governance. In October, the organization requested details of the disbursement of food

items in the Osun Food Support Scheme to track the transparency and impact of the scheme in the state.

The FIJ launched its activities this year to expose incidents of corruption and injustice by focusing on the disadvantaged members of society. Their investigations have led to the arrest of corrupt police and Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) officers caught on camera while extorting motorists by the Lagos State Police Command in September; removal of a Head of Department from a Federal University in the Northeast by management for extorting students of about N3.3m in May; arrest of the proprietor of Bras Polytechnic for fake issuance of statements of results; as well as the exposure of about 10 hideouts in Lagos where hard drugs are traded with the connivance of members of the Nigerian police in July. The work of the foundation has also been useful for a transnational perspective with reference to the refund of tuition by a French university to a Nigerian whose tuition had been withheld for two years prior.²⁴

24 For details See www.fij.ng

The Human and Environment Development Agenda (HEDA) Resources Centre runs an Anti-corruption Situation Room where it does a quarterly event where stakeholders meet to update on anti-corruption issues. As part of its environmental advocacy, it conveyed a national dialogue to amplify issues of corruption, asset recovery, exploitation in the oil and gas sector and climate change as a contribution to the COP26 advocacy. It also collaborated with the African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICIMIL) in September to train journalists on the protection of whistle-blowers.

In November, Budgit partnered with the Paradigm Leadership Support Initiative (PLSI) and Civil Society Coalition on Audit in Nigeria (CSCAN) to request the release of an audited report by the federal government regarding the donations and expenses of the COVID-19 funds, while pointing out that accountability and transparency remain important in gaging the impacts of the interventions on members of the vulnerable group. It is also partnering with CODE on updating the FollowCovid19Money database along with other CSOs across Africa to demand accountability from governments across Africa regarding the management of the funds.

SERAP has instituted several legal actions against the federal government to demand accountability including a lawsuit filed in August at the Federal High Court in Lagos praying that the court request the government to release the details of the disbursement of N729bn to 24.3million Nigerians in 6 months.²⁵ In its September report, the organization highlighted how fraud perpetrated in budgeting and procurement by MDAs deny poor people access to potable water, health facilities, education and other essential facilities. More importantly, the report urged the President to propose an executive bill for the amendment of the Constitution to incorporate the justiciability of the socioeconomic rights of Nigerian citizens; and also, to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to guarantee accountability.

In Kano, CITAD tracks the progress of project implementation in the state through a radio program tagged 'Report a Project.' The project starts with a call for reports from students on badly executed projects in their communities, as a means of building the next generation of anti-

²⁵ See SERAP Press Release dated August 29, 2021



Photo credit: Pius Utomi Ekpei AFP/Getty Images



corruption crusaders. Then community members are then engaged through Freedom Radio Dutse on Thursdays for their feedbacks in order to call the attention of the relevant duty bearers on specific projects. The organization was also mobilised by the MacArthur Foundation to engage 25 social media influencers who develop content (short video skits, poetry, drama) on anti-corruption related themes for broadcast, print and new media.

Another MacArthur grantee, YIAGA Africa organized a national university debate captioned ‘Bounce Corruption National University Debate’ in July 2021 where six universities, drawn from across the six geopolitical zones, were invited to engage on issues of anticorruption, transparency and accountability with the University of Lagos winning the competition. The organization also held a virtual capacity building retreat between June and August 2021 for radio presenters drawn from different parts of the country, who were subsequently adopted as Radio Ambassadors, and equipped with the necessary skills to

effectively engage in anticorruption related discussions through their radio platforms.

2.6 Elections

As the country prepares towards the 2023 elections, the digital climate for elections has again become a paradox with the positive of the passage of the Electoral Bill with provisions allowing for electronic transmission on the one hand, and the susceptibility of the electorate to online misinformation, disinformation, hate speeches and fake news. As it were, one of the major highlights of the civic space was the passage of the Electoral Bill 2021 by the National Assembly. Major provisions in the proposed bill include enhancing the operational autonomy of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); protection of the voting rights of the visually impaired and giving INEC discretion on the adoption of a technologically driven electoral process - through biometric registration and accreditation, as well as electronic voting, collation, and transmission. The bill also recommended stiffer punishments for electoral related offences. PLAC did significant work to

facilitate the processes leading to the passage of the bill by working with INEC and the Electoral Matters Committees in both chambers of the National Assembly.

To apply pressure for quick passage of the bill, different groups of CSOs protested at the National Assembly while the bill was under consideration, including the Centre for Citizens with Disability (CCD), CDD, CLEEN Foundation, Inclusive Friends Association (IFA), Institute for Media and Society (IMS), International Press Centre (IPC), KIMPACT Development Initiative (KDI), Nigeria Women's Trust Fund (NWTF), Peering Advocacy and Advancement Centre in Africa (PAACA), PLAC, PTCIJ, The Albino Foundation, YIAGA Africa, Electoral Hub, Speak Out Africa Initiative, To Build a Nation, Centre for Development Alternatives Research and Studies, Raising New Voices, Ready To Lead Africa, Centre for Impact Advocacy, Aspilos Foundation, Millennials Active Citizenship Advocacy Africa among others. On October 12, 2021, the efforts of these organisations were rewarded when the harmonized version of the bill was passed by the Senate after the third reading with the provisions empowering INEC to prescribe methods of voting and transmission, including the use of electronic

voting machines; and mandating direct primaries and equal opportunities for aspirants to elective posts with INEC oversight. As at the time of writing this report, the bill is awaiting the assent of the President for it to be signed into law.

As part of its Advocacy towards enhancing the electoral process in Nigeria, The Electoral Hub commended INEC for implementing one of its recommendations to create a gender-specific department tagged Gender and Inclusivity Department, while it further pointed out the importance of digitizing the collation process by uploading result sheets at the ward, local government and state levels and the upload of electoral data and materials, and the enforcement of COVID-19 protocols during the polls amongst other recommendations. In September, the organisation launched the Electoral Forum which was designed as a platform for electoral bodies to engage with other key stakeholders on issues of reform of electoral laws and policies amongst other relevant issues around elections in Nigeria. Similarly, the NDI developed a program tagged the Democracy Corner, as part of its Sustaining Electoral Engagement for Democracy Programme, to build the capacity of locally based NGOs to foster the participation

of Nigerian citizens in the build-up to the 2023 elections. This is to help educate and rebuild the trust of citizens in the electoral process to enhance their participation. PLAC also carries out this same advocacy by developing content on elections materials to educate the Nigerian public on their rights and responsibilities during the election cycle.

CDD released a research report in November that focused on the political representation of women through an exploration of the challenges and opportunities for the political participation of women in politics across West Africa. In the just concluded November elections in Anambra State, the organization ran an Election Analysis Centre from the State and presented real-time updates on the elections as they happened. One of its major interventions included engaging with the Nigerian police on the security situation of the state to help manage the suspected challenge of voter apathy while, raising concerns about malfunctioning of Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) machines, which could result in the denial of eligible voters in the exercise of their constitutional rights.

As part of its trademark activities in the engagement of youths to contest for elective positions, YIAGA Africa engages students in tertiary education on active participation through the electoral cycle via its Campus Conversation Series. The program has highlighted the importance of creating partnerships between student union governments and political parties to foster mentorship for youths with aspiration to elective positions. This program has also helped in convincing students to register to vote during the upcoming elections, while others have committed to joining political parties to contest. Two of the series have been organised at the Federal University of Technology in Minna and the University of Abuja, in October and November 2021 respectively. Currently, the organization has followed up the successes of the passage of the Age Reduction Bill in 2018, with the Ready to Run project that provides support for intending aspirants through access to personnel and resources around selecting political parties, media publicity, campaign financing, and development of effective manifestoes.²⁶ It also carries out citizen-driven oversight on the electoral processes through its 'Watch the

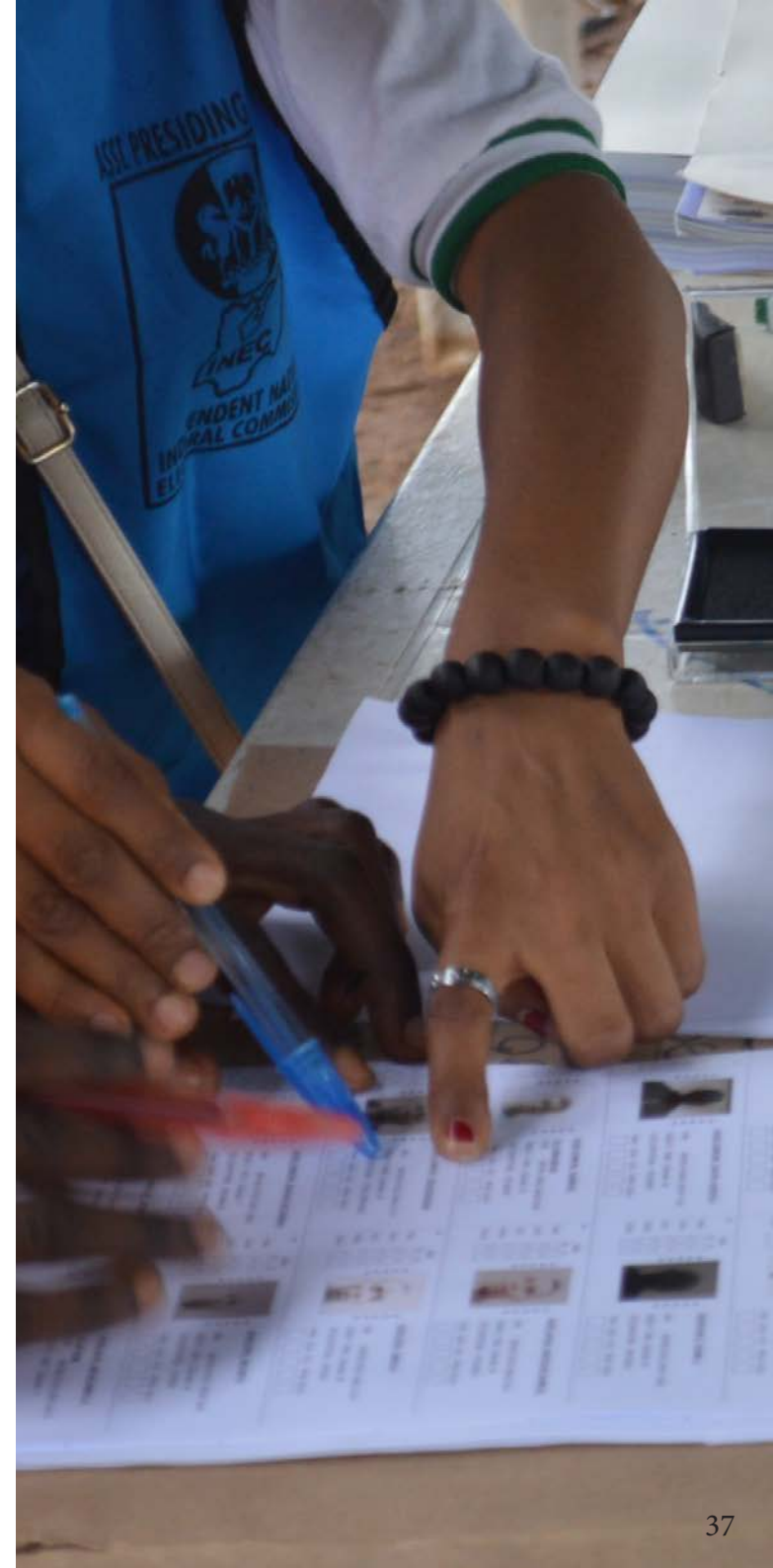
²⁶ See <https://readytorunng.org/>

Vote' Project where it validates the credibility of election results through real-time SMS updates from citizen observers at polling locations.²⁷

The Kukah Centre has also been providing technical support for the National Peace Committee as its secretariat and has been responsible for the signing of the National Peace Accord during which political aspirants vying for governorship and presidential elections are brought together to commit to working towards peaceful electoral processes. The centre facilitated the signing of the peace accord in the build-up to the Anambra Gubernatorial elections on November 6, 2021, where 11 governorship candidates signed the peace accord two days to the elections.

Regarding the Anambra Elections, PLAC continued its coordination of the secretariat of the

²⁷ See <https://watchingthevote.org/>



Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR) which monitored and provided credible updates on the conduct of the elections as part of its efforts to ensure good governance in the country. The Carmelites Prisoners' Interest Organisation (CAPIO) is building a partnership with INEC on protecting the rights of prisoners to vote during the 2023 elections, as part of its Pollrite 23 project. The project targets communities who are affected by voter apathy and have low turnout during the elections and is incorporating inmates at the custodial centres of the Nigerian Correctional Service into the project. CAPIO is engaging with different stakeholders to create a framework for holding elections at the custodial centres including the availability of election material and facilities including INEC help desks.

2.7 Advocacy on Gender Responsiveness

The gender²⁸ gap in Nigeria remains one of the key advocacy areas of the CSO society in Nigeria

²⁸ While this report recognizes the ongoing advocacy for people to self-identify their gender beyond the conventional categorization of male and female, the word gender in this report is used with reference to this category based on the context of CSO operation in Nigeria in 2021.

from the context of gender-mainstreaming into the political process to the importance of protecting women from domestic and other forms of gender-based violence, CSOs have continued engagement with key stakeholders. In 2021, they have continued their engagement with decision-makers on taking the lead by incorporating gender-sensitive policies and laws within their spheres of influence, while also carrying out grassroots engagements to enlighten women in disadvantaged communities on the provisions of the law regarding their rights.

The Foundation for Resilient Empowerment (FRED) through The Livelihood Pathways Programme funded by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Spotlight Initiative) empowered 87 women survivors of sexual abuse through skill acquisition on fashion design, events management, and culinary arts. In May, Action Aid supported Honour Birth Foundation in Owerri Imo State to reverse cultural norms that combat violence against women through an open declaration of the traditional rulers to abolish female genital mutilation and

other harmful practices.²⁹ Earlier in March, the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD) donated school wears, writing materials and school bags to girls in Adamawa State as part of its Community-led Collective Action for Girls Education (C-CAGE) with the help of the Malala Foundation. This project has helped in the enrolment of about 910 girls in schools and the provision of 16 safe spaces for their vocational training and numeracy education.

In Borno State, Plan International is countering Gender-based violence through its Girls Get Equal Project, which is designed to support girl rights campaigners chosen from among the community to address education deficits and counter sexual abuse as well as trafficking of the girl-child. The girl-child advocates are advocating for the inclusion of sexual harassment policy in every organization in the country.³⁰ In May

²⁹ See Swift: ActionAid Nigeria Triannual Newsletter. Issue 12 April-July 2021

³⁰ See Meet the Students Campaigning for Girls' Rights. <https://plan-international.org/case-studies/meet-students-campaigning-girls-rights> Sisters Fight against Patriarchy in Nigeria. <https://plan-international.org/case-studies/sisters-fight-against-patriarchy-nigeria>

2021, the CLEEN Foundation partnered with the UN Women and the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) on the Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria project to build the capacity of community-based organizations in Lagos towards the development of gender-responsive laws and policies to be able to protect young women and girls from national and transnational human trafficking networks (NANb, 2021).³¹ In building the capacity of young girls for self-defence while in danger, the Youth Empowerment Foundation trained school girls in Oyo State in July on using martial arts to protect themselves from assault.³² The Women's Rights and Health Project (WRAHP) has been working to protect the rights of Women living with disabilities in Lagos State to highlight the need to protect them for GBVs. In April, they carried out an enlightenment campaign on the relevant laws that protects them from all sorts of abuses and violence, including domestic violence and also empower them to be able to have access to justice in the event of abuses. The organization also carried out training of

³¹ The Same event was earlier held in Benin City in February 2021.

³² See Facebook Page Youth Empowerment Foundation

trainers for 30 young girls in Edo on the VAPP law to make them ambassadors of proselytizing the law, while working towards its domestication in Edo State. The project is designed to engage with key stakeholders including security agents, the media, and workers in the Ministry of Justice on how to protect women and girls from GBVs, while ensuring that the domesticated law in the state, when finalized, is made available to the public by sharing 5000 copies of the law within the state.

The Youth Alive Foundation fostered the advocacy for the passage and implementation

of the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act in different States where they are yet to be passed. which has been passed into law in several State Houses of Assembly in 2021. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) for instance, supported the passage of the bill in Ondo and Bayelsa States, while organizing a conference to get the support of the male-folk as champions of the bill. The advocacy is to consolidate the provisions on the protection of women, girls and people living with disabilities from assault and all forms of violence.

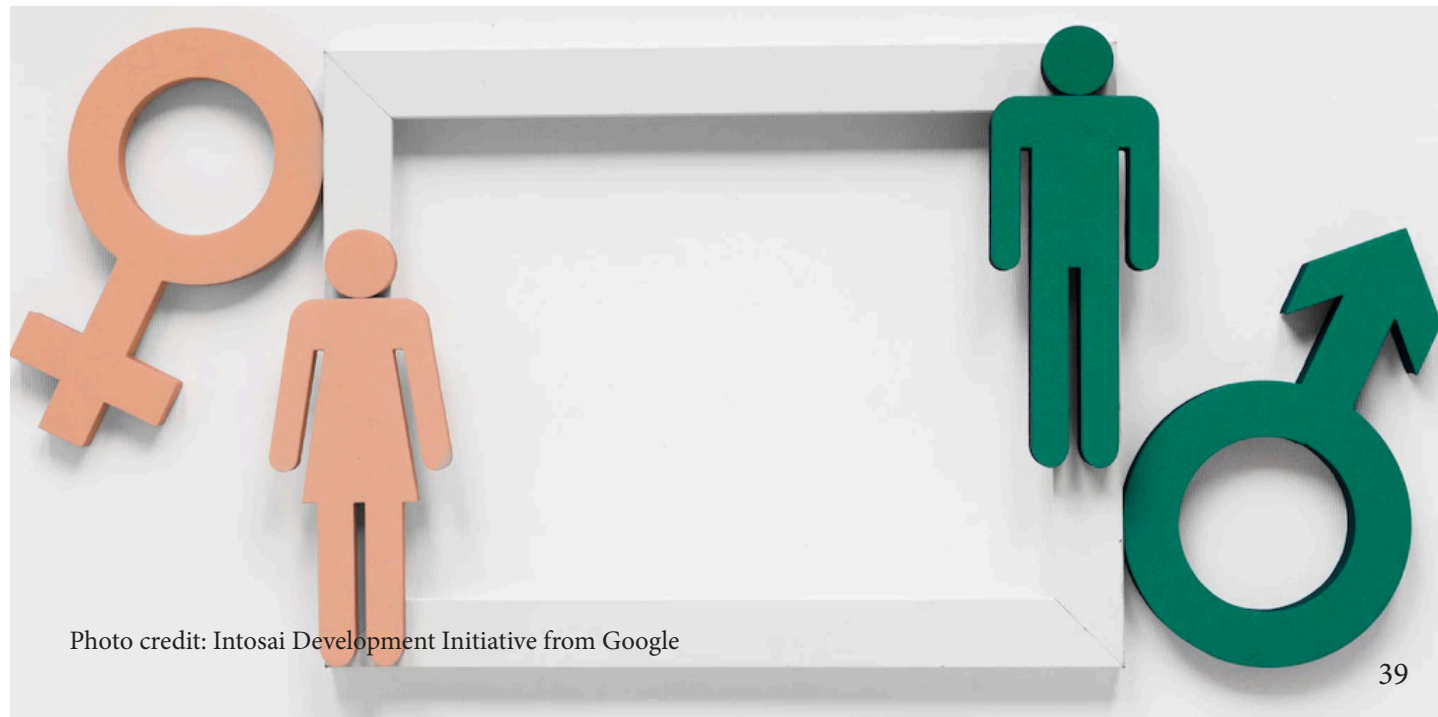


Photo credit: Intosai Development Initiative from Google

As part of its advocacy, the 100 Women Lobby Group continues its advocacy with the House of Representatives by training Members on gender-responsive budgeting, and also researched the political participation of women to foster their engagement with women in political parties, party leaders and government duty bearers. In March, the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) engaged with the traditional rulers in Plateau State on mainstreaming gender into their administrative procedures by providing a gender desk in their palaces specifically designated for women issues, especially regarding GBVs. They also canvassed for the traditional rulers to join the advocacy for the enactment and implementation of gender-responsive laws in the state.

With respect to ending harmful cultural practices, Hacey, a youth-led organization working on health issues and empowerment for women and youths, is partnering with the UN Trust Fund to engage local NGOs in Ekiti, Oyo and Osun States to end the prevalence of Female Gender mutilation by building the capacity of survivors, community leaders, security agents and community-based organisations in contributing their quota to ending the practice.

In terms of women empowerment, Connected Development (CODE) partnered with UN Women to mainstream women in the decision-making processes for the COVID-19 interventions in Kaduna state. This included building the capacity of female community champions³³ to lead the campaigns, documentary of interviews with female leaders in both the private and public sectors in the state, the signing of the pledge card for women empowerment by public officials and the use of social media for engagement with the hashtag #GenderResponsiveness, as well as radio engagements via Invicta FM in the state. In November, CODE announced the continuation of its advocacy against gender-based violence in Kano with the aim of developing an action plan for the state to end all forms of gender-based violence, adopt and implement the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act and the Child's Rights Act.

The Association of Public Health Physicians of Nigeria launched its advocacy during its June conference to continue its campaign for the end to violence against women. The Initiative to Resist Institutional Slavery and Exploitation

³³ 12 men were also included in this initiative

(IRISE) coordinated the launch of the One Billion Rising (OBR)³⁴ global campaign in Nigeria in November 2020. This year's theme 'Rising Gardens' was framed around ending the exploitation of women's bodies in connection to land and resources in Africa, feminism in Nigeria, women's influence in the EndSARS protests among other allied topics. In October, the OBR Nigeria released a statement with respect to the killings in Sokoto, Niger and Kaduna states calling on the global community,

³⁴ The OBR campaign is the initiative of the V-Day global activist movement, which intersects gender and environmental advocacies in fighting for the plight of women with an estimation that about 1 billion women will either be beaten or raped during their lifetime.

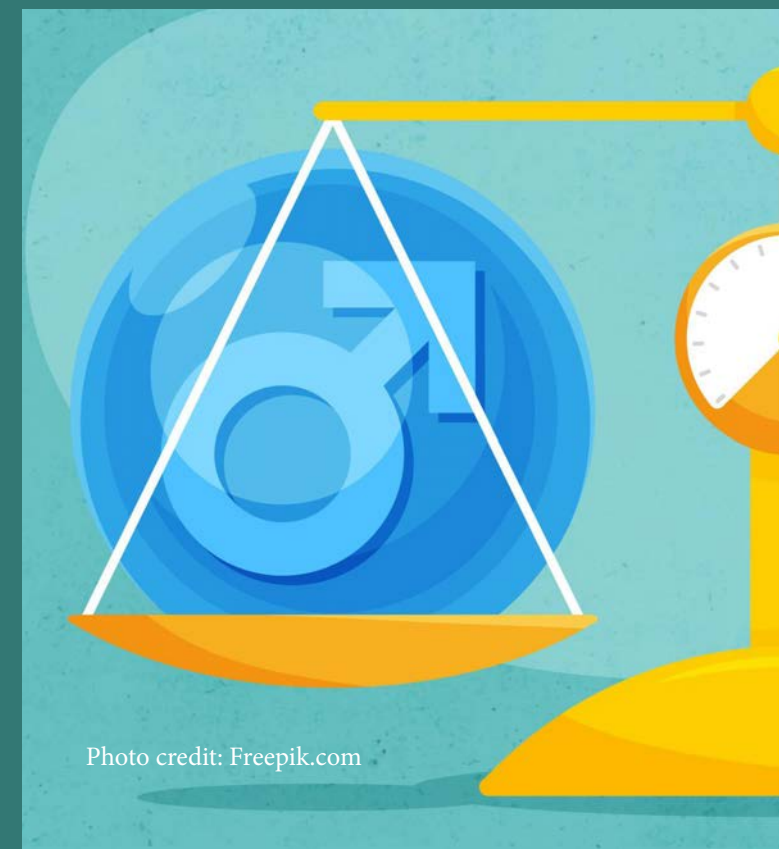
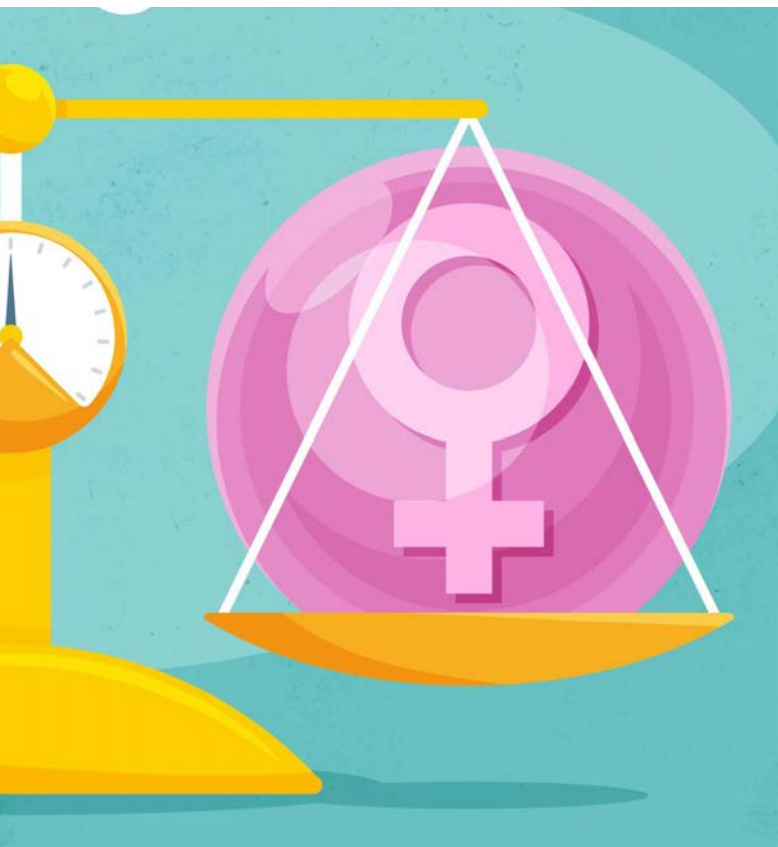


Photo credit: Freepik.com

ECOWAS leaders and the Nigerian government to make -non-adversarial interventions.

The African Centre for Entrepreneurship and Development (ACIEDEV) has continued to engage with women at the grassroots to encourage active political participation and improve their livelihood. The organization provided support for women in the agricultural value chain and empowered them through different skill acquisition programs to include the production of soap and organic spices, as



well as baking. In September, Global Rights, in partnership with the Environmental Justice Foundation called world leaders to take action regarding the protection of climate refugees, with special mention of the need to prioritize care for women and girls who are disproportionately affected when displaced from their communities due to natural disaster.

As at the time of this report, there is ongoing advocacy by a coalition of CSOs to canvas for support of 'A Bill for An Act to Alter the Provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to Create Additional Special Seats for Women in the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly, that was introduced in the House of Representatives in April. In September, the Supporting Advancement of Gender Equality (SAGE) partnered with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to organize a Nigeria Men's Conference on Gender Sensitive Constitutional Reforms to garner support for the bill among key stakeholders drawn from the Senate, State Houses of Assembly, traditional rulers, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Interior (Jannamike and Ekpong, 2021). PLAC has produced awareness materials in mobilizing

support for the bill by simplifying the content and making it available to relevant stakeholders to ensure speedy passage.³⁵

2.8 Disability rights

The signing into law of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 by President Muhammadu Buhari on January 23, 2019, signalled significant progress in terms of the advocacy for inclusion of people living with disabilities.³⁶ The importance of this bill is highlighted in a 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey carried out by the Nigerian Population Commission that reflected that at least 1% of the population had great difficulty or dysfunctional faculties in exercising their abilities to hear, see, know, communicate, walk or take care of themselves independently. The study likewise reflected that about 7% of the members of the household that were surveyed that were over the age of 5 had at least some form of challenge in one of the aforementioned areas. When this

35 See Special Seats for Women in the Nigerian Legislature. Bill Analysis <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Special-Seats-for-Women-in-the-Nigerian-Legislature.pdf> August 2021 Edition

36 Hitherto, Nigeria ratified the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), and its 2010 Optional Protocol. See Ewang (2019).

is juxtaposed with a total population of over 200 million people, it reflects a significant number of the population that is being discriminated against based on their disabilities. Among other things, the law mandated the restructuring of public infrastructure and automobiles to accommodate people living with disabilities (PWDs), reservation of 5% employment opportunities for PWDs, while also proposing the establishment of a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities led by an Executive Secretary for the protection of their socioeconomic and legal rights (see Ewang, 2019). The Commission was established in August 2020 as part of the efforts to commence the implementation of the provisions of the Act (Adeshida, 2021).

While it was quite significant that the bill was passed into law, the implementation of the bill has constituted a major point for advocacy among key stakeholders in the CSO working on disability rights, as the government seems not to have done much regarding the practical aspects of protecting disability rights. In July, the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities International Inc. continued to engage with the House of

Representatives (HoR) on their current efforts to amend the Constitution while it considered the 'Bill for an Act to Amend the Provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) to Provide for Inclusion and Protection of Persons with Disabilities. The bill, among other things, provides for the inclusion of PWDs in the president's ministerial cabinet and also empowers the National and State Houses of Assembly to make consistent laws regarding the welfare of PWDs.³⁷ The HoR had established the House Standing Committee on Disabilities in December 2020 following campaigns by disability rights groups and adoption of the 2018 Disabilities Act.

In May, the Joint National Association of Persons Living with Disabilities (JONAPWD), as part of its advocacy for the domestication and implementation of the Act at the state level, called out the Taraba State government on its perceived discrimination of PWDs by questioning their exemption from the COVID-19 Task Force in the State and the absorption of just 22,000 of them into the civil service, while there are quite a greater number of those that qualified. In June,

³⁷ The focus on the Constitutional Amendment is on the repeal of section 12 of the Constitution, which at present contradicts some provisions of the Disability Rights Act

CCD commemorated the 10th year anniversary of the Special Peoples Law in Lagos State while calling out the MDAs charged with the implementation of the Law, which has not been very effective since it was passed.

Since 2018, the BBC Media Action has been carrying out advocacy for PWDs in Nigeria, with specific focus on integrating them into the formal



Photo credit: The Guardian Newspaper Website

employment sector through partnership on radio programming with local stations. It carries out this advocacy as part of the Inclusive Futures Consortium, alongside other disabilities-friendly programmes on different media platforms that advocate against COVID-19 related exclusion and stigmatization of PWDs.³⁸

38 See <https://inclusivefutures.org/projects-in-nigeria/>



Another major organization that is active in the Inclusive Futures Consortium is the Sightsavers, working with school management in Kaduna State to build the capacity of teachers and school administrators with respect to incorporating disability-inclusive educational practices into 8 schools within the state; collaborating with state and non-state actors to improve services at the local eye care systems in Kogi State and audit of accessibility at COVID-19 testing, isolation and treatment centres.³⁹ Regarding the exclusion of PWDs during the pandemic, the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) pointed out that as of August 19, no one in the Lagos PWD cluster has been vaccinated (Akoni, 2021).

The Irede Foundation is focused on making at least 70 limbs available to kids in 2021, which is part of its efforts to make limbs affordable to child amputees, especially in its bid to reduce discrimination against them. It has also been canvassing for government support to those who manufacture artificial limbs to facilitate accessibility and reduction in the cost of the limbs. The foundation commemorates the Limb

39 See <https://inclusivefutures.org/projects-in-nigeria/>

Awareness Month every April as part of its efforts to reduce stigmatization against amputees.

In June, the African Polling Institute (API) embarked on the collation of disaggregated information to create a national database for PWDs to facilitate their inclusion, as part of its Nigeria Disability Research Project. This project is to be carried out in four phases which include collaborating with the National Bureau of Statistics on the creation and management of the national database, replicating the same initiative at the state level by working with state governments and the academia, building the research capacities of PWDs and conducting research on SGBV committed against PWDs.⁴⁰ In the same month, the Disability Rights Advocacy Centre (DRAC) led other stakeholders drawn from Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, the National Health Insurance Scheme, National Population Commission, and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to develop a white paper on the collation of disaggregated data of PWDs. The aim is to track the progress on the collation of data to enhance the interventions of the commission, various

40 Social Inclusion: Institute Advocates Accurate Data of PWDs in Nigeria. Daily Trust, Wednesday June 16, 2021.



Photo credit: Bright Magazine from Google

MDAs and CSOs in terms of the inclusivity of PWDs (Zenda, 2021). Earlier in the Year, DRAC had requested that the federal government make a desk available to cater to the needs of women PWDs in all medical centres across the country to equal access to quality healthcare.

Outside of the engagement with government, the Project Enable Africa is engaging with the private sector regarding disability rights. In February, the organization launched the second edition of its Business Support Programme for female PWDs entrepreneurs to increase their profit margin and help expand the coverage of their business operations. It also carried out training for 50 corporate organisations in March, on themes related to initiating, implementing, and auditing disability inclusion policies in the workplace. DRAC has been at the forefront of inclusion, especially for Nigerian females living with disabilities. In March, the organization trained 420 women and 48 girls in 7 area council of the FCT on how to build their confidence through effective communication and negotiations skills, while it also distributed 167 devices to PWD females.⁴¹

⁴¹ See DRAC Distributes 167 Devices to Aid Women, Girls with Disabilities. <https://nnn.ng/drac-distributes-devices-aid/>

They have also been involved in organizing townhall meetings at the grassroots to sensitive communities on the importance of educating girls with disabilities, organizing leadership trainings with female PWDs and running an empowerment scheme through its Village Savings and Loans Associations for PWDs in rural communities to aid their financial independence.

2.9 Youth Inclusion

One of the major fallouts of the EndSARS protest was the aura of visibility that youth activism garnered within the Nigerian public space, a rave that was similar to the passage of the Age reduction bill. Increasingly, young persons have continued to contribute their quota, specifically leveraging on technological tools to amplify their voices. The emerging nature of youth participation in Nigeria's civic space has been described as leaderless due to the purportedly spontaneous nature of the protests and its coordination in cells of multiple leadership structures. One major reason for this is the hybrid nature of online and physical protests which has increasingly become characteristic of the global civic space,

with influencers repositioning as leaders in the digital media, while the social media is used for organizing. Suffice to say that the influencers have largely been composed of celebrities, mostly in their youth, that have huge followership running into thousands and millions, and are able to engage with multiple audiences in real-time. Within this new wave, the CSO space has also witnessed the emergence of youth leaders who are engaging to create change within their communities from technovation, to accountability and peace and security.

In September, the Nigeria Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security comprising about 30 youth-led organisations concluded its collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports and Development and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution through the launch of a national action plan with respect to domesticating the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security in September 2021. This achievement made Nigeria the first country in Africa and the second in the world behind Finland to domesticate the resolution.

In October, the Nigerian Youth SDGs Network launched its Speak Up, Stand Up Program designed for Nigerian youth activists to make interventions around education, employment, governance, peace, and security. As part of the project implementation plan, it selected 20 youth leaders to work with about 520 youths in Abuja, Lagos, and Enugu on the four thematic areas, towards the realization of the development agenda in their communities.⁴²

PLAC continued its annual legislative internship program in June, which is designed to train youths on legislative processes and enhance their participation in politics. This year included 40 interns drawn from Nigeria's 6 geopolitical zones engaged in three months of intensive training on the workings of the National Assembly and other democratic institutions in the country. It also put out a call for this year's PLAC Policy Engagement Essay Challenge targeted at Nigerian youths to share innovative ideas on how citizens could better engage with policymakers.⁴³

⁴² See <https://nigerianyouthsdgs.org/announcing-the-20-activists-for-the-speak-up-stand-out-program/>

⁴³ See <https://placng.org/i/events/plac-policy-engagement-challenge/>

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung organises an Open Mind Young Voices initiative for youth activists in the country and welcomed its 4th cohort of 26 potential leaders in March. The youths are empowered with skills of activist engagements across different sectors to be able to effectively engage different stakeholders on diverse aspects of social justice. In line with this, the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Nigeria Delta runs a 6-month vocational skills training for youths known as the Delta Youth Employment Program. The scheme targets disadvantaged youths for entrepreneurial and technical trainings in Agriculture, ICT, Building Construction and Services sectors in order to make them independent and crime-free.⁴⁴

Hacey, a youth-led organization working on health issues and empowerment for women and youths has been engaging with young girls in tertiary institutions across the Southwestern states on issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) through its Youth Amplify Project. About 100 champions were trained on how

⁴⁴ See also <https://pindfoundation.org/delta-youth-employment-program-technical-vocational-skills-training/>

to develop content and use the digital media in amplifying issues of SRH. It also partnered with the United Nations Population Fund Youth Participatory Platform (UNFPA) to educate over 100,000 youths across Oyo, Lagos, Osun and Ekiti on SRH issues through the Beyond Treatment For You Project (BT4U) as part of its advocacy for preventive practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic, while carrying out free HIV testing services. The Youth Empowerment Foundation collaborated with Prime Sports to organize a football tournament among youths in tertiary institutions in Lagos tagged Kick Off 2021 as part of its enlightenment campaign to debunk myths being circulated on COVID-19 vaccines and HIV/AIDS.

The Urban Alert is a youth-driven organization that engage youths in demanding accountability in Nigeria's Southwest region. The organization has continued to focus on monitoring the implementation of government projects in Osun State and has been using the social media to call out the government on abandoned projects that deprive citizens of access to essential facilities. In 2021, it is partnering with the University of Ife



Photo credit: Tope. A Asokere from www.unsplash.com



on an issue of environmental justice by carrying out a scientific investigation on the Osun River. The physicochemical and microbiological tests have revealed that the water from the river is heavily contaminated with cyanide, mercury, and lead. The research is the first part of its advocacy towards the restoration of the river, as it continues its engagement with the government, community leaders and development partners on next steps to cleaning up the river.

In terms of youth inclusion, YES is implementing the ‘Sorosoke’ project in the 5 states of the Southeast in the bid to improve the participation of the youth in terms of engagement with security agents and governance issues in general. This project was initiated as part of efforts to preclude confrontation with the police as part of the lessons learnt from the EndSARS project. UNICEF also runs a Youth Mediathon project which helps develop the skills of youths between the age of 16 and 22 in creating content for online advocacy. In line with the activism that accompanied the CoP26 meeting this year, some Nigerian youths from the project used arts to lend their voices to the importance of youth inclusion in the various

decision-making processes for protecting the environment through the ‘Save Environment’ Project.⁴⁵ In building responsible leadership among youths, the Nigeria for Change Initiative supported the advocacy for the amendment of the Fiscal Responsibility Act towards ensuring that a culture of transparency and due diligence in terms of the government’s financial management strategy at all levels.\

2.10 Digital Activism

The Twitter ban in Nigeria in June was an indication of the momentum that online activism has been gaining in the country. While it was banned for allegedly threatening Nigeria’s corporate existence, the impact of the digital space in mobilizing support from an estimated 104 million Nigerians that have access to the internet⁴⁶ (see Johnson, 2021), and millions of others in the diaspora reflects that the cyberspace

⁴⁵ See Save Our Environment: A Creative Plea for Urgent Climate Action. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/save-our-environment>

⁴⁶ This estimate puts the internet penetration in the country at about 51.44 percent, with three quarters of its web traffic generated from smart phones.

has increasingly become a viable platform for civic engagement. In spite of the large number of users, it is also important to highlight the inequality that exists across the digital divide in terms of internet accessibility as a lot of people in Nigeria are disenfranchised based on the class of their economic income, gender, literacy level and place of habitude. Suffice to state that the reaction from the Nigerian government is not a peculiar one, as there is a growing trend on censoring the use of the internet as part of the plans to clamp down on opposition, since the launch of the digital civic space through SMS activism. Roberts and Ali (2021) supported this claim when they postulated that there are five major means adopted for the closure of digital space under the guise of regulations by governments on the African continent. These include digital surveillance, disinformation, internet shutdowns, legislation, and arrests from online activities. In its release during the first-year anniversary of the #EndSARS protests in October, the Action Group on Free Civic Space (AGFCS)⁴⁷ stated that Nigeria is experiencing

⁴⁷ This action group is a coalition of 61 organisations launched in 2018 as a fallout of Spaces for Change's exchange hub on Nigeria's closing civic space in the aftermath of the proposed 2015 Anti-Social Media / Hate Speech Bill (see Pugh and Doane, 2019).

an era of digital unfreedom in an unprecedented manner (Akinrefon et al, 2021), with increasing surveillance activities, disregard for digital regulations including the interception of digital communications to target media practitioners, dissenting voices and civil defenders by digital authoritarians.

On specific instances of digital activism, Action Aid coordinated its environmental activism tagged #EARTHWALK through the digital platform in support of climate justice to coincide with the International Rural Women's Day in October and as a means of calling out world leaders meeting in Glasgow for the CoP26 conference. While individuals were encouraged to register online, the walk was to be monitored by linking the registration to the smartphones.⁴⁸ The UN Women is continuing its advocacy on ending gender-based violence through its viral online campaign of 16 days of activism with different groups in Nigeria virtually participating by showing their solidarity using this year's theme: Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!

⁴⁸ Facebook Post on Action Aid Facebook page on October 14, 2021.

Digital activists like Budgit have used online tools and the social media platform to monitor the implementation of Nigeria's government policies while also scrutinizing the activities of the mining organizations (Oladapo and Ojebode, 2021). It created a project-tracking tool called Tracka, which is citizen-driven as it allows citizens to post pictures of development projects in their communities. Its trademark intervention is in its simplification of data on Nigeria's budgeting processes and the disbursement of funds to foster transparency by government institutions. Spaces for change runs an online database known as Closing Civic Space which documents the threats against the civic space across Nigeria and WestAfrica and it focuses on seven categories namely violations against freedom of association, press freedom, freedom of expression, political restrictions, digital closure and surveillance, anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism and anti-NGO bills and restrictive laws since 2015.⁴⁹ Several NGOs including PTCIJ (dubawa), CITAD, CDD (factcheck), ICFJ Knight Nigeria Programme (#FactsMatterNG), and AFP (Africa Check) have online platforms where

they provide alternative narratives to counter the circulation of fake news and hate speech. These projects include developing posters, video skits, podcasts, hashtags, and short messages from factual sources having cross-checked the truth or falsehood of information that are being circulated online.



Photo credit: www.orfonline.org

As part of the embrace of the new normal, a lot of CSO activities have embraced the virtual platform using Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and other available web applications to conduct meetings, as well as host lectures, webinars, and conferences entirely online in virtual formats. While leveraging on the ability for mass mobilization that the digital space presents, a lot of NGOs are engaging increasingly with influencers to amplify their events, as with the ongoing mobilization of influencers by CITAD to develop content in fighting against corruption in Nigeria. In July 2021, PLAC launched the first edition of PLAC Beam which is a platform designed to document the CSO space in Nigeria by highlighting issues, activities, resources and impacts of NGOs in Nigeria. PLAC Beam is an updated online platform for data gathering, with an online news magazine (named after the platform) as one of its major outputs to educate the public on historical and current events in the Nigerian civil society space.⁵⁰

50 See <https://placbeam.com/>

Sourcing for NGO funding has also assumed a digital model with the increasing use of crowdsourcing platforms to generate funds for different interventions. There is the Lagos-based Donate-NG that has worked with over 200 charities and NGOs to raise funds for different causes including medical, academic, legal, environmental, and humanitarian causes. Similarly, Global Giving, a Washington based organization has supported various causes including anti-trafficking initiatives, prevention of stigma, education, medical and gender rights in Nigeria.⁵¹

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES



Photo credit: Lagos Food Bank

3.1 COVID-19 pandemic and Impact on CSOs

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging period, especially with the enforcement of certain measures to curtail the spread. With the global consensus on reducing contacts through social distancing, the restrictions on movements (including curfews) and the number of persons that can congregate at events being significantly reduced, the operational mode of CSO interventions has also been greatly affected. In line with this, the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) noted that the 2021 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Health Protection Regulations contributed to the shrinking of the Nigerian civic space, with provisions that contrasted those of the Open Government and the Coronavirus⁵². Among other things, its observation that the wide range of discretionary powers given to state agents and the omission of timelines for restrictions facilitates abuses has been validated in reported cases of abuses by state agents and private security personnel who engaged in arbitrary arrests and assaulted Nigerian citizens, including civil society actors.

⁵² This is a resource guide by the Open Government Partnership (OGP) to aid OGP members response to the pandemic

In terms of the operational dynamics of the workspace, a significant number of civil society organisations are still working from home, and this has affected effective field interventions as it has been more difficult to coordinate communities for gatherings with the restrictions and low rates of vaccination, which has a ripple effect of low attendance at meetings due to fear of contracting the virus. It also meant that outdoor events have ended up being cancelled, while some human rights activists have been harassed and arrested by law enforcement officers and charged with the violation of the enforcement protocols. Quite a number of organisations have also cut down the number of their staff for what they refer to as operational efficiency, with some INGOs closing certain programming operations in Nigeria, while others have restrained overseas travel due to the burdensome requirements for cross-country movements due to border closures.

For some organisations, there are reports on the reduction of staff efficiency as some have suffered from mental-health related issues resulting from the effects of losses of loved ones suffered during the pandemic. The reduction in staff remuneration due to pay cuts or outright

termination of contracts and being requested to work from home for an extended period have also affected some CSO staff's mental health in Nigeria. However, some organisations have mentioned that remote operations have helped them to cut some running costs and keep their organisations from folding up. Similarly, while most international humanitarian organisations confirmed that they have access to safety kits to protect frontline staff during the delivery and administration of humanitarian aid, most locally based organizations, especially those with operational coverage reduced to marginal communities lack access to these essential kits and face significant risks of infections during the operations. UNOCHA specifically highlighted the Northeast as one of the most affected regions, resulting from worse security and access constraints due to the peculiar nature of being affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. This led to the allocation of around \$23.8m of the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund (NHF), with priority given to locally based NGOs as part of its localization efforts with the consortium allocation strategy.⁵³

⁵³ Nigeria Humanitarian Fund: \$23.8 Million to Address Critical Humanitarian Needs in North-East Nigeria. Press Release by the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund dated November 2, 2021.

In terms of harassments, state agents used the excuse of Covid-19 regulation of social distancing to commit assaults at gatherings during protests as well as prevent people from accessing essential services rendered by CSOs. Some organisations are also still working remotely, and this has affected several engagements that would have been carried out physically. With the third wave already being experienced in Europe, the indication is that it is only a matter of time before measures are reinforced across the country; and this would make the civic space more vulnerable to harassment by state agents.



Photo credit: Lagos Food Bank

3.2 Regulation of civic space

The passage of the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 generated a lot of controversies regarding some of its provisions included in Part F, specifically Sections 838, 839 and 842. According to the ICNL, the CSO sector is also subject to other additional legal frameworks which include the Companies Income Tax Act 2006, Taxes and Levies Act 1998, Value Added Tax 1993, VAT Amendment Act 2007, Federal Inland Revenue Service (Establishment) Act 2007, National Planning Commission Act 2013, The Money Laundering Prohibition Act 2011 (as Amended) and Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011.⁵⁴ Earlier in 2019, the Borno State government passed the Agency for Coordination of Development and Humanitarian Response Bill into law, which created an agency to regulate the activities of INGOs, NGOs and development partners in the state by introducing additional procedures for reviewing and approving their workplan. The attempt of burdening the sector with excessive regulations have come with the allegations of lack of transparency and accountability by some

⁵⁴ See Nigeria. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/nigeria>

organisations, which have been highlighted above with the SCUML mandate. However, these frameworks contain provisions that make CSOs vulnerable to abuses of government agents and officials who have been reported to be manipulating them to deprive them of their fundamental freedoms, as some organisations have been subjects of harassment resulting from allegations of money laundering and links to terrorism without substantial evidence.

The intentionality of the government in imposing its force of law within the civic space had been hallmarked with the response of the state to the EndSARS protests of October 2020, with the recently submitted report of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry on Restitution for Victims of SARS Related Abuses and Other Matters documenting that crimes against humanity were committed at the Lekki Toll Gate on October 20, 2020. While the White Paper on the report by the committee set up by the Lagos State government is being awaited, the evidence of the aggression of state agents in trying to enforce the regulation of the civic space was recorded during demonstrations on this year's Democracy Day. The officers

of the Nigerian Police Force, as has become customary under this dispensation, teargassed, assaulted (including the seizure and destruction of mobile devices), shot at and arrested peaceful protesters who came out to display their displeasure with bad governance, the Twitter ban, dwindling economy and the insecurity.⁵⁵ The police had maintained that the protests were unauthorized, which is a confirmation of the government's efforts to prevent dissenting opinion in violation of the constitutional rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as provided for in Sections 39 and 40 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended.

CSOs in Nigeria have also been working towards resisting the government's attempts at creating further restrictions on the civic space by taking different measures. For instance, a coalition of four CSOs working on media freedom - including the PTCIJ, IPC, MRA, and Centre for Media Law and Advocacy (CMLA), opposed a bill

⁵⁵ See Nigeria: Police Fire Tear Gas in 'Democracy Day' Protests. *Aljazeera*, Saturday June 12, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/12/police-fire-tear-gas-to-break-up-nigeria-protests> Accessed October 21, 2021

was proposed in 2019 to amend the Nigerian Press Council Act through a joint memorandum presented during the public hearing of the bill by the House Committee on Information, National Orientation, Ethics and Values on June 17. The bill among other things had sought to make the members of the council's board the predominantly government appointees, development of the press code (including the regulation of the conduct of media practitioners) by the Minister of Information while prescribing punitive measures to media institutions and practitioners, and determination of the registration of media outfits; thereby making them vulnerable to abuses.⁵⁶ The Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO) also challenged the bill on the ground that it could prejudice a pending case against it at the Supreme Court (Itodo and Alkassim, 2021). Suffice to state that among there are draconian provisions in Nigeria's extant laws that stifle the freedom of the press and the civic space in general, including the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Cyber Crimes Act, the National Broadcasting Commission Act, the Criminal Code Act, the Penal Code Act, the Official Secrets Act, the

⁵⁶ Details of these provisions were contained in Sections 3, 17 and 33 of the amendment



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Obscene Publications Act (see Olorunyomi, 2021) and the Miscellaneous Offences Act.

As a response to the clampdown on the civic space, the Agent for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) Programme of the British Council organized a virtual dialogue for about 50 CSOs in May around the regulatory context of CSOs in Nigeria, with the bid to establish a technical committee to drive the process of creating a self-regulatory framework. A committee with about 15 members is currently working on conceptualizing the regulatory document. In the meantime, it remains difficult for new NGOs to get their registration done with longer delays, while leaving room for abuse by some staff of the CAC in denying credible organisations certificates of incorporation. Regarding the review of aspects of CAMA, PLAC has been involved in shuttle diplomacy and eventually facilitated a meeting of the CSOs with the Acting Chair of the Senate Committee on NGOs where certain amendments have been proposed to the Act.

The Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation has also been providing support for the National Human Rights Commission through a redesign of its reporting platform to allow effective management process of the cases of abuses that are brought before the commission. It has also been carrying out evidence-based advocacy by supporting research, developing content using video vignettes and flashcards which it is disseminating through different social media platforms to make them effective.

3.3 CSOs and the Management of Threats to Democratic Governance

As highlighted above, the challenges to democratic practice in Nigeria have been reflected in the threats to the Nigerian civic space. The divisive nature of agitations, which are often advocated along ethnoreligious lines, political rivalries and corruption have all contributed to the call for change, amidst other global factors including climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The default response of the

government has often reflected a confrontational approach in which these agitations are often labelled as attacks on national sovereignty. Nonetheless, CSOs in Nigeria have continued strive for the protection of human rights and work towards good governance in the country through seeking legal redress, research, advocacies, oversight, and awareness campaigns on the importance of respect for the rule of law and due process, protection of civil liberties and advancement of the people's welfare. During the year, the Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) continued its six-month project that spanned October 2020 up until March 2021, which was designed to harness the efforts of CSOs in the South-South (Bayelsa and Rivers States) and the South-West (Ondo State) to defend the civic space. In May, Palladium convened a meeting of stakeholders including government representatives, CSOs, security agencies and the media under the USAID sponsored Strengthening Civic Advocacy and Local Engagement (SCALE) project⁵⁷ to develop an action plan for safeguarding the Nigerian civic space which highlighted the importance of dialogue and collaboration between the citizens



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and security agents, while also pointing out the collective responsibility of both citizens and government actors to respect the provisions of the law in terms of peaceful engagements during protests (Alabi, 2021).

SERAP likewise filed several lawsuits against the government during the year. One major lawsuit (No ECW/CCJ/APP/23/21) was filed alongside 176 others on June 8 before the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice to seek an interim injunction restraining the government from implementing the Twitter ban and criminalization/harassment of Nigerians and other Twitter Users while the substantive suit was pending (Akoni, 2021). It subsequently followed up with another request on September 24 urging the UN General Assembly to pressure the President to lift the ban and wrote an open letter a day after the President's independence broadcast calling on him to withdraw the conditions for the removal of the ban as it could prejudice decisions on the impending court case before the ECOWAS court. Also in October, AI made a submission to the 72nd Session of the UN Committee against Torture to draw attention to the abuses being

perpetrated by the disbanded SARS and Nigerian military against members of vulnerable groups including the aged, children and women.⁵⁸ Earlier in February, the organization had demanded that the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC) authorize the launch of investigations into the allegations of atrocities allegedly perpetrated in Nigeria's Northeast. This is sequel to the findings of the preliminary investigations of the Former ICC Chief Prosecutor, Ms. Fatou Bensouda, who released a statement on the context of perpetration of atrocities in Nigeria's Northeast and had established the need for an authorisation by the Judges of the Pre-Trial Chamber of the ICC for her office to commence investigations.⁵⁹

PLAC has continued to build the capacity of CSOs regarding effective engagement strategies with policymakers through a series of workshops on policy engagement within a

58 See Nigeria: Submission to the UN Committee against Torture: 72nd Session, 8 November-3 December 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/4872/2021/en/>

59 See Statement of the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, on the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria [https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=201211-prosecutor-statement dated December 11, 2020](https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=201211-prosecutor-statement%20dated%20December%2011,%202020)

shrinking civic space in the post-COVID-19 era. More specifically, it provides technical support to members of the National Assembly to facilitate their engagements with the civil society in making development interventions, especially with reference to addressing inequality in the country. To achieve this, it prioritizes its engagements with committees that directly focus on assuaging the challenges of the most vulnerable including those working on constitution and electoral reforms, public accounts, finance, budgeting, human rights, health, education, gender, and security sector reforms to facilitate an integrative approach to their legislative duties.

As the country prepares towards the general elections in 2023, CSOs have also been deeply involved to ensure successful elections and improvement in the country's governance architecture during the next dispensation. In August, the Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (CHRRCR) launched the Network on Anti-Corruption, Transparency and Accountability in Kogi State to support the work of organisations fighting against corruption during the 2023 electoral cycle;

even as the NCSSR mounted pressure on the harmonization committee to ensure that the electronic transmission of results was included in the electoral act (see Nnochiri, 2021). As one of the key recommendations from the election monitoring activities of CSOs in the just concluded Anambra governorship election, there has been an ongoing advocacy for capacity-building in the technical know-how of INEC staff, including those on ad hoc duties, especially with respect to the use of the newly introduced bimodal voter accreditation system (BVAS) and other technologies for electronic accreditation and transmission towards the 2023 elections.

3.4 Changing Funding Climate for CSOs

Sourcing for funds has been a major part of operations for non-profit organisations, with most dependent on philanthropists, charities, corporate organisations, and development partners to provide support for projects that are of mutual interest. In developing countries like Nigeria, the bulk of the funds come from international organisations, with specific timelines for delivery within a funding cycle. However, the funding climate in Nigeria has been challenged by allegations of corruption and the negative image of Nigerian with the funders revising the application and reporting templates through extra measures to ensure more transparency and accountability.

The issue of transparency and accountability within the civil society sector has been prominent within the national discuss in the past five years with several bills being proposed in the National Assembly including the Bill for the Registration and Coordination of NGOs in Nigeria and for

Connected Purposes (2015); Civil Society Commission of Nigeria Bill (2016); and Bill for the Establishment of the Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria and for Related Matters (2016). While these attempts were challenged in court in September 2017 as an attempt to repress the fundamental freedoms, especially those of association, assembly, and expression guaranteed under the Nigerian Constitution, the activities of CSOs as non-profits have remained under scrutiny. For instance, in September 2021, the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) announced that CSOs that are involved in trade and business should be made to pay income tax. Advocates of this view have argued that there needs to be an investigation into NGOs who serve as fronts or engage in profit-making ventures (see Abati, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also negatively affected in terms of donor transition. For instance, access a lot of funds have been channelled towards the management of the virus, while some funders are unable to provide funds due to diversion to support official measures to curb the



Photo credit: The Guardian Newspaper Website



spread of the virus, especially in the home country of the funders. The lack of a central database that captures local public and private funders, as well as their international counterparts; and the amount allocated for specific projects, has also made it difficult for some CSOs to adequately prioritize their interventions and source for funds from the appropriate potential funders. The need for flexibility of funders during the pandemic period has also been highlighted in terms of budget implementation. With some activities put on hold, some organisations are negotiating on how they could be supported to keep their organisations afloat with fewer restrictions as per the funding terms. CSOs have also been engaged in knowledge sharing regarding the changing contests of funding, and how organisations can better adapt to the challenge. In line with this, PLAC has been providing support for CSOs on adapting to the changing financial climate through capacity building workshops on resource mobilization and management in a post-pandemic era. In a July workshop organized by PLAC, the importance of running a profitable organization through the creation of an allied business that enhances the work of the organization, while also helping to

sustain it was a major discussion point. This, it was suggested, could be done by either running the businesses directly or by investing in other businesses to get returns.

Overall, the post-pandemic era is creating a shift in how operations are carried out, and some aspects of the new normal are determining the shifts in focus for funders who are making transitions and also prioritizing their support based on their evaluation of what aligns with the goals of their organizations. It is, however, important that the sustainability of the projects is prioritized by factoring in exiting strategies at the initial stages of project partnerships with beneficiaries.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

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4.1 Conclusion

The Nigerian civil society remains an integral part of its drive for transparency, good governance, and sustainable development in the country. They have continued to provide support for the government in terms of improving the social welfare of citizens through empowerment and humanitarian services, while working towards the establishment of the rule of law to make the practice of democratic governance yield dividends for all citizens. Nonetheless, the nature of civil society activism, which entails the carrying out of oversight on some government activities, while calling its officials out on the fulfilment of its constitutional roles and responsibilities has often resulted in unnecessary censorship measures that impose the might of the state in stifling the space for CSO operations. As highlighted above, CSOs have contributed to assuaging the challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, reductions of poverty and inequality, management of conflict and insecurity, anticorruption, smooth regime transitions through interventions for successful electoral processes and inclusion of women, PWDs and youths. They have also created a global impact

through networking and mobilizing support using the digital media.

With these important contributions, the Nigerian Network of NGOs (NNGO) in its June 2021 Brief highlighted the need for government to designate some CSO interventions as ‘essential services’, especially those that have to do with medical supplies upon which the wellbeing and lives of beneficiaries are dependent. This is quite important with the benefit of hindsight regarding regulations on the management of the coronavirus as a public health challenge, which largely excluded CSOs from the decision-making processes and constricted access to persons and communities in dire need of essentials. The inclusion of CSOs within decision-making processes cannot be overemphasized, according to the Office of the High Commissioner at the UN, as they make policymaking ‘more informed, effective and sustainable’.⁶⁰ It is also important to encourage specializations within the CSO sector for more professionalism in terms of interventions. The lack of specialization has impeded the impacts of interventions, especially

⁶⁰ Enhancing Participation and Protecting Civic Space. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/ManagementPlan/Pages/participation.aspx>

as there seems to be concentration on specific areas that are perceived as well-funded, while other needs are left unattended to. This leads to the duplicity of efforts as well as unsustainable interventions.

While there have been isolated interventions by the government in the management of misinformation and disinformation, albeit with its bid to regulate content on the digital media; civil society also has several projects on countering misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. However, the spontaneous nature of these efforts has undermined their impacts. It is thus important to create a multistakeholder structure to synergize the efforts of both public and private sectors in fostering collaborations and the restoration of Nigeria’s civic space. Talking about synergy, it is likewise important to synergize and prioritize CSO interventions in the country in order to be able to devise appropriate methods for coordinating the disbursement of funds for interventions, amidst donor transitions. More importantly, CSOs need to be perceived as partners in development by the government and not necessary as people in opposition, or as loyalists of foreign donors. The

loyalty should be to vulnerable Nigerian citizens that are the primary constituents of interventions of both the public and private sectors. Within this consideration, there should be more involvement of locally based corporate organizations and philanthropists to support CSO efforts as part of their corporate social responsibilities.

4.2 Recommendations

Government:

The government has the responsibility to provide an enabling environment for Nigerian civil society to contribute to the development of the country. Rather than see CSOs as taking the place of opposition and attempt to stifle their operations through hostile regulations and their enforcement, the government should see them as collaborators with the same aim of ensuring the security of lives and properties while enhancing the welfare of Nigerians. The three arms of government should thus provide platforms for continuous engagement where non-adversarial

means can be adopted to resolve differences and chart the way towards progress for the country. The government should support the collation, maintenance, and harmonization of a database for development interventions in the country to align with a national plan for action and prevent unnecessary duplication of interventions.

Development Partners/Donor Agencies:

Development partners and other donor agencies, as the mainstay of funding for CSO activities, should collaborate with CSOs in making their interventions sustainable by ensuring that the closeout plans for projects include how alternative sources could be used as leverages. It is also important that community-driven projects are prioritized to enhance community ownership and legitimacy for sustainability beyond the funding cycle. The funders should also create a flexible but effective project implementation plan to accommodate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Donors should also consider funding social enterprises for NGOs as this could help assuage financial pressure and enhance transparency.

Security Agents:

Security agents should see themselves as partners in development as their role of protecting lives and properties entail. They should thus refrain from victimizing CSOs with dissenting opinions to the government, especially in the situation where the advocacy is geared towards accountability and transparency to protect Nigeria's commonwealth. It is thus important to ensure their operational independence with the knowledge that their loyalty is first and foremost to Nigeria and not individuals. The Nigerian Police should endeavour to provide protection for CSOs during peaceful demonstrations and abide by the judgement of the court that protects the right to peaceful assembly without a permit.

Communities of Interventions:

The communities of interventions, as beneficiaries, should collaborate with the CSOs to ensure that their efforts are impactful by helping to identify those that are mostly in need of the interventions and help prioritize the implementation plan. They should also take ownership of the interventions by providing available resources as contributions

to the interventions. Community leaders also have major roles to play in providing conducive environments for interventions by mobilizing support among community members and ensuring fairness in terms of accessibility to aids. build strong internal systems cannot be over emphasized. This remains crucial for getting resources for interventions and maintaining trust and legitimacy with their partners and beneficiaries.

CSOs:

CSOs should familiarize themselves with technology tools that could aid their protection from the aggression of state agents in terms of mobilizing support for their causes. Similarly, the use of solidarity as a major tool for mobilization should be institutionalized as this is key in creating formidable clusters for activism. Also, the technical committee working on a regulatory framework should ensure that it accommodates objective contributions that will ensure that a code of conduct that is made available gets the support of both government and non-government stakeholders. It is important that CSOs have the responsibility to cater to the mental health of their workers, especially when the challenge is induced while in the line of duty. They should help them seek help and provide the necessary support for their recovery. Finally, the need for organizations to improve their capacity and

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About PLAC

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is a non-governmental organization committed to strengthening democratic governance and citizens' participation in Nigeria. PLAC works to enhance citizens' engagement with state institutions, and to promote transparency and accountability in policy and decision-making processes.

The main focus of PLAC's intervention in the democratic governance process is on building the capacity of the legislature and reforming the electoral process. Since its establishment, PLAC has grown into a leading institution with capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, policy analysis and advocacy. PLAC receives funding support from donors and other philanthropic sources.



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