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# MURRYA

#Voices for Impact

NIGERIA  
INNOVATE & LEARN  
STORIES



May 2024





## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

**Murya** means **Voice** in Hausa, one of the three most widely spoken languages in Nigeria and Africa. It is a collection of impact stories narrated by Voice rightsholders and grantees. Voice has funded over 50 projects while strengthening the capacities of the grantee partners to support positive outcomes for rightsholders across Nigeria. Murya celebrates all of the Voices that have been impacted in the course of the programme.

The impact stories were developed by The Cognito Project; special thanks to Kaseina Dashe, Christy Asala, Andrew Ochu-Baye, Seun Asala for curating and conceptualizing the document. We appreciate other members of the team, Kim, Timothy, Joshua, Caroline, Charles and Eunice. We also appreciate all who were part of this journey at various points in time including Ojonwa, Chizoba, Chidinma, Bankole, Faiz and Bukola.

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Linking and learning was possible due to the cooperation of the awesome Voice Grantee partners we had the privilege of working with as follows:

**2021 Voice Grantees:** Africa Caribbean Heritage Alliance (ACHA), Carmelite Prisoners' Interest Organization (CAPIO), Center For Ability, Rehabilitation and Empowerment (CARE), Citizen Commons, Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), Connected Development (CODE) & Boys Quarters Africa (BQA), Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics (CSAAE), Foundation for Societal Expression and Rejuvenation (FOSER), Nigeria Youth SDGs, Public Private Development Centre (PPDC), Street Project Foundation (SPF), YIAGA Africa, Youth Hub Africa, Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative (YSAD), Integriti Technologies & Yes We Can Youth Initiative



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

**NOW-US Awardees:** Motherhen Development Foundation (MDF), Coalition of Societies for the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria (COSROPIN) and Gender Mobile Initiative

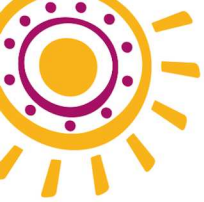
**2022 Voice Grantees:** Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable Persons (CAP Rights), Dew Drop Foundation (DDF), Female Inmates and Returned Citizens Cooperative Society of Nigeria (FIRC), Hoomsen Women Farmers Cooperative Society (HWF), Ike Foundation for Autism, International Center for Environmental Health & Development (ICEHD), Mothers and Marginalized Advocacy (MAMA) Centre, Novel Association for Youth Advocacy (NAYA), The Albino Foundation, Plateau State Chapter, Voice Global Grantee: Kids and Teens Resource Centre

We have also been blessed to work with various **stakeholders** in building **Communities of Practice for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), Social Justice, Elderly, and Gender Justice**. These include the Federal Ministries of Health, Women Affairs, Interior, Justice, Humanitarian and Information, as well as their respective parastatals.

We are also grateful to our media partners and the entire Civil Society space for the overwhelming support and collaboration. We look forward to doing more impactful work together in the near future.

The stories in this document may be freely used for learning or noncommercial purposes, provided that the material is accompanied by an acknowledgment line. For more information on Voice programme and linking and learning, please visit [www.voicenaija.org](http://www.voicenaija.org).





## About Voice

**Voice** is an innovative grant facility that supports access to resources, participation, and rights of marginalized rightsholder groups in Nigeria, including persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous groups and ethnic minorities, women facing exploitation, violence and/or abuse as well as age discriminated groups such as youth and elderly. Implemented in ten countries across Southeast Asia and Africa – including Nigeria, Voice-funded projects empower rightsholders to come to the awareness of their voice, amplify voices for themselves and others like themselves and influence positive action for issues they care about whilst ensuring representation for a more responsive and inclusive society under the “Nothing for us without us (Now-Us)” principle.

## About Linking and Learning

Referred to as the heart and soul of Voice, linking and learning is the process enabling the sharing of experiences and lessons from innovative approaches to program implementation. Linking and learning, within Voice refers to all the activities, processes and pathways towards boosting collaboration, exchange, learning, innovation and application of new knowledge with the aim to stimulate transformative change for the most marginalized and discriminated groups. It allows successful projects and approaches to scale out and scale up. It is learning from setbacks and being open to solutions that propels rightsholders and partners out of their comfort zones to explore possibilities that fuel positive social change. Voice actively promotes linking and learning as a process that organizations commit to when they join Voice as grantees, which has become the highlight of the Voice journey.

## Cognito - The Linking and Learning Facilitators (LLF) for Voice Nigeria

**Cognito** is a social enterprise that uses unique facilitation techniques, creative communication strategies, knowledge management, and technology to amplify the impact of development programmes and enterprises, highlighting innovative learnings and using these learnings for improved programming geared towards addressing critical development issues and improving the wellbeing of target populations. Our approach employs research and human-centered design to understand development programmes we implement, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test. Co-creation and collaboration are at the core of our work. See more about the work we do [www.wearecognito.org](http://www.wearecognito.org) and [www.voicenaija.org](http://www.voicenaija.org)



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# Influencing for Change





# NIGERIA INFLUENCING GRANTS AT A GLANCE



## PPDC

Public and Private Development Centre

### PROJECT:

#### Promoting Inclusive Governance Through Civic Engagement (PIGCE)

A project to empower communities to actively participate in governance and hold their elected leaders accountable.

## YIAGA AFRICA

Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement Africa

### PROJECT:

#### Run To Win

A campaign supporting young women and men to run for and win political office in Nigeria.

## CARE NIGERIA

The Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment in Nigeria

### PROJECT:

#### Accessible Aviation

A project advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities.

## SPF

Street Project Foundation

### PROJECT:

#### ARTvocacy

A project using the creative arts to engage and empower young people to promote and advocate for social justice and accountability.

## CODE/BQA

Connected Development & Boys Quarters Africa

### PROJECT:

#### Project SABI

A project raising male activists to lead the fight to end violence against women and girls.

## CAPIO

Carmelite Prisoners Interest Organization

### PROJECT:

#### POLLRITE 23

A project advocating for voting rights for prisoners.

## NYSDG

Nigeria Youth SDGs Network

### PROJECT:

#### Speak Up; Stand Out (SUSO)

A project empowering young people with the knowledge, skills, and resources to develop their communities and grow local advocates.

## CCD

Centre for Citizens with Disabilities

### PROJECT:

#### Enhancing Access to Justice and Political Participation among Women, Elderly and Youth with Disabilities

A project to create access to justice, democratic governance & political participation for PWDs.





## INFLUENCING VOICES:

### Innovative Approaches to Social Change

In today's interconnected world, the power to influence has taken on new dimensions. With the rise of social media and global communication platforms, individuals and organizations alike have unprecedented and powerful opportunities to drive change and advocate for social justice.

#### What is Influencing?

Influencing refers to the ability to affect the thoughts, actions, and behaviours of others. It encompasses a range of activities, from persuasive communication to advocacy and activism. Influencing can be both intentional and unintentional, and it operates at multiple levels, from personal

interactions to broader societal movements. In the context of social change, influencing often involves challenging existing norms, advocating for marginalized communities, and promoting awareness of critical issues.

People are a powerful force for driving social change, especially when they come together and work collaboratively. On the Voice grant, several grantee organizations have employed various influencing approaches to amplify the voices of marginalised and discriminated groups. These groups include youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous ethnic communities, prison inmates, and men and boys advocating against gender-based violence.

These Voice grantee partners, who are often also rightsholders themselves, work with their rightsholder groups to identify a pain point, strengthen their collective capacity and skills needed to address the issues, use the skills garnered to draw attention to the issues on a larger scale while also interfacing with decision makers and duty bearers to bring about the change.

Public Private Development Centre (PPDC) and Nigeria Youths SDGs worked with rural communities and youth to demand inclusion and accountability in governance. Their efforts helped rightsholders to spearhead conversations around policy reforms and judicious use of public resources, and also advocate for the execution of projects that improve the social infrastructure and welfare of the community, such as the rehabilitation of a borehole in Buzunkure community in Kuje, FCT, Abuja. The Speak Up and Stand Out (SUSO) youth advocates supported by NG Youths SDG implemented several interventions in their communities in education, governance, employment and peace and security.





## Innovative Approaches to Social Change

During the 2023 elections, YIAGA Africa supported young people to run and win elections under their Voice-funded “Run to Win” project, while Street Project Foundation’s “ARTVOCACY” project used creative arts as a platform to mobilise young people to make their voices heard as social change influencers. Interestingly, under the Linking and Learning component of the Voice grant, these two organizations who hitherto were unknown to each other, connected and collaborated to implement a youth festival to garner youth participation at the polls.

Carmelite Prisoners’ Interest Organization (CAPIO), a change-focused organization helping to shape the future of criminal justice administration in Nigeria, under the “Pollrite 23” project, sought to ensure the participation of inmates in 2023 election. The Center for Ability, Rehabilitation and Empowerment (CARE) has worked to remove all barriers to accessible air transportation for persons with disabilities in Nigeria through their Voice-funded “Accessible Aviation” project. The project has scored many wins including the set up of a disability help desk at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, in cooperation with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, which has also committed to scaling up the intervention to other airports across Nigeria.

And to end all forms of violence against women and girls, Connected Development (CODE) partnered with Boys Quarters Africa (BQA) to undertake “Project Sabi” – a movement aimed at engaging men and

boys as empowered advocates against gender-based violence (GBV). The project employed a grassroots approach to enlist and support men and boys to confront age-long and culturally inherited biases and galvanise them as major allies and change agents in reporting and speaking up against sexual and gender-based violence.

### Conclusion

Everyone has a voice. All voices matter. Voices can and should be amplified, Voices can be collectively projected to ensure representation and influence decision making. The empowering term ‘rightsholder’ adopted by Voice, reminds us that the rights reside in the people and helps us understand that the role of a project is to support rightsholders to uphold, amplify and advance their rights. One of the most important learnings from the above-mentioned VOICE Influencing Grant projects in Nigeria is that rightsholders can create change if they are empowered to influence decision-making and co-design solutions to the problems they face. The diverse themes addressed through the above-mentioned projects have amplified the voices of marginalised and discriminated groups in Nigeria, ensuring that, in keeping with the Nothing About Us, Without Us (Now-Us) principle, rightsholders are actively involved in influencing for change. This is the only way change can be true and lasting.



# PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Project PIGCE



**Rightsholder Groups:** Indigenous people and ethnic minorities;  
**Impact Themes:** Improved access to resources and employment; Improved access to social services, health and education; Space for political participation  
**Grantee:** Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC)

Nigeria is a country with a large and diverse population, but there is a significant development gap between rural and urban areas because many rural communities lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to support economic growth and development.

One of the root causes of this development gap is the lack of effective civic engagement in rural communities. Citizens in rural areas often lack the knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in governance and to hold their elected officials accountable. This can lead to corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of transparency in government spending. As a result, many rural communities in Nigeria are plagued by abandoned projects, poor service delivery, and a lack of development. This has a significant impact on the lives of rural residents, who are often denied the most basic public services and human rights.

Empowering, mobilising, and educating citizens in rural Nigeria to actively participate in governance and to hold their elected officials accountable is the bedrock of the

**“Promoting Inclusive Governance Through Civic Engagement”** project (PIGCE) which set out to identify the most effective approaches to enhancing citizen engagement and improving service delivery in rural communities.

The VOICE funded project, implemented by the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) in Abuja and Enugu, Nigeria, recognized how vital civic participation and amplifying of community voices are to sustained development and upholding the rights of citizens.

PPDC is a Nigerian non-profit organisation that works to promote transparency, accountability, and participation in public governance. They have been instrumental in pursuing and instituting policy reforms in public expenditure governance, especially in public procurement. PPDC’s overall goal is to reduce procurement-related corruption by improving public service effectiveness in Nigeria and across Africa. Their mandate is to root out systemic corruption and opacity, especially around public finance management, and to strengthen the capacity of government and citizens to use technology in solving social issues.

The PIGCE project set out to increase agency for rights holders in the governance and accountability landscape by:

- Creating opportunities for ensuring that public voices are effectively represented in the development of policy or policy reforms, especially as they relate to the judicious use of public resources.
- Stimulating public discourse by supporting right-holders with the platforms and tools needed to capture the public space and improve access to public infrastructure.
- Building on existing social and value systems that can serve as catalysts for action, trust, and a sense of ownership to make rights holders difficult to ignore in governance processes.

The project provided citizens with the information and tools needed to advocate for their rights and to hold the government accountable for its promises. It focused on building on existing social value systems to create a sense of community and ownership among rights holders. It is hoped that the project will help to ensure that citizens are not ignored in governance processes and that their voices are heard.

### Innovative Change Solutions

- **Demystifying public finance processes for rightsholder groups** by leveraging an existing civic technology platform called **Budeshi**. This is a community of Civil Society Organisations that collaborate and share ideas, reports, images, success stories and the likes with the overarching goal of improving service delivery while driving further public engagements in tracking and monitoring of public contracts. Budeshi simplifies procurement data into visuals, using art and indigenous languages for creative storytelling.

- **Amplifying the voices of marginalised groups** by tapping into PPDC's established networks within the mainstream media, investigative journalists, community-based organisations, and traditional institutions.

Under this innovative solution, **the Budeshi Radio was used to inform rightsholders about the project and provide them with an avenue to share their findings and experiences related to constituency projects**. This platform has helped to foster transparency and accountability in the implementation of public projects.

- **Using a citizen-led approach to create a 'safe haven' for rightsholder groups** by partnering with faith-based and traditional institutions, revered persons in the society, medical, psycho-social professionals, celebrities, and organisations with expertise around these issues to build trust and deliver expert services. In addition, the project partnered with policymakers to influence policy/reviews, strengthen the justice system to protect victims, and dispense justice without prejudice or bias.
- **Strengthening the capacity of rightsholder-led CSOs in Enugu and the FCT** by using their civic tech platform to deliver in-depth training, advocacy toolkits, resources, and tools to effectively engage, drive, analyse, monitor, and deepen the conversation with policymakers, governments, and groups on public finance management. This entailed advocacy, analysis of laws/policies, monitoring compliance, procurement process audit, budget/contract monitoring, and incentivising compliance. Under this innovative solution, the project trained community-based organisations as community-based monitors. These monitors played a vital role in tracking projects and diligently following up on their implementation. This initiative helped to ensure accountability and effective use of allocated resources.

- Community-based organisations were also trained on using the **Budeshi Toll-Free Line** to report abandoned projects in their communities, allowing for necessary follow-ups to be conducted. The project also educated rightsholders, particularly community heads and gatekeepers, on how to write letters and raise Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to demand information about the status of projects in their communities, especially abandoned or uninitiated projects. Templates were provided to serve as a guide for writing these letters.
- **Promoting gender equality** by facilitating conversations using a pairing/cluster approach of (formal and informal sector) women on elections matters, gender procurement; supporting interested women to help shape leadership.
- **Leveraging the success of their Digital Inclusion and Safer Internet (DISI) program and partnership** with Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to influence the integration of Nigerian cultural practices, good ethical conduct, and heritage into school curriculums.

### Project Impact

Despite the Nigerian government's efforts to promote transparency and accountability, Nigeria still ranks low on these indices of good governance. This is due in part to citizens' inadequate knowledge to demand accountability. The PIGCE project has played a significant role in enlightening citizens and ensuring community members are able to access information through the Freedom of Information Act, thereby empowering them to hold the government accountable.

In Buzunkure, Kuje Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, community members using the PIGCE project's innovative tools – including writing letters, the Budeshi toll-free line, the Budeshi digital platform, Budeshi radio, and leveraging on training they had received – engaged with their House of Representatives member and successfully secured the construction of a borehole in their community. This has eliminated the need for community members to travel miles to access water from a distant stream.

A community in Kwali, also in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, used the project's innovative tools and drafted a letter to get the attention of their constituency member about a road project awarded to their community in 2020. Thanks to their proactive efforts, money was disbursed for the project, and the deplorable road was graded. The community members have continued to follow up to ensure that the project is fully completed.

### Learning Journey

The overarching challenge the project sought to overcome was the lack of active participation in government-implemented projects in target communities. Nearly all the projects are often implemented from the top without engaging with the community to understand their needs. PIGCE project stakeholders have learnt that:

Rightsholders can actively participate in governance by writing letters to their representatives and use the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act to engage with the government.

Access to contractual information enables rightsholders to demand accountability and improve their participation in governance. Rightsholders can access information regarding projects being implemented through the Budeshi platform, the FOI Act, and by observing and asking questions during project site visits.

## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Project PIGCE

The project also highlights the importance of transparency, community engagement and participation in project implementation. By engaging with communities early on and understanding their needs, the government can ensure that projects are implemented in a way that benefits everyone. When community members are involved in the planning and implementation of projects, they are more likely to be satisfied with the results. The PIGCE project is a valuable contribution to promoting inclusive governance in Nigeria.

### About the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC)

**PPDC** is a citizen sector organisation driven by the desire to have a more transparent and accountable government, and see citizens empowered to actively participate in governance processes. PPDC has made significant contributions to improving public procurement practices in Nigeria. They pioneered procurement and contract monitoring activities using the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and played a leading role in the inclusion of the citizens' observation and participation clause in the Public Procurement Act. PPDC created Budeshi, a digital hub for citizens to access procurement data in a user-friendly format and successfully advocated for the adoption of the Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) in Nigeria. They have helped to raise awareness of corruption in public procurement and to empower citizens to hold their elected officials accountable. Their VOICE funded project, 'Promoting Inclusive Governance Through Civic Engagement' set out to ensure that public voices are effectively represented in policy development and reforms by supporting rightsholders with the necessary platforms to improve the judicious use of public resources.



# POWERING A NEW GENERATION OF NIGERIAN LEADERS

## Project Run To Win

**Rightsholder Groups:** Vulnerable youth  
**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation  
**Grantee:** Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa

In May 2018, Nigeria's then President, Muhammadu Buhari, signed the historic **Not Too Young To Run** bill into law. The Not Too Young to Run campaign is a youth-led grassroots movement that advocates for the reduction of the age limit for running for political office. The campaign was launched in 2016 and quickly gained momentum, with young people from all over Nigeria mobilising through rallies, protests, and social media to support the campaign.

The campaign's main objective is to increase the participation of young people in Nigerian politics because even though Nigeria has a young population, with around 70% of the population under the age of 35, young people are grossly underrepresented in political office. Prior to the passage of the Not Too Young to Run Act in 2018, the minimum age requirement for running for president was 40, and the minimum age requirement for running for the Senate and House of Representatives was 35.

The campaign was successful in achieving its main objective. The Not Too Young to Run Act lowered the age requirement for running for president from 40 to 35 and the age requirement for running for the Senate and House of Representatives from 35 to 30. The campaign has led to a significant increase in young people

***"Dissatisfaction with democratic politics is fuelled partly by the dominance of gerontocracy in politics and the disconnect between politics and citizens"***  
– Samson Itodo, Executive Director, YIAGA and co-founder of the Not Too Young To Run Campaign.



running for and winning political office in Nigeria. The campaign has also had a broader impact on Nigerian politics.

It has helped to raise awareness of the importance of youth participation in democracy, and it has inspired young people to get involved in the political process. However, there remain obstacles that must be overcome to ensure full inclusion of young people and women in Nigerian politics. These marginalized groups encounter significant barriers when attempting to run for and succeed in elections. These hurdles include:

1. Limited access to election-related knowledge and support, particularly for youths and women.
2. Insufficient guidance and resources available to youths and women seeking to enter and excel in electoral contests.
3. Lack of awareness regarding basic election procedures such as obtaining permanent voters' cards (PVCs), participating in continuous voter registration (CVR), and accessing polling unit information.
4. Inadequate backing from political parties for aspiring young candidates and women, including a lack of mentorship and the prohibitive cost of nomination forms.

As a result of these problems, youths and women are underrepresented in government. They are prevented from exercising their democratic rights and having their voices heard. Yiaga Africa's report revealed that only 0.6% of seats in the National Assembly were occupied by youth in the 2019 elections; there was only 6% youth representation in 34 State Houses of Assembly and 29.7% at the local government level. The situation is even worse for women. According to UN Women, only 10.1% of candidates who participated in the 2023 general elections were women.

The underrepresentation of young people and women in Nigerian politics results in a dearth of diversity and inclusivity in government, potentially resulting in policies that fail to address the specific needs of these demographic groups.

The Run To Win campaign is a VOICE-funded project, spearheaded by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa. It was designed to address the above-mentioned problems and empower youths and women with competence, capacity and character to run for elective office in Nigeria's general elections. The campaign provides participants with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed in politics. The campaign also advocates for changes to the political system that will make it easier for youths and women to participate in elections by engaging with political parties to ensure open, transparent, and direct party primaries, reduction in campaign costs for young people, and increased inclusion and representation as party candidates. It creates an overall enabling environment that will ensure young people have the opportunity to participate fully and meaningfully in the Nigerian political process and in their democracy. The Run to Win campaign is a vital initiative helping to increase the representation of youth and women in Nigerian politics and ensure that Nigeria's democracy is truly representative of all citizens.

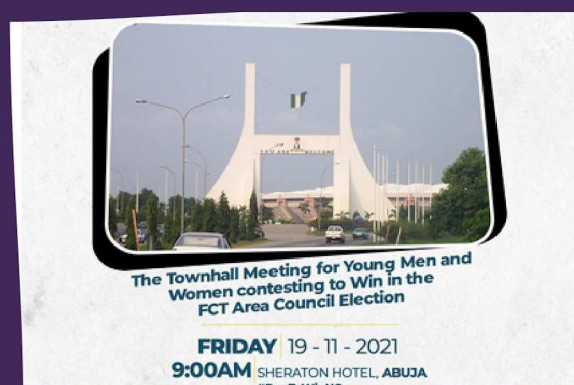
Yiaga is a non-profit civic hub of change-makers committed to promoting democratic governance, human rights, and civic engagement. Yiaga Africa prides itself as a community organising and movement-building organisation and has consistently shown that in designing programs to address social issues, it prioritises citizen participation and engagement in crafting sustainable solutions.

The Run to Win campaign set out to achieve four major objectives: to locate, inspire, support, and provide linkages to young people vying for elective office. It focuses on the following areas:

**Education:** The campaign provides youth and women with education on the basics of elections, including voter registration requirements, polling unit locations, and voting procedures.

**Mentorship:** The campaign connects youth and women with mentors who can provide guidance and support throughout the electoral process.

**Financial assistance:** The campaign provides financial assistance to youth and women to help them cover the cost of nomination fees and other campaign expenses.



### **Innovative Change Solutions**

Yiaga Africa deployed several innovative interventions to the objectives of the Run To Win project. Some of these interventions include:

**Town hall meetings with political party leaders:** Yiaga Africa organised town hall meetings in Enugu, Lagos, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, to provide a platform for young people to engage with leaders of political parties and voice their challenges. The goal of these meetings was to find solutions to some of the election-related challenges facing young candidates, such as the high cost of nomination forms.

**Voter outreach program:** To bridge the voter knowledge gap, Yiaga Africa organised a voter outreach program in markets and other public places, to create awareness about the 2023 elections and distribute voter education materials.

**Partnership with Zikoko:** Yiaga Africa partnered with Zikoko, an online platform that amplifies African youth culture, to promote voter education and engage with influencers and celebrities. They also collaborated with Street Project Foundation, another VOICE project grantee, to organise youth festivals in the FCT, where social issues were discussed through dance, music, and poetry.

**Radio programs for young candidates:** To support young candidates with campaign costs, Yiaga Africa organised radio programs where young people could come on air to campaign, giving young candidates a platform to share their message and a cost-effective way to reach many voters.

**Mentorship from political party leaders:** The stakeholders involved in the Run to Win project included leaders of political parties, who provided mentorship to young candidates.

### **Project Impact**

The Run to Win project made a significant impact on the representation of young people and women in government, helping them to get elected to office and increasing voter turnout among their populations.

In the 2023 FCT Area Council elections, 18 young people who participated in the Run to Win town hall meetings won seats as councillors. In Enugu State, two young candidates who participated in the town hall meetings won seats in the Federal House of Representatives and State House of Assembly elections.

The voter education outreach has also had a positive impact. Statistics show that a higher number of young people participated in the continuous voter registration for the 2023 elections than in previous elections and made up the majority of new registrants. This suggests that the voter education outreach program was successful in increasing youth awareness of the importance of registering to vote.

The Run to Win project has also had a positive impact on the public perception of young politicians. In the past, young politicians were often seen as inexperienced and unqualified. However, the Run to Win project has helped to showcase the talent and potential of young Nigerian leaders.

The project has also helped to increase the level of competition in Nigerian elections. In the past, many elections were uncontested or only had a few candidates. However, the Run to Win project has encouraged more young people to run for office, which has led to more competitive elections.





# POWERING A NEW GENERATION OF NIGERIAN LEADERS

## Project Run To Win

### Learning Journey

One of the key learnings of this project is that more young people and women keenly expressing interest and are engaging in political discussions and activities. This is evident from the increase in the number of young people who have registered to vote.

It was also noted that, although a few political parties, including the ruling party, have reduced or waived their nomination fees to encourage young people to run for office, there has not been an improvement in the participation of young people and women in running for political office.

### About Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa

Yiaga Africa was launched as a student organization in 2007 at the University of Jos, Nigeria, and has since established itself as a leading civil society organization in Africa. Since its inception, the organisation has carved a niche for itself as one of Africa's frontline non-profit organisations promoting participatory democracy, human rights, and civic participation.

Yiaga Africa envisions a democratic and developed Africa where citizens are actively engaged in the governance processes. It's goal is to build and support sustainable democracy and development anchored on the principles of inclusion, accountability, and justice through research, advocacy, and capacity development.



# AN ARTICULATE RANT FOR A NEW NIGERIA

## Project ARTvocacy

**Rightsholder Groups:** Youth and Persons with Disabilities

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation; Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Street Project Foundation (SPF)

The **ENDSARS** movement in Nigeria emerged in 2017 and gained renewed momentum in 2020, driven by widespread protests against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian Police Force due to its history of brutality, torture, illegal arrests, corruption, and extrajudicial killings. The protests, predominantly led by young Nigerians, sought the dissolution of SARS and broader police reform. While initially peaceful, they were met with violence from law enforcement, resulting in casualties and human rights violations.

The simmering agitation of the nation's youth propelled ENDSARS into a movement pregnant with the frustration, desperation, and hopelessness of Nigeria's youth. A constellation of growing poverty, massive unemployment, and shrinking space for inclusive participation of youth in governance and policy making was the essential context of the protests, which became an expression of frustrations of young people, not only against years of brutality perpetrated by SARS but against institutionalized corruption, reckless extravagance and wastefulness among political elite and public servants, marginalization, and a lack of effective civic engagement with the youth\*. The protests snowballed into demands for broader social and economic reforms.

The youth uprising was a significant moment in Nigerian history. It demonstrated the power of social media to mobilize people and to bring about

change. It is a powerful example of youth activism, showing that young Nigerians are willing to stand up for their rights and demand change from their government.

The protests emboldened youth voices in Nigeria and reinvigorated stimulating and provocative expressions of the youth campaign and desire for a better, more just, and more inclusive Nigeria. It gave birth to more youth focused and youth led initiatives like Project ARTvocacy, a social enterprise conceived by Street Project Foundation (SPF) targeting the restlessness and lack of direction of millions of Nigerian youths living under the poverty line by providing them with alternative avenues of expression, with opportunities to develop their skills and empowering them to harness their talents.

### Project ARTvocacy

The concept of ARTvocacy is built around backing youths to create what the Street Project Foundation describes as "an ARTiculate Rant for A New Nigeria". The project aims to support young people to become social change influencers and content creators advocating for progressive societal change. The ARTvocacy project wants to surprise – to show up in unlikely places or take on unfamiliar forms and disrupt people's preconceived notions around art and protest.

\* Frimpong, Osei Baffour, and Richmond Comodore. 2021. #EndSARS Youth Protests in Nigeria: Lessons and Opportunities for Regional Stability. SVNP Special Paper Series | Issue No. 1.

The community of youth at Street Project Foundation wants to raise transformational youth ambassadors for Africa, and their vision is of a world with a critical mass of transformational youth ambassadors making a sustainable living doing what they love; and their mission is to facilitate opportunities for youth employment and engagement using the creative arts as a tool.

Project ARTvocacy provides an avenue for an articulate rant for a new Nigeria where creative youths leverage on art forms to speak up about the social injustices in Nigeria that affect them. The project aims to galvanise positive action to address social issues that young people care about by using the creative forms that come naturally to them. It is a youth-focused project seeking to harness the creative potentials of young people and channel it to “articulately rant” and advocate for the Nigeria of their dreams.

Street Project Foundation’s Voice-funded ARTvocacy project has provided a safe space for movement building, creative thinking and problem solving through the lens of artistic activism. The advocates, through a series of rigorous six-week bootcamps, learned and honed useful skills, addressed personal issues, and emerged ready to act as a cohesive force for social change. They were eager to share their message with other young people, making connections with one community after another, and sharing life-changing stories of their astonishing transformations.

### Innovative Change Solutions

Project ARTvocacy believes that where traditional forms of protest, like marches, need to constantly increase in size or scope, or deteriorate into violence to become noticed and newsworthy, the creative innovation at the heart of artistic activism provides something uncommon or out of place that can attract attention and become memorable. Artistic activism works well in repressive regimes

where overt political protest is prohibited, but artistic practices are tolerated. Slipping under the radar, artistic activism is not seen as politics by authorities, but it is still able to communicate social messages to the public. Project ARTvocacy’s innovations are helping to break down barriers to civic participation and create a more just and equitable society for all Nigerians.

Its innovative methodology included building communities, building a movement, and advocating using the creative arts. The project instituted a ‘reflection circle’ that offered the young people the opportunity to express themselves, embrace vulnerability, and create impactful artistic pieces that speak to the issues for positive social change.

The project’s innovations included:

- **Online Community Engagement:** ARTvocacy social media groups provide an online platform for young advocates to share information, learn from each other, and support each other in their advocacy work. Project ARTvocates also produced two short films and a 26-episode podcast serial to galvanise the online community and activate them for political participation in a compelling fashion.
- **Tactical Community Engagement:** in a bid to build a new Nigeria movement at the grassroots level, community theatre, and community visual art creations on billboards were used to express the desires of youth, providing an avenue to rant and voice out their frustrations about their social welfare and propose solutions to issues in the community.
- **Direct Tactical Engagement with Public Servants:** A coffee table book was produced as a unique and creative ‘rant’, to raise awareness of social issues and advocate for change. A compilation of street photography and digital storytelling to be distributed,, the coffee book delivers youth’s message to the faces and on the tables of public servants.

- **Six-week boot camp for young advocates:** The boot camp provided 50 young people from Abuja and Enugu with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective advocates, including how to influence other young people, build community, and use creative art to influence social change.
- **Partnership with the National Orientation Agency (NOA):** The partnership with NOA provided young advocates with training on how to use the Freedom of Information Act to access government information and hold the government accountable.
- **Inclusion of people with disabilities:** The inclusion of people with disabilities in the program ensured that all young people could participate in the ARTvocacy movement and advocate for social change.

At the end of the 12-month VOICE grant, the ARTvocacy project had well over 2,000 social media followers, 5 stage plays, 3 short films and had become a rising movement of over 400 ARTvocates. These figures have increased exponentially since then and the ARTvocacy project is growing and evolving, continuing to blaze its trail across Nigeria and providing a safe and empowering space for young people to speak up and influence social change.

### Project Impact

The ARTvocacy project continues to make significant impact on the lives of young people in Nigeria. The project has been recognised internationally for its innovative approach to youth engagement. Street Project Foundation won the United Nations Intercultural Innovation Award in recognition for its innovative approach in mobilising young people from different ethnic and religious groups across Nigeria towards a common goal of social justice advocacy using the creative arts.

The ARTvocacy movement has also been successful in attracting a large number of young people. The monthly community meetings in Abuja and Enugu have recorded over 800 youths in attendance, and the project has engaged over 3,000 youths on social media.

The ARTvocacy project has helped to shape the lives of its rightsholders in a number of ways, including:

- **Empowering them to use their creativity to advocate for change,** helping young people use their art to speak out about the issues that matter to them;
- **Providing them with opportunities for leadership and development** as many of them have had the opportunity to take on leadership roles on various community projects;
- **Building their confidence and self-belief,** helping young people to recognise their innate potential, and develop self-belief in their ability to make a difference in the world.

For example, Uzoamaka Asiegbo has been selected to represent Nigeria for the Pan-African Youths with Disability Leadership Program in Ethiopia, and Pelemo Nyajo has been selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands, for their global youth advisory board. Paul Ahiawu has been selected for an international visual arts exhibition in Ghana focusing on youth political participation, and Michal Ogbuchukwu won a national photography competition organised by the Nigerian Sovereign Wealth Fund and the Office of the Vice President, with his entry focusing on the resilience of Nigerian youth in the Covid-19 pandemic. Other rightsholders were selected to work on other Voice grantees' projects.

# AN ARTICULATE RANT FOR A NEW NIGERIA

## Project ARTvocracy

### Learning Journey

The ARTvocracy project of the Street Project Foundation (SPF) has learned several valuable lessons along the way, including the following:

- **Establishing a strong movement is key to success:** The ARTvocracy movement has been instrumental in mobilising young people from different ethnic and religious groups across Nigeria to participate in social justice advocacy.
- **Developing a replicable model is essential for scaling impact:** SPF has developed a blueprint of its methodology that other CSOs can adopt and replicate across the country.
- **Strategic partnerships with youth-based organisations are essential for expanding reach:** SPF established a strategic partnership with Yiaga Africa to mobilise young people for the 2023 elections and is exploring other partnerships.

The ARTvocracy project is empowering young people to become agents of change in Nigeria, and the lessons from its implementation are helping SPF to scale the impact of the project and make a real difference in the lives of young people across the country.

### About Street Project Foundation (SPF)

SPF is a not-for-profit organisation that uses creative arts as a tool to facilitate opportunities for youth development, social mobilisation, and cross-cultural dialogue. Recipients of the 2021 United Nations and BMW Group's Intercultural Innovation Award, their VOICE funded project – ARTvocracy: An articulate rant for a new Nigeria – sought to grow a youth movement of social change influencers that uses ART to advocate for progressive societal change across Nigeria.



# SPARKING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH YOUTH ACTIVISM

## The SUSO Program



**Rightsholder Groups:** Youths

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation; Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Nigeria Youth SDGs Network (NGYouthSDGs)

Nigeria is facing a unique demographic challenge of unprecedented proportions: its youth population is booming. With over 123 million young people (63% of the entire country's population) under the age of 35, Nigeria has more young people than the entire population of some countries! The United Nations (UN) predicts that by 2050, Nigeria will have the third-largest population in the world.

One of the biggest challenges facing Nigeria's youth is unemployment. Over 42% of young Nigerians are unemployed, and many more are underemployed\*. This is due to several factors, including a mismatch between skills and job requirements, a lack of investment in the youth sector, and a difficult business environment. The lack of employment opportunities is fuelling frustration, resentment, and despair among young Nigerians. Many are turning to crime, violence, and other forms of deviance. Others are migrating to other countries in search of better opportunities.

There is, however, a huge and vibrant youth population refusing to settle for the status quo, refusing to give in and give up; and who are instead determined to **speak up and to stand out**. They are extraordinary youths sparking social change through their activism. Youths like Nebo Collins, who designed the **'My Community, My Government'** project to educate youths on how to monitor and track public service delivery in their

community. He mobilised the young people of Nkanu East in Enugu State, Nigeria and supported them to engage with their leaders, develop scorecards and demand accountability from their elected officials and government.

Youths like Ene Audu, who believes forgiveness and healing can be an effective tool for building peace in national development, and set out to establish a **healing and reconciliation** project in Lugbe, Abuja. She inspired the rehabilitation and care of victims from a bomb blast that rocked their community and laid the foundation for long-term recovery and peacebuilding.

Youths like Oluwatosin Adeshina, who **up-skilled 30 young people in vulnerable communities** in Lagos State to make them employable and attractive to employers. She coordinated mentorship support and a series of training sessions to help these youths build a secure career path and connect them with potential employers.

And Ruhamah Ifere whose **'Sexual Offence Watch Observers'** project raised 25 ambassadors to advocate for justice against sexual violence and women's rights.

Nebo, Ene, Oluwatosin, and Ruhamah are all 'SUSO Activists', young activists under the Speak Up; Stand Out (SUSO) project,

\* National Bureau of Statistics. 2023. Nigeria Labour Force Survey (NLFS) Q4 2022 & Q1 2023. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics

selected for their passion and resolve to make a difference in their communities. With the help of the coordinating grantee, the Nigeria Youth SDGs Network (NGYouthSDGs), and with funding from the VOICE project, these young activists, along with 16 others across 3 states (Enugu, Lagos, and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory) in Nigeria, created solutions to address developmental challenges in their various communities. Through a rigorous selection process, Project SUSO identified and recruited these 20 young activists with a passion for social justice and a commitment to making a difference in their communities.

**SUSO activists** are a diverse group of young people passionate about making the world a better place. They come from all walks of life and represent a wide range of backgrounds. But they all share one thing in common: a commitment to social justice and a belief that young people have the power to change the world.

### Project SUSO

**The Speak Up Stand Out program** is a groundbreaking initiative that was designed to build youth leaders who will lead and mobilise other young people to advocate for social issues affecting youth in their community. The program delivery was centred on empowering these potential young leaders with the knowledge, skills, and resources to expand their leadership capabilities, participate meaningfully in and spearhead socio-political change and development within their communities. By leveraging digital platforms for social mobilisation, amplifying youth voices, and developing people-led campaigns, SUSO is helping to create a more just and equitable world for all. Over the course of 12 months, 20 SUSO activists participated in a comprehensive training program that covered a wide range of topics including media and information literacy, grassroots mobilisation skills, campaign strategy, and digital advocacy. Activists were paired with experienced advocates, resident in the implementing

communities where the SUSO activist' projects were based, who provided mentorship and guidance throughout the program. Over the course of the project, these 20 young activists, alongside 211 youth advocates, worked to develop and implement mini projects that set out to address pressing issues affecting their communities.

The SUSO Program highlights the role young people can play to address the rising problems affecting today's youth and contribute to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. The program gave birth to five projects on education, three projects on employment, six projects on governance, and five projects on peace and security and these 19 projects fell under four key thematic areas that affect young people:

- **Education:** Projects under this theme supported the establishment of reading clubs, igniting a culture of academic excellence among thousands of students in the project states and focused on innovative ways to influence policies that will reduce the number of Nigerians Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETs).
- **Governance:** Projects under this theme advocated for young people to speak up and stand out, mobilised active youth participation in governance and supported youth voter registration and political involvement.
- **Employment:** Projects under the employment theme focused on localising the Nigeria Youth Employment Action Plan to improve young people's access to work.
- **Peace and security:** Projects under this theme focused on the implementation of Nigeria's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security, empowering and engaging young people to build a more peaceful and secure Nigeria and mobilising them to become peace advocates.



#### Innovative Change Solutions

In a world where young people are often told to sit down and be quiet, the SUSO Program set out to inspire them to "get up and speak out!" And that's exactly what they did. Twenty passionate and enthusiastic young people, desiring to make a difference and stimulate change in their communities and in society, implemented innovative projects that addressed various challenges across four crucial themes – education, governance, employment, and peace and security.

The SUSO Program empowered these youth activists to challenge issues affecting youth and develop innovative ways to drive social change. The project also developed a training kit to serve as learning guides to help young activists in their development journey.

Lauritta Boniface's **'Your Waste My Money'** project explored innovative solutions to the problems of waste in Nigeria through recycling and strategic advocacy. The project trained young people on how to recycle common waste into useful products thereby empowering them to make a positive environmental impact.

Chidinma Chikwelu's project used innovative approaches to boost the leadership skills and political confidence of young girls in Enugu South communities. Chidinma used awareness creation, knowledge sharing and practical support on menstrual hygiene management and public speaking to instil dignity and pride in young girls and went further to introduce these girls to opportunities for participating in leadership and governance. This SUSO activist empowered at least 100 girls with tools to build their confidence and grow their leadership capacities.

Busaosowo Bisong's school-based drug education project is a drug abuse prevention campaign that set out to reduce the rising number of young people involved in substance abuse. His project addressed root causes of drug abuse among students through a participatory and creative approach that first interacted with the targeted youth and then co-created a tailored educational and behavioural change campaign based on these interactive sessions.

Gift Chikere and Arinze Okafor curated art projects that involved the creation and use of compelling music, poetry and theatre productions to inspire active citizenship and challenge young people to participate in the 2023 elections and in governance.

Emediong Akpabio included more than 100 families in vulnerable communities in Lagos State, in the co-design of the child protection policy document delivered to policymakers through a series of advocacy campaigns.

These were just some of the innovative approaches used in a wide variety of youth-focused projects under the Speak Up; Stand Out program.

#### **Project Impact**

The SUSO Program has had a significant impact on the lives of its participants and the communities they serve. The 20 youth activists trained, mentored and supported by the project continue to implement successful social change campaigns on numerous critical development issues. The SUSO mini community projects spearheaded by these young SUSO Activists have in turn directly impacted over 5,100 young people between the ages of 11- 35 years across three states in Nigeria.



The project has also had a positive impact on the activists themselves, supporting the development of their leadership and advocacy skills. 85% of activists reported a significant improvement in their leadership skills, and 60% of activists have developed the confidence to mobilise the grassroots for social change. Additionally, 80% of activists have shown significant improvement in their abilities to build alliances and strengthen partnerships with local, private and government stakeholders to influence positive change in their community.

Part of the project's overall goal was to ensure young people can influence public reforms and policies in their communities. 15% of activists have influenced policy and inspired public reformation through their community projects and many continue to work towards achieving this.

Very crucially, the project's influence and impact extended beyond its activists and their advocates to inspire local inhabitants to take charge of the development of their communities.

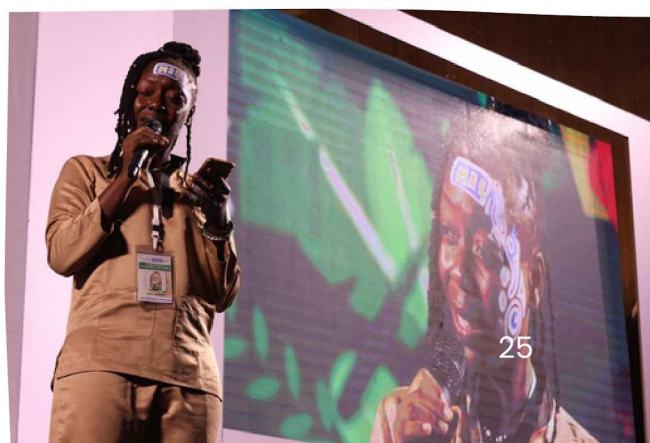
A **Speak Up Stand Out project documentary** has been produced as one key result of the project. It tells the journey of the Speak Up Stand Out activists and the outcomes of their community projects.

### Learning Journey

One of the most important lessons from the Speak Up, Stand Out project is that **young people can make a significant impact if they are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making**. The project has shown that young people are passionate about making their communities better, and they have the skills and ideas to do it. When given the resources and support they need, young people can lead successful campaigns on a wide range of issues, and make real and lasting change in their communities and in society at large.

The Speak Up, Stand Out project is a valuable model for funders and development organisations who want to support young people to lead social change in their communities. The project has shown that it is possible to resource unregistered youth groups and achieve real results and transformational impact in people's lives.

Nigeria's youth bulge may indeed be a ticking time bomb that could lead to increasing social unrest and instability. However, if the government and other stakeholders invest in young people and create opportunities for them, and if young people are given the opportunity to succeed, then the country's youth bulge could also be a catalyst for change and a golden opportunity to drive economic growth and development. The Speak Up, Stand Out program is a creative initiative that is trying to address some of these challenges head-on. It is a glowing and inspirational example of how young Nigerians are taking matters into their own hands and working to build a better future for themselves and their country.



# SPARKING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH YOUTH ACTIVISM

## The SUSO Program



### About the Nigeria Youth SDGs (NGYouthSDGs) Network

Nigeria Youth SDGs Network is a coalition of 300+ youth-led civil society organisations across the 37 states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory. Their mission is to amplify the voice of youth and enhance their participation in the developmental agenda of their country. NGYouthSDGs provides opportunities and platforms for youth-led/focused civil society organisations to localise the sustainable development goals in their communities, making their voices count and holding the government accountable for the SDGs.

The network's Speak Up, Stand Out (SUSO) project, funded by VOICE, promotes the push for accountability and greater participation of young people in decisions that affect them by providing them the tools they need to engage and influence social change.



# ADVOCATE FOR THE VOTING RIGHTS OF INMATES

## Project Pollrite 23

**Rightsholder Groups:** Inmates in Nigeria

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation; Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Carmelite Prisoners Interest Organization (CAPIO)



In a groundbreaking ruling back in 2014, a Federal High Court in Benin, Edo State, affirmed the voting rights of inmates. Despite this legal milestone, incarcerated individuals in Nigeria have still faced obstacles in exercising their right to vote. With little progress made towards facilitating inmate voting, these individuals took their case to the appeals court, urging the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure their inclusion in the voters' register. Once again, the court upheld the earlier ruling, underscoring the voting rights of inmates.

To address this issue, the Pollrite 23 Project, funded by Voice and implemented by the Carmelite Prisoners Interest Organization (CAPIO), was launched. The initiative aimed to advocate for the voting rights of inmates across Nigerian custodial centers, with the objective of securing these rights in time for the 2023 general elections. The project's scope encompassed engaging various stakeholders, including the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), as well as governmental entities such as INEC and the Nigerian National Assembly (NASS).

CAPIO, a civil society organization renowned for its diverse interventions in correctional facilities, such as providing legal aid and organizing skill-building initiatives like manufacturing sanitary pads and detergents, has initiated the Pollrite23 project in response to inmates' desire to exercise their voting rights, given that they are not legally disqualified from doing so. By undertaking this project, CAPIO has brought the issue to the forefront of discussions among stakeholders and policymakers. The primary aim of the project was to advocate for the inclusion of inmates in the electoral process, exploring the feasibility of enabling voting within custodial centers. The project piloted this concept during the 2023 national elections in three states: Enugu, Lagos, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

CAPIO employed 2 major innovations in implementing this project: (1) a community engagement strategy was developed to guide grassroots and (2) high-level advocacy to influence already mapped stakeholders, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Federal Ministries of Interiors and Justice as well as the Nigeria National Assembly (NASS) to formulate a Framework for Voting within Custodial Centres in Nigeria.

The project succeeded in raising awareness, particularly among stakeholders and renewed the push for the Pollrite 23 project's goals, including:

- **Facilitate Civic Engagement:** This initiative aims to promote civic engagement among communities with low voter turnout, including inmates in Nigeria.
- **Awareness and Enabling Environment:** To create an enabling environment for inmates to exercise their electoral rights in Nigeria.
- **Electoral Framework:** aiming to establish an electoral framework specifically for inmates, setting the groundwork for elections within Custodial Centres.
- **Access to Electoral Resources:** ensuring access to registration/card collection points, polling units, and INEC help desks.
- **Voter Education:** focusing on providing voter education activities for inmates and wardens.

The project was not without its challenges. The framework, which was developed for the 2023 elections, could not be validated in time for the elections due to bureaucratic issues. But like every challenge, this presented an opportunity to take a step back and learn from the process.

### Learnings

Throughout each stage of the project implementation process, valuable lessons were gleaned. One pivotal realization was the imperative of engaging a broader array of stakeholders as advocates and allies right from the project's inception. Responding adeptly to challenges encountered, CAPIO swiftly adjusted its approach by establishing a collaborative coalition comprising diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in governance, democracy, and electoral affairs. This collaborative effort aimed not only to enhance the project's credibility but

also to magnify its impact beyond the capacity of any single organization. Furthermore, CAPIO intends to present the framework to the National Assembly, endorsed by members of the collaborative group.

Although the framework wasn't validated early enough to align with the timeline of the 2023 national elections, INEC has committed to revalidating it for future national elections.

Employing a comprehensive strategy encompassing policy research, community engagement, stakeholder identification, collaboration, and advocacy, CAPIO navigated challenges during implementation while steadfastly advocating for inmate voting rights. Notably, this advocacy culminated in high-level discussions at the Senate, spearheaded by Senator Abba Moro, the former Minister of Interior overseeing the Nigerian Correctional Service. The project also heightened awareness about inmates' voting entitlements among stakeholders and the public. The Pollrite 23 Project holds substantial promise in illuminating the realities within custodial centers across Nigeria.

The CAPIO team is now focused on leveraging the insights garnered from this project to refine their strategies for the next election cycle and to broaden their advocacy efforts by engaging additional Civil Society Organizations.

***"When the birds learn to fly without stopping, the hunter will learn to shoot without missing". Within an advocacy project, it is not out of place to expect and encounter twists and turns along the path, leading to a seeming delay in advocacy wins, but that is where the true success is recorded."*** – CAPIO Project Officer Michael Ukwuma.



***Ibrahim Usman, Comptroller  
of Corrections Operations  
Service, Nigerian Correctional  
Service (NCOS)***

“CAPIO is not a new name to us; we popularly refer to CAPIO as **‘Extra-Warden’** because of the numerous things they do with inmates. This Poll rights (Pollrite23) of inmates is what the correctional service has been longing for because inmates are passionate about their rights to vote. The coming on board of CAPIO has put it on the front burner, and thanks to their consistency, it has gone quite far. They have not relented since we started this thing: there have been meetings upon meetings, seminar after seminar, advocacy upon advocacy, going to who and who matters, including stakeholders”.

***Executive Director  
of CAPIO, Fr. Jude  
Isizugo***

“We will keep pushing, and the thing is, we learn at every stage. We plan to make a submission to the National Assembly and the prisons. A good number of CSOs and NGOs working in governance, democracy, and electoral matters will sign a concept note that we will come up with. It will no longer carry the power of one organization alone, it will be a group of CSOs who are interested and fighting for the rights of inmates to vote in the Nigerian election. The target was to vote in 2023 and it didn’t come to pass, that’s okay. What I learned from that is there is need to keep advocating, keep putting more efforts”

### **About the Carmelite Prisoners Interest Organization (CAPIO)**

CAPIO was established in 1992 as a Human Rights organization to address the rights, needs, and dignity of prisoners. The organization was formally registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in 2003. The organization has a track record of supporting the rehabilitation as well as protection and enforcement of the Human Rights of prisoners in Nigeria.

CAPIO’s mission is implemented through four (4) main program areas including Medical Aid Program, LegalAid Program, Rehabilitation Program, and Social Welfare Program. The various programs employ advocacy as a key strategy to seek sustainable development in the Criminal Justice Sector in Nigeria.



# A NEW GENERATION OF MALE ACTIVISTS AGAINST GBV

## Project SABI



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence and men

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to social services, health and education; Improved access to resources and employment;

**Grantee:** Connected Development (CODE) & Boys Quarters Africa (BQA)

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious problem in Nigeria, affecting 1 in 3 women.\* It takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, child marriage, and harmful traditional practices. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) can have devastating consequences for women and girls, including physical and psychological harm, social isolation, and economic hardship. It perpetuates gender inequality and prevents women and girls from reaching their full potential. Addressing violence against women and girls requires comprehensive measures, including awareness campaigns, strengthening support systems, and addressing pervasive gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained beliefs and expectations about how men and women should behave, based on their gender. In Nigeria, like many parts of the world, young boys are exposed to a plethora of gender stereotypes that can influence their perceptions and behaviours towards gender roles and relationships. Unfortunately, these stereotypes can sometimes perpetuate acts of gender-based violence, contributing to a cycle of harm and inequality.

Some of these gender stereotypes men and boys adopt include traditional masculinity, which emphasizes strength and emotional suppression, hindering boys' emotional expression and empathy; the association of masculinity with power which can lead to aggressive behaviours and entitlement, contributing to violence; and hyper-sexualization of masculinity which encourages men to view women as objects of desire, undermining respect for boundaries and consent.

To combat these stereotypes and reduce gender-based violence, men and boys need to be educated on gender equality, consent, emotional intelligence and other critical issues.

### Project Sabi

In Nigeria, Connected Development (CODE) and Boys Quarters Africa (BQA) are implementing a VOICE influencing grant project – Project Sabi. Sabi is a Nigerian Pidgin-English word which means 'to know', and the aim of Project Sabi is to educate men and boys on how their attitudes and practices are crucial to fostering a more equal and safer society. The central idea is to ignite a countrywide movement aimed at ending all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWGs), by strategically building the capacity of men and boys, to take the lead in driving the conversation.

\* National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF. 2019. 2018 Nigeria DHS Key Findings. Abuja, Nigeria and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF.

CODE and Boys Quarters, through effective mobilisation and strategic stakeholder engagement, set out to ensure men acknowledge and understand how sexism, male dominance, and male privilege lay the foundation for violence against women and girls and create an avenue for men and boys to reflect on their powers and privileges and understand that real and sustainable change won't be possible until they become full allies and partners on this journey.

Project SABI, through a grassroots engagement approach, targeted 1,000 men and 1,000 boys over a period of 20 months with information on their roles as responders, diverse communication and reporting channels, and the need to mobilise mass voices to collectively speak out against violence against women and girls.

### Innovative Change Solutions

Many programs aimed at addressing gender-based violence tend to prioritize dealing with the aftermath and consequences experienced by women and girls, rather than tackling the underlying reasons behind the violence targeting them. This preference stems from the complexity of the issue, which has diverse root causes. Tackling these root causes can pose challenges, leading many initiatives to focus on offering support and assistance to victims and survivors instead.

Project SABI stands out as a pioneering innovative effort – it's a behavioural change program centered on men and boys, aiming to empower them as advocates for gender equality and leaders in the fight against gender-based violence in Nigeria. Through specialised training, Project SABI equips men and boys with the tools to engage in strategic advocacy and collaborate with various stakeholders. Its innovative methods include:

- **Involving boys and men as active participants:** Project SABI's involvement of boys and men as active participants is a significant innovation because it challenges the traditional view of men as perpetrators of gender-based violence and instead sees them as potential allies in the fight against GBV. The project used a variety of approaches to engage boys and men, including training sessions, 'consent concerts', mobilising and creating an institutional Boys Against Gender-Based Violence Club, town hall meetings, roundtable discussions, safe spaces, and engagement with religious leaders and individuals at motor parks. It also organised immersive cluster-based town-halls for men and local and informal bodies like NURTW, Cooperatives, etc. where participants were guided to carefully examine and challenge the role every man subtly plays in aiding other abusive men.
- **Partnerships with key stakeholders:** Project SABI's partnerships with the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, and the Enugu State Ministry of Gender Affairs and Social Development and Religious Leaders are essential to its success. These partnerships provided the project with a central mobilisation channel and made it easier to engage and mobilise various stakeholders throughout the project duration. For instance, male religious leaders were mobilized to attend capacity-strengthening sessions focused on the role and impact of religion and how religious leaders can actively participate in combating the rise of sexual and gender-based violence across the project states. There was also strong advocacy for the creation of Gender-Based Violence Desks across this strategic institution.
- **Social Construct Platform:** The Social Construct Platform is a digital data collection and analysis tool used to assess the misogynistic tendencies of men and boys, educate them about GBV, and serve as a comprehensive reporting platform for victims and survivors. The platform has successfully reached over 3,318 individuals.

- **SGBV Manuals:** The SGBV Manuals are 24-week learning manuals for mentorship and extracurricular activities designed for boys and girls in various secondary schools within the project's focal states. The manuals aim to reach approximately 2,610 individuals.
- **Documentary and VOX-POP:** A documentary and VOX-POP were used to engage with rights holders and highlight the impact of sexism and male dominance. The documentary aims to end all forms of violence against women and girls, while the VOX-POP in three languages captures the experiences and opinions of rights holders on the street regarding SGBV.
- **SGBV Manual for transport workers and organisations in the informal sector:** The SGBV Manual for transport workers and organisations in the informal sector was designed and developed by the project. The manuals are used to engage gender desk officers within the motor park space and have reached over 605 individuals.

### Project Impact

Some of the key achievements of Project SABI include:

- **Partnerships with key stakeholders:** The project engaged with key stakeholders, such as the National Union of Road Transport Workers and the Enugu State Management Agency, to establish five gender desk offices across five states in Nigeria. These offices provide support to victims and survivors of gender-based violence and advocate for their rights.
- **Supporting women and girls:** The project has provided support groups and safe spaces for women and girls, allowing them to share their experiences, seek psychosocial support, and raise awareness about gender-based violence within their communities.

- **Empowering boys:** The project has empowered boys to become allies in the fight against GBV through the Boys Against Gender-Based Violence Club. The club, which is the first of its kind in Africa, organised one of the largest international boy-child summits across Sub-Saharan Africa, with over 2,600 boys from six Nigerian states in attendance. It has garnered the support of prominent stakeholders who have committed to ensuring quality education for boys in Lagos State.

### Learning Journey

There were significant lessons learnt deconstructing biased social norms and rallying men and boys as agents of change. These learnings challenged decades-long customs, traditions, perspectives, and ways of life. Policymakers, programmers, researchers, and activists around the world agree that men must play a significant role if societies are to achieve gender equality. The goals of changing men's practices in relation to violence, health, and family life – and efforts to dismantle the underlying factors that prompt and support these practices – have become well-established in the global gender equality agenda.

According to Barker et al. 2011 and Heilman et al. 2014, failure to involve men in delivering solutions that contribute to gender equality means we might unfairly burden women and girls with the task of ending global injustices and inequalities that result primarily from men's actions.

A huge learning was that men and boys can be allies in ending gender-based violence because everyone talks to the victims, but no one talks to the potential perpetrators.

The project took a comprehensive and innovative approach to educating, empowering, and mobilizing men and boys in the fight against GBV. It focused on motor parks and the marketplace because there is a high rate of gender-based violence in these places, and it focused on Lagos, Abuja, and Enugu because



## A NEW GENERATION OF MALE ACTIVISTS AGAINST GBV

### Project SABI

these states are central to the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) network, which has a large presence in motor parks across Nigeria.

Project Sabi's core principle revolves around shaping one young man at a time. Through its dedication to training boys, the project aims to cultivate individuals who will mature into well-rounded men, comprehending their responsibilities in nurturing and upholding an equitable and secure community for all, with a particular focus on women and girls.

#### About Connected Development

Connected Development [CODE] is a non-government organisation and ONE Africa Award winner focused on empowering marginalised communities in Africa through advocacy for open governance, transparency and accountability. CODE's mission is to empower marginalised communities in Africa, and they envision a world where everyone, everywhere, can hold their government accountable. CODE started on the premise of its "Follow the Money" (FTM) Initiative in 2010, a youth-led movement to shine a light on the plaguing corruption in international aid and public spending while demanding transparency, accountability, and improved public service delivery.

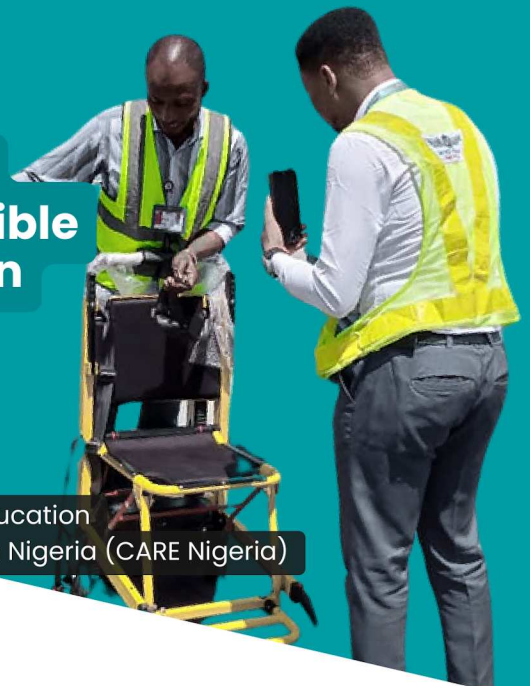
#### About Boys Quarters Africa

On this project, CODE partnered with Boys Quarters Africa, a boychild transformation movement founded in December 2018, whose mission is to educate, empower and advocate for the boychild. Their vision is a movement to raise a new tribe of boys who will be better humans, who rise to the demands of life and project the right kind of masculinity, fit enough for the desired future.



# TRANSFORMING AIR TRAVEL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA

## Project Accessible Aviation



**Rightsholder Group:** People with disabilities

**Impact Theme:** Improved access to social services, health and education

**Grantee:** The Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment in Nigeria (CARE Nigeria)

When Dr Chike Okogwu suffered a freak car crash in December 2006 that left him paralysed from the waist down, life as he knew it was over, and everything became forever changed. Eight years later, in 2014, having experienced first-hand what it was like to live in a world that marginalised people with disabilities dwell, one that gave them little or no say in rebuilding their lives and communities, he founded CARE Nigeria – The Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment in Nigeria. The organisation has become a forefront advocate for disability rights in Nigeria.

The Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities face no barriers in accessing services and facilities anywhere in the country. The organisation's interventions include provisions of scholarships, humanitarian relief, and advocacy for accessible air travel. CARE's accessible air travel campaign, '**Project Accessible Aviation**,' was founded in 2021 after Dr. Okogwu famously experienced and spoke out against discrimination and difficulties while travelling by air in Nigeria. The project seeks to address the daily frustrations passengers with disabilities continue to face in airports and with local airline companies in Nigeria with a view to removing all barriers to accessible air transportation for PWDs.

People with disabilities face significant challenges in Nigerian airports due to the lack of accessibility infrastructure (such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms), services, and support desperately needed to facilitate easy movement and their use of airport facilities. The situation makes it difficult for them to navigate airports, access gates, and board flights, often resulting in delayed or missed flights. In addition, many airport staff lack the necessary training and expertise to assist people with disabilities, and discriminatory treatment is common. The cost of air travel is often prohibitively high for people with disabilities, many of whom are unable to afford the extra costs of special assistance or accessible facilities.

According to research conducted by CARE, only 3 out of Nigeria's 47 airports (including airstrips and military airports), have some form of provisions that support the travel experience for persons with disabilities. The rest are plagued by inaccessible infrastructure that make life on the go difficult, for persons with disability.

### Project Accessible Aviation

Project Accessible Aviation is a solution-oriented call to action that demands for modern assistive devices at every airport and within the aircrafts in Nigeria to eliminate accessibility barriers. The project spearheaded the '**CARE and Access for All**' counters supported by the National Commission of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) and the

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to provide services to all people with disabilities, including sick, pregnant women, older persons, people with albinism and any vulnerable person. The desk is expected to register and assist all such passengers and ensure they are treated with dignity throughout their journey. The records received will help the NCPWD in issuing the Disabilities Certificate program, which is part of its mandate to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities in Nigeria, in line with the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018. It is a scheme that aims to provide identification and recognition for PWDs in Nigeria and their visibility, inclusion, and empowerment in society. The certificate is a legal document that serves as proof of disability and entitles the holder to various benefits and privileges.

The project put several key components in place such as:

- **Awareness and advocacy:** CARE has worked to shine a spotlight on the challenges faced by people with disabilities in the aviation sector and to advocate for change. This has involved working with stakeholders such as the Nigerian government, airlines, airport authorities and the media, committing these key stakeholders in the Nigerian Aviation sector to play important roles in setting up accessible air transport systems.
- **Capacity building:** CARE has provided training to airport staff and airline operators on how to assist PWDs. This training has covered topics such as disability awareness, the rights of PWDs, and how to provide accessible services. The organization is also supporting job creation through new opportunities for operators of assistive devices and ancillary services at the airports.

- **Infrastructure development:** CARE has worked to improve the accessibility of airport infrastructure. This has included installing ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. CARE has also provided assistive devices such as wheelchairs and stair climbers.

Key implementing partners of the Accessible Aviation Project include National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), who create awareness for citizens on the rights of people with disabilities and implement disability-friendly policies; airline operators, the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) and the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), who both ensure policy, operations and compliance within the sector as well as the National Assembly of Nigeria, which formulates the enabling laws, and the mass media, which amplifies the rights and voices of people with disabilities.

### Innovative Change Solutions

The Accessible Aviation Project has implemented several innovative solutions and deployed unique equipment and technology to improve accessibility for people with disabilities at airports. These solutions can be categorised as follows:

#### Tools and Technology:

- a. **Ambi scissors lifts:** These lifts rise to the height of the aircraft to lift and carry people with disabilities.
- b. **Stair-climbing wheelchairs:** These wheelchairs allow people with disabilities to climb stairs independently.
- c. **Wheelchairs:** Wheelchairs are available at the airport at no cost to people with disabilities.
- d. **Umbrellas:** Umbrellas are provided to people with albinism to protect them from the sun.

#### People and Systems:

- a. **Disability desk officers:** Disability desk officers are available to aid people with disabilities with navigation, sign language interpretation, and other needs.

### Operational Approaches:

a. Collaboration: The project was also able to achieve the level of impact it did by using a collaborative approach that involved working with a variety of stakeholders, including people with disabilities, airlines, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations, towards a common goal.

### Project Impact

- **Policy reform:** A petition submitted to the National Assembly following the harrowing airport experience of CARE Nigeria's founder, led to a hearing by the legislative branch. A subsequent report indicting the airline served as a deterrent to other airlines and mandated the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority to update its laws and require airlines to post their flying policies online.
- **Assistive devices and supportive infrastructure development:** The Accessible Aviation Project has made a significant impact in improving the travel experience and quality of life for people with disabilities in Nigeria. The project has contributed to reducing discriminatory practices against people with disabilities in the aviation sector by providing various mechanisms to ensure easy air transportation. The project facilitated the deployment and installation of accessibility infrastructure at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport and PWDs who travel through this airport now enjoy better services and an improved travel experience. Plans are underway to scale this up to more airports around the country.
- **Awareness creation:** Amplifying the success story of improved infrastructure at the pilot airport (Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport), has raised the awareness of the general public about the needs and rights of travelling PWDs and indeed all PWDs. It is hoped that the process of replicating this in other airports around the country will further increase awareness and support for PWDs nationwide.

- **Establishing a service desk:** Located in the departure hall of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, Nigeria, the service desk is staffed by disability desk officers trained to assist PWDs with navigation, sign language interpretation, and other needs.

### Learning Journey

One of the key learnings from the Accessible Aviation Project is the importance of collaboration for achieving success. The project has been successful because it has brought together a variety of stakeholders, including people with disabilities, airlines, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations, to work towards a common goal.

Another key learning is that influencing for change requires persistence and grit. The Accessible Aviation Project has faced many challenges, but has been relentless in its work to make a real difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Nigeria.

### Project Sustainability

The project's impact has inspired stakeholders to take steps to sustain the gains of the 'Accessible Aviation' project. Key milestones in this regard include:

- On February 28th, 2024, the Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment (CARE) took centre stage at the National Assembly's House of Representatives Complex for the Accessible Aviation Project's Partnership Charter Signing and Disability Service Desk & Equipment Handover Ceremony. This significant milestone aims to bridge gaps between aviation stakeholders and PWD travellers in Nigeria, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in air travel. Similarly, the handover of equipment acquired under the Voice-funded Accessible Aviation project was a crucial sustainability milestone, providing incentive for scaling up across the entire country.

## TRANSFORMING AIR TRAVEL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA

### Project Accessible Aviation

- On the 3rd of April, 2024, The Executive Secretary of the National Commission of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), Mr James Lalu, hosted the CARE project team and partners to a press conference where the Commission unveiled plans to take over the Accessible Aviation project and scale it up across major cities in Nigeria. In his words, "Today we are taking over a project by CARE, to which we made initial commitments. The National Disability Commission will deploy our personnel to major Nigerian airports to provide the necessary support for persons with disabilities. The little number of personnel we have may not be able to cover all the airports but we are going to start with some of the major airports. We will train our staffs and provide sign interpreters within the airports"

VOICE supports and promotes the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in societies. The Voice project's "Nothing About Us Without Us" mantra, is symbolic of the struggle of PWDs for inclusive human rights implementation. It presents the belief that no decision affecting persons with disabilities should be made without their full and active participation. The Accessible Aviation Project showcases this mantra and is a remarkable example of how innovation and collaboration can be used to create a more inclusive society.

#### About the Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment in Nigeria (CARE Nigeria)

CARE Nigeria is a non-governmental organisation working to promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Its mission is to create a society where persons with disabilities are fully included and empowered to live their lives to the fullest.






# Celebrating Inclusion



# NIGERIA INCLUSION GRANTS AT A GLANCE

## ACHA

The African Caribbean Heritage Alliance

### PROJECT:

**Nigeria NOW-Us AWARD:**

**Celebrating Inclusion**

A project to support, empower and build the capacity of winners of the Nigeria NOW-Us Celebrating Inclusion award.

## COSROPIN

The Coalition of Societies for the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria

### PROJECT:

**Older Person's Hangout**

A project working to ensure the well-being, welfare and dignity of older persons.

## MDF

Motherhen Development Foundation

### PROJECT:

**Yaki Da Cin Zарafin Mata**

A campaign fighting GBV and poverty among women in rural communities in Gombe and Borno states of Nigeria.

## GMI

Gender Mobile Initiative

### PROJECT:

**Amplifying Female Students' Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response**

A project that builds the capacity and agency of women and girls on campus to fight and survive sexual violence and harassment





## Youth Festival

or healthcare needs, deserves to be respected and valued as a crucial member of their community. Everyone deserves a seat at the table.

Through the celebrating inclusion projects funded under the Nothing About Us Without Us (NOW-Us) Award, marginalized voices are being empowered using inclusive approaches to tell untold stories, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable society.

Facilitated by the African Caribbean Heritage Alliance (ACHA), this initiative sets sail under the Voice-funded "Now Us Award" project, ensuring "nothing about us without us!" Over a hundred organizations applied for the opportunity, culminating in 10 organizations participating in a 5-day boot camp. From this, three organizations emerged as winners, showcasing the uniqueness and originality of their ideas for inclusive projects.

These winning projects include the Motherhen Development Foundation's initiative addressing gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment, COSROPIN's "Older Person's Hangout Project" across rural communities, and Gender Mobile Initiative's project on sexual harassment prevention and response at the University of Abuja.

The primary objective of celebrating inclusion was to amplify rightsholder voices, highlighting unsung efforts and moving towards a more responsive and inclusive society where rightsholders are empowered to enact positive change in their lives and communities.

# VOICES FOR INCLUSION

## Spotlight on NOW-Us Award Winning Projects

Imagine being told that you don't deserve certain rights due to factors beyond your control, excluding you from demanding a seat at the table. Now, imagine being unaware of a table accessible to you, with a seat waiting at the banquet you've seen others trooping out to.

Conversations worldwide have long centered on diversity, yet it's now evident that diversity alone doesn't ensure representation. This realization has spurred a shift towards promoting inclusion, driven by changing demographics and increased awareness of social justice issues. Voice advocates for inclusion, asserting that everyone, regardless of abilities, disabilities,



Advocacy at a town hall meeting

***So, what did we learn on the journey of celebrating inclusion? Let's simplify it this way: achieving inclusion demands intentional action during implementation, ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of their circumstances, are respected and valued within their communities.***



# CELEBRATING INCLUSION IN NIGERIA

## The NOW-Us AWARD



**Rightsholder Group:** Indigenous people and ethnic minorities, vulnerable elderly and youth, women facing exploitation, abuse, and/or violence, and people with disabilities  
**Impact Theme:** Improved access to social services, health and education  
**Grantee:** African Caribbean Heritage Alliance (Acha)

For many years, conversations around the world have been filled with themes on diversity, which is the presence of differences within a given setting, including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, place of practice, and practice type\*. In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition that diversity alone does not equal representation; this has caused a shift towards promoting inclusion to create more equitable representation and supportive environments for all individuals. This shift has been driven by several factors, including changing demographics, increased awareness of social justice issues, and a growing body of research that shows the benefits of inclusion for individuals and organisations alike\*.

Through the Voice-funded initiative, 'Nothing About Us Without Us Award' (NOW-Us), the African Caribbean Heritage Alliance (ACHA) has set the stage for meaningful action to stimulate a more inclusive and sustainable society. They have done this by creating a platform for amplifying and celebrating groundbreaking initiatives that bring about change among rightsholder groups such as - indigenous people and ethnic minorities, vulnerable elderly and youth, as well as women facing exploitation, abuse, and violence in Nigeria.

### Nothing About Us Without Us

The Nothing About Us Without Us (Now-Us) Awards – is an inclusive innovation project that honours and beams the spotlight on ongoing initiatives led by rightsholder groups and communities, often excluded from interventions in hard-to-reach areas in society, to promote and demand their rights. The Now-Us award is part of the Annual Partos Innovation Festival, in partnership between Partos, Spindle, and Voice, with the core focus being to employ innovative approaches that strengthen the capacity of marginalised groups, facilitating their advocacy and empowerment processes.

The (NOW-Us) awards aim to promote inclusive initiatives, trigger the empowerment of minority groups, strengthen innovative approaches, and build their capacity to influence and establish learning platforms. Such platforms encourage the sharing of lessons learnt and provide fora for grantees to tap into and gain mutual understanding and empowerment to benefit the most marginalised and discriminated groups in society. The ACHA team, with extensive experience in working with ethnic minorities and vulnerable communities, leveraged linking and learning platforms to bring inclusive initiatives to the fore, facilitate cross-learning

\* [https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/220/Supplement\\_2/S30/5552351](https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/220/Supplement_2/S30/5552351)

\* <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/how-2020-accelerated-conversations-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

across participating organisations and highlight innovations around inclusion whilst consolidating their already established platform in their mission to unite Africa and the Caribbeans.

### An Inclusion Innovation Award

The ACHA innovation involved a call for proposals from Civil Society organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and Community-Based organisations (CBO). Based on the project's scope, ACHA began by issuing a Request for Proposal and received over a hundred (100) applications shortlisted to 10 organisations. The ACHA Bootcamp, held from 13 -17 June 2022, established an enabling environment for conversations among the 10 participating organisations that were already implementing inclusive programs. Apart from pitching their respective innovations for the award, the 5-day participatory boot camp had participants delve into understanding the "NOW Us Award" concept, overall project framework, and ways to collectively amplify their voices, reflect, refine, and ideate the next steps for their initiative.

After a competitive pitching process, the top three organisations were selected based on the uniqueness of their ideas, originality, and ability to express themselves on how they would ensure inclusion for their various rightsholder groups. The three organisations who emerged as winners of the NOW-Us Award and were awarded grants include:

- Motherhen Development Foundation, Gombe implementing **'Project Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata'**\* in Gombe and Borno states - 1st place
- Coalition of Societies for the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria (COSROPIN) implementing the **'Older Person's Hangout Project'** across 10 rural communities in Nigeria - 2nd place
- Gender Mobile Initiative implementing **'Amplifying Female Students' Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response'** project at the University of Abuja- 3rd place.

\* "fight against violence against women" in Hausa language

The essence of Celebrating Inclusion is built upon the need for inclusiveness in programming where rightsholder groups are carried along throughout the entire process - inception to implementation. Inclusion is defined by Voice as **"all people, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or health care needs, have the right to be respected and appreciated as valuable members of their communities."** Therefore, inclusion ensures that the perspectives and pain points of rightsholders are taken note of, their voices are heard and amplified, they feel more confident and when it comes to developing advocacy guides and formulating policies, these are done based on the rightsholders' points of view.

ACHA's implementation approach involved working with the three 'Now-Us: Celebrating Inclusion' awardees as partner organisations and rightsholders. Their research questions include: *"How would we ensure that the right organisations are selected to represent the rightsholder groups to amplify their voices and ensure these voices are heard?"* and *"How would we ensure that after selection there is inclusion in the project implementation process and sustainability of the initiative after implementation?"* With these questions in mind, ACHA set out to implement approaches, which included providing capacity strengthening, training and support for the partner organisations. This support was aimed at empowering them to effectively implement their projects, amplify the voices of rightsholder groups, and ensure the long-term sustainability of their initiatives.

***"All people, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or health care needs, have the right to be respected and appreciated as valuable members of their communities."***

ACHA provided support through:

- **Capacity Gap Assessment:** ACHA began with a capacity gap assessment to identify the areas where the partners needed strengthening and created a Capacity Development Plan that itemized these and fed directly into the work plan for providing organisational capacity strengthening.
- **Capacity Strengthening:** The partners received training tailored to their specific requirements at various stages. This included instruction in proposal writing and grant identification, crafting logical frameworks, assistance in formulating communication strategies for their organizational outreach, and support in drafting operational policies. Through these interventions, the partners transitioned from having limited capacities in technical and administrative domains to demonstrating robust capabilities, as evidenced by their successful implementation endeavors.
- **Embodying Inclusion:** ACHA was intentional about involving partners at every stage of their operations, from planning through execution to closeout. An example of this approach is evident in the National Dialogue, which aimed to convene all stakeholders to address discrimination against various rights-holder groups. The success of the National Dialogue can be attributed largely to the inclusive involvement of stakeholders in processes such as selecting the date, developing the agenda, devising implementation strategies, selecting participants, and determining the event's location.

### Learning Journey

Implementing the **Now-Us: Celebrating Inclusion** project was not without its challenges. Navigating the soaring costs of operations amidst inflation and other economic realities was a significant challenge. ACHA recognised the need to optimize its partnership dynamics and collaborated with COSROPIN in a co-location arrangement to address this challenge. A learning experience was the initial pushback from the partner organisations revolving around understanding the role of ACHA as Lead Implementer. This was overcome by ACHA demonstrating their capacity to facilitate and a consistent effort to work and collaborate with these organisations in their activities. This made the partners more receptive to ACHA facilitating the process and made the capacity-strengthening process rewarding for all.

Another significant lesson emerged from the realization that their comprehension of inclusion was somewhat superficial until they began implementing projects. Throughout implementation, ACHA discovered that by intentionally prioritizing inclusion at every stage, they achieved improved outcomes in terms of partner responsiveness and smoother engagement with rights-holders. ACHA actively solicited input and feedback from partners and rights-holders, incorporating these insights into their evolving approach to inclusion.

Moreover, by shifting their perspective to regard partners as rights-holders themselves, ACHA gained a deeper understanding of inclusion. This shift fosters a sense of ownership and helps minimize setbacks, as the end product reflects a collaborative agreement and addresses partners' concerns or viewpoints.



# CELEBRATING INCLUSION IN NIGERIA

## The NOW-Us AWARD

The primary aim of the Celebrating Inclusion project was to unite the voices of rights-holders. By means of the Now-Us Awards, Voice has successfully amplified unrecognized endeavors towards a more responsive and inclusive society. This platform empowered rights-holders to effect the needed changes to enhance their lives and livelihoods.

### About The Africa Caribbean Heritage Alliance (ACHA)

ACHA aims to reunite Africa and the Caribbean in several sectors. The tagline, positively reconnecting the Caribbean with Africa envisages sustainably developing the countries through connecting its peoples.

ACHA aims to achieve its mission through the positive connections between the continents. The focus, therefore, is on bringing and building awareness to both Africa about the Caribbean and vice versa and facilitating the opportunities in various sectors as listed and those that may arise thereafter.



# TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF NIGERIA'S OLDER PERSONS

## The Older Person's Hangout



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly & Elderly Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

**Impact Theme:** Improved access to social services, health and education

**Grantee:** The Coalition of Societies for the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria (COSROPIN)

The creases around her eyes deepened, and a broad smile illuminated her face. One could easily envision the vibrancy she exuded decades ago, her laughter still resonating with a youthful energy despite her 58 years. Margaret Umoh, a trader in Mabushi Village, FCT, fondly recounted her experience at the **Older Person's Hangout** organized by the Coalition of Societies for the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria (COSROPIN). Margaret's journey began with the receipt of an informative handbill during a visit by COSROPIN representatives to her neighborhood. From there, she eagerly participated in a series of activities, including the "hangout," delighting in the adventures she had embarked upon.

Recounting with childlike glee how she had played a game of 'darts', even pausing to demonstrate the game as she aimed and struck the imaginary board with her air throw, Margaret narrated how she enjoyed dancing and making new friends. "These hangouts," she declared, beaming, "not only made me feel younger, but they give me a sense of belonging, like I'm part of something bigger than myself." According to Margaret, this was unlike any other programme she had attended for older persons. The older person's hangouts not only enabled lively conversations with her peers and helped her form new friendships, but they also opened her eyes to the challenges of ageing and the things that could make an older person truly happy and live a longer, healthier life.

Through an inclusive gathering, the hangout familiarized older participants with healthy aging strategies, stressing the importance of regular health checkups, balanced nutrition, adequate rest, physical activity, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness. Margaret, now an advocate for the COSROPIN Older Person's Hangout, shares her firsthand experiences with neighbors, aiming to inspire others to attend future events. COSROPIN entered the hangout for the ACHA NOW Us Award Bootcamp, securing second place. This achievement allows them to implement a project that promotes inclusivity across generations, ensuring every elderly individual is included while bridging generational gaps.

***"These hangouts," she declared, beaming, "not only made me feel younger, but they give me a sense of belonging, like I'm part of something bigger than myself."***

*Margaret (COSROPIN Rightsholder)*

### The Older Person's Hangout

The Older Persons Hangout is an intergenerational initiative focused on reintegrating marginalized older individuals, particularly women, into society through rejuvenating social gatherings. Supported by Voice through the Now Us Awards, COSROPIN's project aimed to protect older persons' welfare and rights, promoting better health and aging for Nigeria's senior citizens. Their efforts also include research, advocacy with relevant authorities, and policy initiatives.

COSROPIN targeted isolated, marginalized and vulnerable older individuals, engaging community leaders and influencers to ensure community acceptance. These leaders were involved in preparatory meetings to discuss the hangouts' objectives and impact. Their endorsement facilitated participant selection and paved the way for successful hangouts, establishing a replicable model for future initiatives.

The core objectives of the Older Person's Hangout include:

- To build social connections by creating opportunities for interactions, networking across generations, sharing life experiences, peer support, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, which would lead to friendships, bonding, and a sense of belonging, reducing social isolation and loneliness.
- Promote general well-being by designing an avenue for learning new hobbies, engaging in physical and mental activities, and participating in health talks. It aims to improve mental and cognitive health, manage time effectively, and reduce the risk of dementia and other diseases.
- Offer support by providing respite for families through social care, healthcare, and caregiving assistance. This gives families peace of mind, knowing their loved ones are safe and engaged.

- Create a change of environment and offer stimulating activities. This will eliminate forced boredom and loneliness and contribute to overall well-being.

### Innovative Inclusion

The COSROPIN's Older Person's Hangout was built around the concept of social connection through fun activities as an approach towards healthy ageing. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), social connectedness influences our minds, bodies, and behaviours – all of which influence our health and life expectancy. It is the degree to which people have and perceive a desired number, quality, and diversity of relationships that creates a sense of belonging and being cared for, valued, and supported\*. Older people who maintain social and community networks tend to live longer, cope better with health conditions, and experience less depression\*.

The COSROPIN Older Person's Hangout achieved this social connection by establishing a platform that brought together indigenous, rural older persons in one space to facilitate their engagement in various sociocultural, healthy living activities and networking through the support of professional healthcare workers, caregivers, and volunteers. The programme was designed to make the older person feel good throughout the period through fun activities. COSROPIN also introduced an intergenerational approach by bringing children to dance, for instance, and other carefully thought-out activities to keep them engaged. The aspect of play embedded into the hangouts was memorable for all, rightsholders and stakeholders alike. From board games like Ludo, Drought, and Darts, card games like Whot, dancing games and especially the blindfold games, the memories sparked child-like excitement for all participants.

\* <https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/affect-health.htm>

\* <https://www.healthinaging.org/blog/social-connectedness-a-key-to-healthy-ageing/>

### Inclusion From Inception To Closeout

COSROPIN involved communities from the project's conception, seeking feedback and refining the program through continuous engagement. Before implementation, they consulted community gatekeepers and elders, incorporating their input on logistics and participant selection. This collaborative approach ensured the success of the hangouts, with feedback informing improvements in subsequent locations.

### Social Connection for Healthy Ageing

COSROPIN's hangouts addressed elderly isolation by fostering social connections beyond mere entertainment. Recognizing the detrimental effects of isolation on older individuals' health, they designed the hangouts to facilitate social interaction, games, exercises, and engagement. These activities combat loneliness, boost mental and cognitive health, promote healthy habits, and enhance overall well-being. By integrating various activities, COSROPIN provided a holistic experience that fosters a sense of inclusion among older persons.

### Project Impact

The "Older Persons' Hangout" was implemented from 30 September 2022 to 30th September 2023 in ten (10) rural communities across Nigeria. They include: (Mabushi, Kurudu, and Pigba-Kasa in FCT, Ilorin in Kwara state, Jos in Plateau state, Nnewi in Anambra state, Markurdi in Benue state, Kafanchan in Kaduna state, Shamaki in Gombe State and Ibadan in Oyo state. The rights holders were made up of diverse ethnic groups from Gbagi, Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Berom, Tiv, Idoma, Igede, and Jukun ethnic groups, with female participants exceeding male participants in most locations except in Anambra, Benue and Gombe States. The project was also deliberate about including Persons with Disability (PwDs) who could be in physical attendance.

- **Positive Reception:** The Older Person's Hangouts garnered enthusiastic approval, earning endorsements from both community and traditional leaders, as evidenced by their active involvement in mobilizing the elderly in their communities and their calls for more hangouts. Senator Dr. Eze Ajoku, President of COSROPIN, noted the overwhelming success of several hangouts, with attendance numbers exceeding the targeted figures by nearly half, and even doubling on one occasion. This suggests a promising potential for expanding the Hangouts to additional communities. Stakeholders and rights-holders similarly expressed surprise, enthusiasm, delight, and gratitude in their feedback, indicating satisfaction with the program's offerings and its tangible impact.
- **Significant Reach:** The hangout reached a total of 565 participants across the country, demonstrating a positive response and potential for further growth following continuous requests for repeat hangouts to be carried out in these locations.
- **Inclusion of PwDs:** The older person's hangout also accommodated Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), with representatives from various clusters in attendance, including individuals with physical disabilities and visual impairments. Feedback from the PwDs highlighted the inadequacies in the country's support systems for them. Despite extensive structural planning nationwide, such as infrastructure and transportation, there remained a conspicuous gap in inclusivity. Dr. Ajoku expressed optimism that with continued advocacy from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for the inclusion of PwDs, the nation would move towards greater inclusivity over time.

# TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF NIGERIA'S OLDER PERSONS

## The Older Person's Hangout

### Inclusion From Inception To Closeout

The Older Person's Hangout reinforced valuable lessons for COSROPIN, including the following:

- Adopting a comprehensive approach that combines various activities like games, exercises, and health talks is valuable in addressing multiple aspects of the well-being of older persons.
- The Older Person's Hangout showcased the power of inclusion by engaging stakeholders and community leaders in their programs, ensuring successful implementation in each visited community. By actively involving these groups, they gained insight into the unique needs of each community, which they incorporated into the hangouts. Recognizing a common interest in health among older persons across communities, they integrated screenings, tests, and vital checks into the hangouts. Additionally, they provided on-site medical assistance and expert-led health discussions.

### About COSPROPIN

The Coalition of the Rights of Older Persons in Nigeria focuses on the well-being and dignity of older persons in Nigeria. It was registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in 2016 and has over one hundred and thirty (130) registered entities in its fold, such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society organisations (CSOs), National Pension Unions (NUP), Senior Retired Civil Servants, Retirement Groups of the Army, Air force, Navy and Police, Academia/Professionals in ageing and all other groups working on issues/activities affecting Older Persons (Senior Citizens).





# ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Project Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata

**Rightsholder Group:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence, indigenous people and ethnic minorities

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to social services, health and education

**Grantee:** Motherhen Development Foundation (MDF)

The location was Bambam, a community in Balanga Local Government Area, Gombe State, Nigeria. Mrs Rifkatu Peter, a 59-year-old mentor, teacher and farmer was very clear as she spoke in the Hausa language. 'Mama', as she was popularly called, began, "Previously, women used to hide their stories of abuse because of the stigma attached to it. Since the '**Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata**' project started, women now speak up because they know that when they do, they have people that are listening, and it's there they find strength and support". She went on to narrate the story of a young girl who had experienced violence through attempted rape. Her reporting of the incident cast a searchlight on the perpetrator, who reportedly exiled himself from the community. It was a new dawn signalling that violence against women and girls (VAWG) was no longer tolerated in the community.

Mrs. Rifkatu Peter expressed gratitude for the Voice-funded project, highlighting its unique approach compared to political initiatives. Unlike political parties, Motherhen Development Foundation (MDF) didn't offer tangible gifts like money or groceries but provided something far more valuable - education on women's and girls' rights and how to respond to violence. Initially sceptical due to past disappointments, community women soon recognized the project's worth. It not only empowered them to protect themselves but also promoted economic independence by imparting livelihood skills.

Mrs Rifkatu is just one of the numerous women who were empowered by the Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata project across several communities in Gombe and neighbouring Borno states. She, along with others, now serves as a mentor to women in their communities, both directly and indirectly, empowering them by passing down their knowledge and experience in tangible ways.

### Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata

The Motherhen Development Foundation's "Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata" project, translating to "fight against violence against women" in Hausa, addresses gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment in rural Nigerian communities. This initiative, which won first place in the ACHA-led selection for the Voice Now Us award, ran from September 15, 2022, to September 15, 2023, reaching four communities: Bambam, Kuri, and Bojude in Gombe state, and Biu in Borno state. The project aimed to strengthen communities by promoting women and girls' economic empowerment, enhancing understanding of their fundamental human rights, and engaging men in addressing gender injustice to break the culture of silence.

By building the capacity of rights holders in selected communities for economic sustainability and improving community responses to eradicate gender injustice, the project sought to empower women and foster male involvement in combating violence against women and girls. Through education and support, the project aimed to encourage women to advocate for themselves and each other, creating a united front against abuse and ensuring justice for victims of violence.

#### Innovative Inclusion

The 'Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata' project innovatively trained community change agents to recognize VAWG, take preventive action, and report incidents. These change agents, consisting of women and youth, subsequently disseminated this knowledge to their peers, empowering hundreds of women and girls to advocate for their rights effectively.

Other innovations MDF employed included:

- **Advocacy visits to key community stakeholders to garner support and smoothen implementation:** MDF took a holistic approach, recognizing that GBV often occurs within familiar circles. Empowering the entire community, not just women and girls, to combat GBV was a priority. MDF conducted advocacy visits to District Heads in three communities in Gombe State, receiving positive reception. They also organized a campaign involving various stakeholders such as the police, Civil Defence Corps, Vigilante Groups, and Women and Youth Groups to discuss the project's objectives and potential impact. In Gombe and Borno states, the campaign was launched at the Palaces of the Emirs of Gombe and Biu. Through commitment cards, they secured support from these stakeholders, who played a vital role in mobilizing community members.

- **Training of leaders, influencers, and peer mentors from the communities:** MDF aimed to ensure gender and economic justice for women, adolescent girls, and people with disabilities. They achieved this by training recommended mentors, community leaders, influencers, and gatekeepers. Using existing 'majalisar' (Hausa congress) structures, they created safe spaces where people of all genders and abilities could discuss community issues. These spaces provided support and guidance for abuse victims. MDF also established school clubs for boys and girls, allowing rightsholders to lead and voice their desired changes. Implementation coincided with election season, requiring strategic management of community members expecting handouts as was the case with politicians visiting the community. Close collaboration with influencers/mentors facilitated seamless engagement with rightsholders.
- **MDF leveraged its network** to support women farmers with seeds for cultivation and agricultural guidance, to guide economic activities that could help women set up small businesses, and, to form cooperatives for village savings to support themselves financially.

#### Project Impact

The "Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata" project reached a total of 882 persons directly. They initially began with four volunteer mentors and expanded their reach over time. Their objective, successfully realized, was for these mentors to establish a network of trainers reaching all women in the community. For instance, a Champion from Biu mentored and graduated 15 young women in business, providing support for them to establish their livelihoods. Similarly, Mrs. Rifkatu Peter mentored up to 150 women and girls in Bam Bam community, Gombe state.

Through their innovative programming, they:

- Established safe spaces led by trained mentors to empower women and girls to break the culture of silence and seek justice collectively. These safe spaces provided a platform for sharing experiences and addressing challenges in a supportive environment.
- Engaged with 4 communities across Gombe and Borno states of Nigeria. The communities include:
  - Bambam, Balanga LGA, Gombe South, Gombe State - 375 persons
  - Kuri, Yamaltu Deba, Gombe Central, Gombe State - 164 persons
  - Bojude, Kwami LGA, Gombe North zone, Gombe State - 132 persons
  - Biu, Biu LGA, Borno South, Borno State - 211 persons
- Engaged community leaders, influencers, gatekeepers, and religious figures, all symbols of trust and aware of the unique challenges of their communities, to be actively involved in project activities, serving as mentors to deepen community engagement and foster a sense of ownership.
- Utilized local institutions to employ creative approaches such as dramas, sports events like football competitions, and town hall meetings to raise awareness about gender-based violence and promote transparency and trust within communities.
- Engaged with external stakeholders, for example, those in ministry to leverage their influence in terms of support and justice where necessary.

Through the initiative, MDF was able to create 21 safe spaces for women and young girls across the 4 communities and strengthened their capacity on how to report issues on GBV to local law enforcement

### Learning Journey

A significant lesson for MDF was the transformative power of inclusion. Adopting a 'nothing about us without us' approach, they engaged community leaders from the start and were pleasantly surprised by their enthusiastic acceptance and collaboration, which contributed to the project's success. Linda Ayuba Tiput of MDF remarked, *"It was inspiring to see the dedication of our unpaid mentors. Being involved in the planning and implementation, they felt a sense of ownership and were eager to learn. One even expressed a desire to surpass her teachers in knowledge."*

***"It was a delight to watch the zeal with which the mentors carried out their work without being paid. Because they were included in the programming and implementation they took ownership of the project and were eager to learn all they could."***

**Linda Ayuba Tiput - MDF**

The "Yaki da cin zarafin mata" project yielded several lessons about the power of community engagement:

- By involving leaders and stakeholders, MDF broke down physical and cultural barriers, fostering trust and inclusivity.
- Direct engagement facilitated meaningful dialogue, ensuring everyone felt heard and respected, laying the groundwork for collaboration on sensitive issues like gender-based violence.
- Cultural sensitivity was essential for effective outreach. MDF adapted messages and activities to local contexts, building trust by addressing community needs.

# ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Yaki Da Cin Zarafin Mata

- To ensure long-term sustainability, MDF focused on building community capacity through peer mentor/influencer training:
  - Peer mentors/influencers passed down their knowledge, set up safe spaces, and coached mentees, creating a cycle of mentorship.
  - This approach empowered communities to take ownership and sustain the project's impact beyond external support.

### About Motherhen Development Foundation (MDF)

MDF is a non-profit dedicated to improving lives in rural Nigerian communities. They focus on empowering women, youth, and the "poorest of the poor" by addressing issues like education, public health, and economic development. MDF works with 125 local organisations and uses education and eco-friendly income generation skills to improve lives and create lasting positive impact. They overcome language, religion, and cultural barriers by using a localised approach that creates strong peer networks for outreach and development.



# ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

## Amplifying Female Students' Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response

**Rightsholder Group:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to social services, health and education

**Grantee:** Gender Mobile Initiative (GMI)

Gender Mobile Initiative (GMI) implemented the '**Amplifying Female Students' Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response**' project at the University of Abuja, focusing on empowering women, girls, and young people, including those with disabilities. The project, which won the Now Us Award, aims to combat sexual harassment through various strategies:

- **Capacity building:** GMI equips participants with skills, knowledge, and the ability to organize and mobilize peers for sexual assault prevention, advocate against sexual violence, and legally hold institutions accountable.
- **Multi-pronged approach:** The project collaborates with institutions to develop anti-harassment policies, trains students and faculty in bystander intervention, conducts preventative education, and provides legal support to survivors.
- **Community empowerment:** GMI's approach strengthens community capacity, promotes women and girls' economic empowerment, enhances understanding of fundamental human rights, fosters male partnership in addressing gender injustice, breaks the culture of silence through rights-holder capacity building, and improves community responses to gender injustice.

Overall, the project strives to create safer learning environments free from harassment for all.

### Innovative Inclusion

GMI prioritized empowering female students, including those with disabilities, to combat sexual harassment at the University of Abuja. They selected 50 female student leaders from over 200 applications, through a competitive application process, equipping them with knowledge, skills and mobilizing kits to address sexual harassment on campus. Leveraging partnerships with the University of Abuja and other stakeholders, including the Center for Gender and Security Studies and the Student Union Government, ensured seamless project commencement and support.

GMI's innovative approach involved directly engaging campus women, girls, and people with disabilities in project design and implementation, ensuring their active participation and adherence to the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us." This inclusive process empowered the University of Abuja community to hold institutions accountable and advocate for improved policies and procedures. By addressing root causes and building capacity among female students, GMI aimed to amplify their voices and agency in combating sexual harassment within the campus community.

### Project Impact

During the 12 months of implementing the Amplifying Female Students Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response project, GMI reached over 500 students through the following activities:

**Engagement with Key Stakeholders:** GMI partnered with key stakeholders including the Center for Gender and Security Studies, Youth Advancement at the University of Abuja, Student Union Government members, and executives of the National Female Students Association of Nigeria through advocacy visits.

**Capacity building for 50 Campus Ambassadors:** They provided capacity building for 50 Campus Ambassadors on Sustainable Campus Organizing, Proactive Bystander Intervention, and First Aid Psychosocial Support, empowering them to address sexual harassment effectively.

**A town hall session** brought together university management, staff, Student Union Government, Center for Gender and Security Studies, and students to discuss sexual harassment issues. This highlighted the need to bridge gaps between student concerns and management approaches. GMI advocated for enforcing existing anti-sexual harassment policies and improving them. The forum also uncovered the issue of 'lecturer boys' who scout for female students for lecturers and perpetrate peer-to-peer sexual harassment, prompting calls for policy improvements and enforcement.

Following the town hall forum, GMI developed an advocacy brief, which the Vice Chancellor utilised for conversations with GMI, lecturers, and other stakeholders on ways to address the issues raised.

**Through an innovative hostel drive** which was an unplanned activity, GMI set out to raise awareness about sexual harassment, prevention and proactive bystander intervention and reached up to 500 students.

- **Four awareness initiatives spearheaded by peer groups** have yielded significant results, ranging from heightened knowledge and awareness to sparking community-wide discussions. The project's impact extends beyond empowering the 50 female Campus Ambassadors; they have emerged as agents of broader change. These ambassadors took proactive steps to lead an awareness campaign, educating the campus community about sexual harassment prevention and response within the academic setting.

### Learning Journey

GMI's experience with the "Amplifying Female Students' Voices on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response" project at the University of Abuja highlighted the importance of identifying and collaborating with key stakeholders. These partnerships facilitated entry into the campus community and created a supportive network for successful implementation. The participatory approach fostered ownership and relevance of the intervention, increasing campus community engagement and sustainability.

Despite challenges, such as maintaining student interest amidst academic disruptions, GMI learned valuable lessons. Patience, consistent follow-up, and increased engagement with students reinforced their investment in the project's success. Adapting to an unstable academic calendar, impacted by strikes, required creative solutions, such as merging capacity-building sessions for Campus Ambassadors. These challenges informed improvements and adaptations, enhancing the initiative's effectiveness.

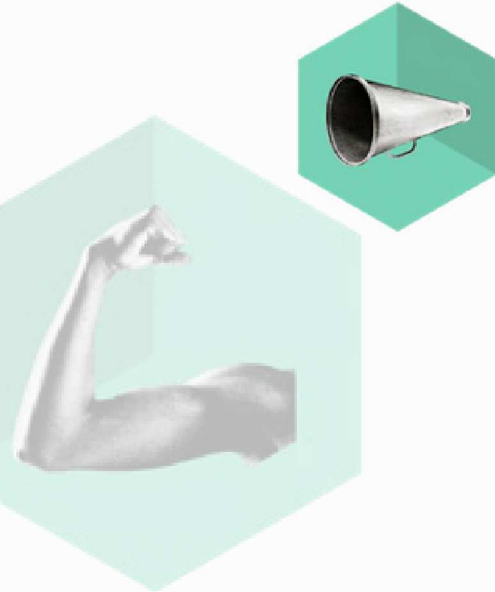
The project serves as a model for similar interventions in other institutions nationwide. GMI's participatory approach can be scaled and replicated across campuses to combat sexual harassment and abuse more broadly.

# ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

## Campus Safety Initiative

### About Gender Mobile Initiative

Gender Mobile Initiative is a female and youth-led NGO that takes a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equality and combating sexual and gender-based violence. Over the years, Gender Mobile has built a credible history in collaborative advocacy and gender mainstreaming as critical tools for the realization of a gender-equitable world. Utilizing technology such as mobile apps and web platforms, they provide support and reporting mechanisms for victims and survivors. Additionally, they engage in policy advocacy, research, education, and empowerment programs to address the root causes and consequences of sexual and gender-based violence.





# Rights and Social Justice







# RIGHTS & SOCIAL JUSTICE GRANTS AT A GLANCE

## CSAAE

The Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics (CSAAE)

### PROJECT:

#### Soro Soke/Park Well

A project seeking to ensure that police brutality and violation of human rights of youths is brought to an end.

## INTEGRITI

Integrati Technologies

### PROJECT:

#### Politeracy

A project aimed at promoting political literacy and participation among rural youths.

## YSAD

Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative

### PROJECT:

#### No Dey Give; Follow Traffic Rules

A campaign fighting the injustice of police extortion on Nigerian roads.

## YOUTH HUB AFRICA

YouthHub Africa

### PROJECT:

#### You Matter In This Matter

A project riding on the wave of #ENDSARS to reduce human rights violations and seek justice

## FOSER

Foundation for Societal Empowerment and Rejuvenation

### PROJECT:

#### Know Your Right to Fight Police Brutality

A project empowering rightsholders in North East Nigeria to understand and assert their human and civil rights

## CITIZENS COMMON

Citizens Common

### PROJECT:

#### From Protest To Action

A project aimed at empowering youth groups and communities towards a greater Nigeria





## VOICES FOR JUSTICE

### Youth-led Innovations for Social change in Nigeria

In 2017, a study on social justice placed Nigeria at a low ranking of 158 out of 190 countries, highlighting significant deficiencies in social justice within the country\*. Additionally, Nigeria ranked 118 out of 140 in the Rule of Law index in 2022, indicating further challenges in governance and justice\*. This grim reality is evident to those residing in Nigeria, where reports of human rights abuses and acts of violence are distressingly common.

The EndSARS movement emerged as a response to these injustices, with young people taking to the streets to protest against police brutality and governance failures. Despite widespread participation in the protests from October 12 to 23, 2020, there remained a pervasive skepticism among many Nigerians regarding the potential efficacy of the mass action.

However, the aftermath of the #EndSARS protests saw the birth of a new wave of youth activism.



Empowered by their experiences, young voices emerged with renewed vigour, advocating for a more just and inclusive Nigeria. This fearless generation, characterised by resilience and determination, utilised social media and civil society organizations to organise, mobilise, and demand accountability from the government.

Youth activism in Nigeria has been a driving force for social change, with today's youth demonstrating remarkable idealism, passion, and creativity. They are innovating their way towards positive change, establishing socially responsible businesses and developing solutions to address pressing societal issues.

Voice operates on a theory of change anchored on three principles: **Empower, Amplify, and Influence**. These pillars serve as the foundation for various interventions aimed at empowering marginalized communities, amplifying their voices, and facilitating their participation in decision-making processes. Inspired by the #EndSARS protests, Voice awarded **sudden opportunity grants** to six organizations, each presenting innovative solutions for social change. These grants were specifically tailored to empower young people in Nigeria, providing them with opportunities to organize and channel their energy into impactful endeavors.

A common thread among these innovations was the focus on placing the rightsholder at the forefront of intervention. This approach aligns with Voice's principle of **'Nothing About Us, Without Us'**, ensuring that the beneficiaries of social interventions actively participate in project design and implementation, thus promoting inclusivity and effectiveness.

\* <https://socialwork.ubc.ca/news/social-justice-in-nigeria/>

\* <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2022/Nigeria/>

While the protests served as a catalyst for change, it's recognized that not all societal issues can be addressed through mass mobilization alone. Indeed, many developmental battles are won through advocacy efforts. In the "**Soro Soke**" project, the **Center for Social Awareness, Advocacy & Ethics (CSAAE)** undertook the task of training 95 young civic actors, each representing a local government area (LGA) in the South-East of Nigeria, to advocate for justice. These individuals were empowered to spread their knowledge and skills to other passionate youth in their communities, ensuring that the spirit of the #EndSARS protests persisted.

In the southeastern part of the country the **Youths and Students Advocates for Development (YSAD) Initiative**, sought to tackle head on the issue of roadside extortion of motorists and pedestrians alike by the police through their "**No Dey Give, Follow Traffic Rules**" project. Their intervention was designed around the idea that when citizens obey traffic rules and are aware of their rights, they can make a strong stand against illegal traffic police activities.

Similarly, the **Foundation for Societal Expression and Rejuvenation (FOSER)** focused on empowering rightsholders in North East Nigeria to understand and assert their human and civil rights, particularly in resisting excessive force by security agents.

The '**Politeracy**' project, a collaborative effort between **Integrati Technologies** and **Yes We Can Youth Leadership Initiative**, aimed to enhance political literacy and engagement among rural youths in Enugu state by providing them with digital skills.

The "**From Protest to Action: Activating our New Nigeria**" initiative, implemented by a consortium led by **Citizens Common Advocacy International** aimed to sustain youth activism sparked by the EndSAR. It focused on ensuring safety for youth leaders, protecting protesters' rights, and promoting accountability.



**YouthHubAfrica's "You Matter In This Matter"** project aimed to expand civic spaces across three Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with the goal of empowering citizens to track the government's #EndSARS promises and curb human rights violations.

## Conclusion

Young people possess immense power to drive social change and shape a better future. Throughout history, they have played pivotal roles in various social movements, showcasing their creativity and determination to make a difference. These Voice Sudden Opportunity grants have helped to reaffirm this, demonstrating that when given the chance, young individuals can have a significant impact on campaigns for rights and social justice. These projects underscore the passion and skills of young people in improving their communities when provided with resources and support.

At the heart of the Voice project is the motto "Nothing for us without us" (NOW-U), highlighting the need for inclusive representation and amplification of all voices in decision-making. Voice uses the term "rightsholder" to underscore that rights belong to the people, empowering individuals to uphold and advance their rights. Through the **Linking and Learning** approach, Voice promotes collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building among grantees to sustain local action and community building in a challenging civic environment. Despite varying project scopes, they collectively showcase how youth-led initiatives can drive positive societal transformation.

# ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN NIGERIA

## You Matter in This Matter



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation, Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** YouthHub Africa

This project was executed by Youth Hub Africa in Ebonyi, Oyo, Bauchi and Abuja, with the rightsholders of the intervention (primary target population) being young people, especially those who participated in the #EndSARS protests, was a social movement and series of mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria that took place in October 2020.

### The Problem

One of the major shortfalls of the #EndSARS protests, according to analysts, was the lack of coordination and clarity\*. The days following the tragic end of the protests were wrought with different angles, opinions, and talk of how the protests would have yielded higher and more impactful results in terms of better governance and representation\*. But to rightsholders like Olayemi, who lost two brothers in the protests, Mama Chinenye, who not only lost a child to police brutality but also had her other children maimed in the following protests, or Danjuma whose store and only means of livelihood was burnt in the ensuing violence, "more impactful results" would simply mean justice for all. Ensuring that people find this elusive justice, hard as it may seem, was the core of the project.

### The Intervention

Saidu, a rightsholder came out for the #EndSARS protests on one fateful day. In a rapid flow of events, he got shot by a policeman and was picked up during a stampede to escape further damage.

During his treatment process, he lost a body part, which was amputated to save his life. At the time of this intervention, Saidu, almost a year after the unfortunate event, his retelling had become foggy, and the trail had gone cold. Saidu remembered the date he was shot but not the name of the guilty policeman. This is the danger of late response on issues of social justice.

One thing that could be concluded from the #EndSARS protest is that the rightsholders of this intervention can only be described as the masses, in that they are vast, countless, and can be mobilized for either positive or negative mass action.\*

One of the goals of the intervention was to create a sustainable platform where police brutality could be speedily reported to receive the right action. The team chose to use the greatest innovation of the global age, digital technology, as the key to the execution of this project. The project activities included stakeholder engagement with key social justice actors like the Nigerian Police Force, National Human Rights Commission, and the Federal Ministry of Justice, town hall meetings with these stakeholders, a pool of average citizens, and radio shows.

\* <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/endsars-youth-protests>

\* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58817690>

\* <https://gja.georgetown.edu/2021/12/13/endsars-a-evaluation-of-successes-and-failures-one-year-later/>

\* <https://study.com/academy/lesson/types-of-mass-behavior-definitions-examples.html>

### Innovation and Impact

Leveraging digital technologies to influence the rightsholders' knowledge patterns and thought processes on social activism through the following activities was one of the most impactful parts of this project:

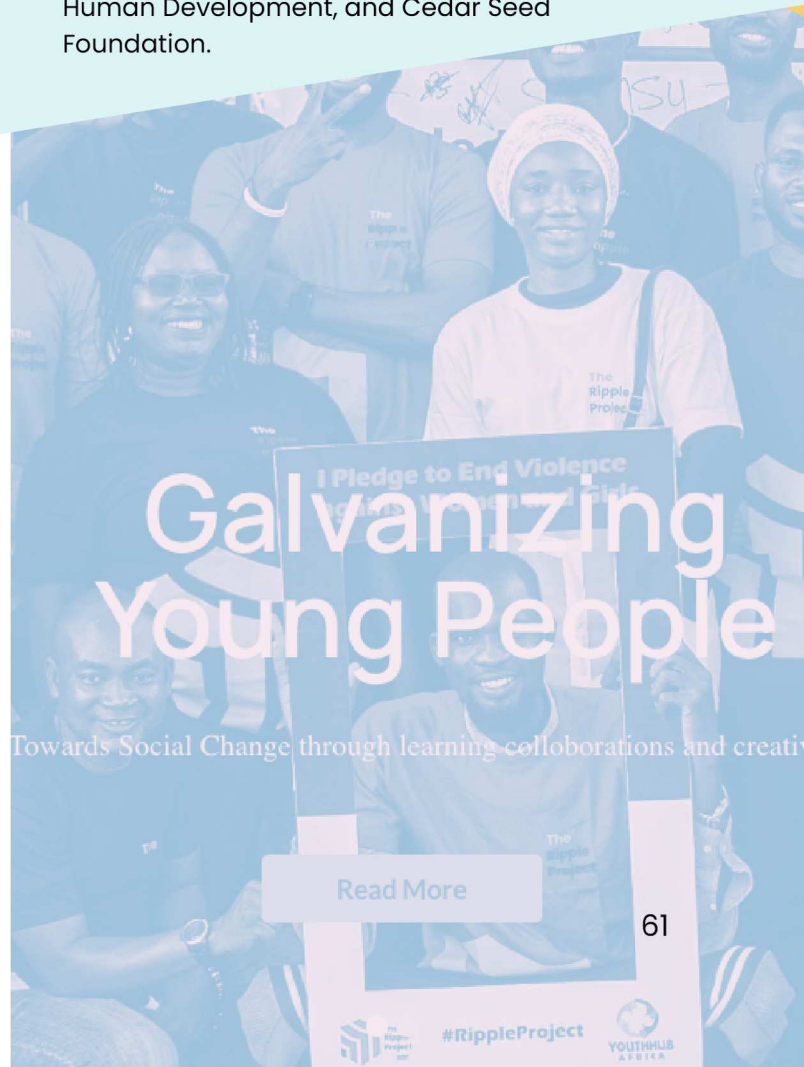
- Holding social activism courses on digital platforms such as Zoom and Whatsapp removed the hassle of assembling rightsholders in a physical venue against their schedules. These courses aided in grooming young people to understand social activism as a whole and how to seek redress in peaceful but effective ways. Building a small circle of social activism ambassadors who can also create bigger circles on their own was important to the project, and these digital platforms made it easy to do this with the lowest funds possible.
- From physical town hall meetings held in the focal states, Whatsapp communities were created to begin a cycle of faster response systems. These Whatsapp groups were created with rightsholders who attended the town hall meetings, representatives of the National Human Rights Commission, and the Nigerian Police Force within the state. Rightsholders never have to go through what Saidu did without justice because they now have a platform through social media to report and seek directions on how to seek redress.
- The use of mass media, radio precisely, was a way to sensitise the public, including the rightsholders, on their rights, using focal resource persons from different sides of the divide: governmental agencies and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The radio shows were also a way to connect rightsholders with the project's internet platforms. The radio medium was chosen because of its versatility and connection to digital technology. Radios are on phones, in cars, and can be accessed in motion.

- A toll-free line was created where rightsholders can call to seek redress on matters concerning police brutality and receive a response while the case is still hot.

These innovations set a sustainable pace that can be scaled. Some of the key project milestones are:

- 80 young people trained
- 48 radio episodes across four states – Oyo, Ebonyi, Bauchi & FCT
- The radio program caught the attention of security agencies
- Town hall meeting in 4 states featuring over 500 participants
- Growing relationship with state parastatals on Social Justice issues
- Over 200 people reached out on Toll-free line 0800-500-5555

The project was executed by Youth Hub Africa in partnership with the Foundation for Investigative Journalism, One Life Initiative for Human Development, and Cedar Seed Foundation.



[Read More](#)

# ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN NIGERIA

You Matter in This Matter

## About YouthHub Africa

Formally registered as Youth Foundation for Development, Education and Leadership, YouthHubAfrica is a frontline youth advocacy and policy-oriented organization programming for Africa and beyond. It envisions Young people as catalysts of Africa's sustainable development while serving as platforms for learning, linkages, and connecting young people to resources and opportunities that will help them take centre stage for Africa's development. YouthHubAfrica has for years championed advocacies around youth development in Nigeria, which include its effort in ensuring the domestication of the Child rights law in key states in Nigeria and increasing funding for education through the UBE Act amendment campaign, amongst others. YouthHubAfrica championed the review of the National Youth development strategy and has continued to support local and international organisations, including UNFPA and African Union.



# ADDRESSING POLICE BRUTALITY

## Know Your Right to Fight Police Brutality



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth  
**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation  
**Grantee:** Foundation for Societal Empowerment and Rejuvenation (FOSER)

The “Know Your Right to Fight Police Brutality” project was executed in Bauchi state by the Foundation for Societal Empower & Rejuvenation (FOSER) and targeted benefitting youths, PWDs, women, and girls as its rightsholders. The project aimed to carry out civic education activities and related engagements to sensitize citizens on their rights while strengthening their capacity to engage with and hold security agents accountable.

### The Problem

Police brutality in Nigeria often stems from a widespread lack of understanding of human rights among the population. While laws exist to protect citizens in their interactions with law enforcement,\* numerous reports detail rights violations and law misuse by police officers. Regrettably, many marginalized individuals, including youth, women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs), endure this brutality due to traditional inequalities and a lack of awareness about their rights.

This intervention targets marginalized groups in society who often bear the brunt of police misconduct. There’s a misconception that many young people are inherently defiant, leading to harsh treatment. Street vendors may reluctantly offer goods to officers to avoid trouble, while PWDs frequently face rights violations due to their limited knowledge of entitlements.\*

The discontent among youth culminated in the #EndSARS protests in October 2020, which also resonated in Bauchi, prompting the formation of a 17-member panel to address their grievances.\*

### The Intervention

This initiative aimed to educate and raise awareness among marginalized individuals about their rights to reduce police use of excessive force. FOSER and its partners employed innovative strategies to bridge the knowledge gap, adapting civil rights materials to local contexts. Activities included rights training, stakeholder workshops, a peaceful rally protesting police brutality in Bauchi state, and advocacy for justice for Altine Dauda, a widow whose husband was a victim of police brutality.

One of the ways to end police brutality in Nigeria is to ensure that perpetrators are punished by law and that both the officers of the law and the citizens are aware of these stiff punishments to serve as a deterrent.\* One of the responsibilities of the Nigerian Police Force Public Relations Officer (PRO) is to inform the public about disciplinary actions taken against officers. This intervention facilitated communication between marginalized groups, known as rightsholders, and the Force PRO through advocacy visits and stakeholder engagements.

\* <https://tribuneonlineng.com/rights-you-should-know-you-have-when-dealing-with-police/>

\* <https://www.voicenaija.org/Newsroom/Blog?blogId=248>

\* <https://tribuneonlineng.com/endsars-bauchi-constitutes-17-member-judicial-panel-of-inquiry/>

\* <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/addressing-police-brutality-in-nigeria-a-crisis-of-non-implementation/>

The PRO now directly oversees a help desk for reporting police brutality, boosting confidence among rightsholders in seeking redress and streamlining the process for justice.

Various community and rightsholder groups, including students, transport unions, market associations, social media influencers, and security personnel, received training on human rights, justice-seeking, and civic education. FOSER organized a peaceful rally against police brutality, utilizing radio and public awareness campaigns to reach over 2,500 people. The rally, with over 1,000 participants covering a distance of 12–15 kilometers, aimed to highlight constitutional rights and promote accountability in law enforcement.

### Innovations & Impact

**Collaboration:** The project's success stemmed from its collaboration with law enforcement agencies, garnering involvement and dedication from police and justice departments. Notably, this collaboration facilitated justice in the case of Altine Dauda versus The Nigerian Police Force.

**Public awareness:** A live phone-in radio program reached grassroots communities, sparking discussions on justice and conflict. This platform enabled Altine, a widow due to police brutality, to learn about the project and seek support to pursue her case against the police, resulting in a favorable outcome. Social media influencers kept the conversation alive, particularly for internet-savvy rightsholders. Additionally, religious leaders were engaged to educate their followers on seeking justice and understanding their rights.

**Timely intervention:** A commercial sex worker, repeatedly subjected to police brutality, learned through the project that her arrests were rights violations. This realization

empowered her to stand up for herself and her colleagues against police extortion and abuse. Inspired by the project, she left sex work, pursued education, and supported others to do the same. This empowerment spread across various groups, leading to peaceful civic engagement in the 2023 elections.

**Inclusion:** Active inclusion of women and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) ensured that the voices of the most marginalized community members were heard and amplified.

This project was executed by the Foundation for Societal Empower & Rejuvenation (FOSER) in partnership with Kings Leodews Initiative (KLI) and the Initiative for the Liberalization of Physically Challenged People in Nigeria (ILPCPN) and was supported by Voice.





# ADDRESSING POLICE BRUTALITY

## Know Your Right to Fight Police Brutality

### About FOSER, KLI and ILPCPN

Foundation for societal Empowerment and Rejuvenation (FOSER) encourage peace and harmonious growth in society by supporting young women and men including vulnerable groups to develop their human potential in order to exploit different opportunities that will increase their confidence towards improving their quality of life and promote their social inclusion, partnership and networks aimed at achieving a positive and equitable development in society. FOSER also sensitizes and mobilizes the vulnerable and underprivileged youths as well as the marginalized to participate in socio-economic activities as an important tool for lifting them out of poverty and creating a favorable society for sustainable development while also giving education priority as a powerful instrument for meaningful development.

Kings Leodews Initiative is an organization that works in the areas of health, education, water and sanitation, civic education, governance and human rights, peace education and peace building and income generation while Initiative for the Liberalization of Physically Challenged People in Nigeria (ILPCPN) is an integrated Non-Governmental Organization for physically challenged people, with the purpose of providing remedies to social issues, education and knowledge to the physically challenged.



# CURBING TRAFFIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON NIGERIAN ROADS

## No Dey Give; Follow Traffic Rules

**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth  
**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation  
**Grantee:** Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative



The “**No Dey Give, Follow Traffic Rules**” project was implemented by the Youth and Students Advocates for Development (YSAD) Initiative in Imo and Abia States. The rightsholders of the intervention (primary target population) are the members of the road transport union workers, market unions and youths while forming strategic alliances with law enforcement agents, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) as well as relevant government agencies like National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

### The Problem

There are indeed over a thousand ways to die in Nigeria, one of which is by the extrajudicial discharge of an officer’s weapon for a myriad of reasons. One of these reasons is the refusal to be extorted. Roadside extortion, which involves the illegal and sometimes forceful collection of money from motorists by security agents, is a long-standing vice in Nigeria. In a 2018 report published by Premium Times Nigeria, the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law accused Nigerian security forces and law enforcement agencies of pocketing up to 100 billion naira over a space of three years from roadside extortion and bribes in the Southeast alone.\* It is not a strange sight to see people sitting inside or standing beside a parked car on the road negotiating rigorously with an officer to be allowed to continue their journeys.

The **2020 #EndSARS protests** were a series of decentralised mass protests against police brutality and the silence of the government in Nigeria. The protests, carried out after one too many extrajudicial killings, upgraded the major victims of these attacks from just young citizens to rightsholders with a critical need for innovative interventions. Reports from the protests in the Southeast depicted low impact,\* necessitating the need to create programs that continue the fight for social justice in the aftermath. Officers and security agents are occasionally trained in the protection of the human rights of citizens, but as more officers were secretly recorded extorting citizens or abusing the rights of people, it became obvious that different tactics had to be employed to reduce the incidences of roadside extortion which is a form of police brutality.

### The Intervention

The goal of the “No Dey Give, Follow Traffic Rules” project was to address the vice of extortion, a recurring decimal in intervention geographies and sensitize the public on what traffic rules are, the importance of adhering to traffic rules in ending extortion, and what constitutes a violation of the human rights of road users by the police.

\* <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/302621-nigeria-security-forces-extort-n100-billion-in-southeast-in-three-years-report.html?tztc=1>

\* <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/the-scares-of-sars-protests-in-south-south-east-target-only-sars-add-some-jamboree/>

**YSAD** Initiative collaborated with **Eagle Post** to adopt the innovative approach of sensitising the three points of the stakeholder triangle. The first point had the various **security agencies**, the second held the **rightsholders** (young citizens of Southeastern Nigeria, road union workers and market unions), and the last had **authorised watch dogs**: the National Human Rights Commission, the National Orientation Agency, and the Media. The intervention was based on the conclusion that it is easier to fight for your rights when you are within your rights. This informed the project title: *No Dey Give, Follow Traffic Rules*.

The activities under this intervention included advocacy visits to stakeholders and engaging the rightsholders through media programmes like radio jingles, interviews, print articles, stakeholder workshops, roadside rallies, and a youth summit in the two pilot states, Imo and Abia.

#### Innovations & Impact

*“Vehicle license? I no get o. Who dey use license sef...” (Translated: I don’t have a vehicle license, who uses a vehicle license these days)* These were the words heard from rightsholders during the scoping exercise that further strengthened the resolve of the project. Imagine hearing these statements from multiple drivers during the scoping exercise to measure citizens’ adherence to traffic rules. Anyone familiar with the Nigerian context would know that the only way to drive without a driver’s license or vehicle papers consistently is by paying any officer who stops the car. Herein lay the first challenge: how to influence the needed behavioral change in rightsholders who believe that it is cheaper to ‘settle’ an officer than to pay for license and car paper renewal or stop at a red traffic light.

Another challenge was the insecurity that plagued the South-East: ‘sit-at-home’ orders from separatist groups, rampant executions by “unknown gunmen”, and occasional mild to raging riots.

With these in consideration, the following innovations were employed in the execution of the project:

- First, the consortium mapped out a structure aimed at putting the rightsholders at the centre of all activities by creating strong alliances between the rightsholders’ and the security agencies. These alliances were carefully built through multiple advocacy visits to the motor parks, markets and academic institutions to make friends as well as the agencies. The advocacy visits were scheduled in a way that didn’t affect the sit-at-home situation and endanger rightsholders.
- The consortium convinced the security agencies, especially the Nigerian Police Force, that the project was not aimed at tarnishing their images or ambushing them. This involved very diplomatic coaxing of the Force PRO. After winning him over, he successfully brought his people to the workshops organized under the project. Sometimes, all that is needed to convince an organization is to target a key person.
- Following this, roadshows were conducted and billboards were installed. These roadshows and billboards disseminated messages to rightsholders, primarily located in motor parks, mechanic sheds, and local eateries.
- To facilitate dialogue between rightsholders and stakeholders without raising suspicion among officers, a youth summit was organized instead of a direct workshop with drivers, which might have been met with resistance. Officers from various security agencies and other stakeholders were invited to provide insights and speeches. During the summit, rightsholders expressed concerns about extortion to the officers, while the PRO clarified to attendees that while following traffic rules can prevent police issues, officers should not request licenses, vehicle papers, or demand money, as these actions are illegal. This strategic approach successfully achieved its objectives.

# CURBING TRAFFIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON NIGERIAN ROADS

## No Dey Give; Follow Traffic Rules

- Another innovative approach involved harnessing the leadership of various stakeholders to improve conditions for rightsholders. Organizing all drivers in Imo and Abia states to ensure their vehicle papers and licenses were in order would have been extremely challenging. However, progress was made towards this goal through a workshop involving the leadership of the National Union of Road Transport Workers, the Nigerian Police Force, and the Federal Road Safety Commission. During the workshop, the union was educated on the significance of adhering to traffic rules to combat illegal extortion, and commitments were made to establish documentation and a database of all their members.

These innovative measures resulted in several successful outcomes for the project and laid the foundation for sustainability. The "No Dey Give, Follow Traffic Rules" initiative was implemented by Youth & Students Advocates for Development (YSAD) and Eagle Post, with support from the Voice program in Nigeria.

### About YSAD and EaglePost

Lead Organization: Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative (YSAD) began as a student organization at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 2010, focusing on fostering social change through advocacy, training, research, and public interest litigation. YSAD has been featured on NTA Network's talk show "Bridges," addressing national issues, and has been vocal against extortion and police brutality in Nigeria.

EaglePost is a media advocacy group dedicated to promoting socio-political and economic awareness among youth. Through traditional and social media, EaglePost aims to engage more people in public affairs and inspire them to fight injustice and believe in themselves.



**No Dey Give Bribe;  
Follow Traffic Rules**

**PRESS CONFERENCE**  
ON CONTINUED EXTORTION OF MOTORISTS ON NIGERIAN ROADS BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Date: Tuesday 1st Feb., 2022 | Venue: Eldorado Hotels, Aba, Abia State  
Time: 10:00am

#NoDeyGive #StopExtortion

# BRIDGING DIGITAL EDUCATION GAPS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Politeracy



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation, Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Integriti Technologies

Inspired by the #EndSARS movement's effective use of social media for nationwide organization, the **Politeracy** project, implemented by Integriti Technologies in Enugu state, aimed to address the digital education gap hindering rural youths from participating. It provided basic ICT training to youths in rural communities, fostering digital inclusion for enhanced political engagement. The intervention sought to sustain the momentum of #EndSARS and ensure no one was left behind.

### The Problem

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that 60 percent of Nigeria's population falls within the youth category,\* making it the youngest country in Africa. However, statistics reveal that only about 17 percent of this sizable youth demographic have pursued higher education and received formal digital education beyond basic computer studies in secondary school\*

The #EndSARS protest emphasized the need for good governance, prompting campaigns to ensure that the youth population actively participates in subsequent general elections, despite past apathy.\* Full youth engagement in elections as both candidates and voters is essential for electing suitable leaders and holding them accountable. However, this requires adequate political education for the youth population.

### The Intervention

The primary goal of the **Politeracy** project was to improve political literacy among youths in the marginalised rural communities of the Southeast. The other aspect of the project was the innovative strategy used to secure the trust of the rightsholders. The Politeracy project leveraged the massive digital divide between youths in urban and rural communities by bringing digital training to these rightsholders at the rural end on the one hand and political awareness campaigns on the other hand. The activities of the project included the digital and political awareness training of 20 young people each from Iva Valley, Ugwuaji, Ozalla, Mmaku, Iwollo Oghe, Ubgawka, Unu Ode, Amorji, and Abakpa Nike communities of Enugu state.

### Innovation and Impact

The objective of this project was to bridge the digital gap between rural and urban communities by reaching out to rightsholders. To achieve this, 10 communities were strategically selected in Enugu state. These selections were based on their representation across senatorial districts, proximity to urban centers, and the presence of a sizable youth population within the communities.

\* <https://www.unfpa.org/data/adolescent-youth/NG>

\* <https://zoetalentsolutions.com/education-statistics-for-nigeria/>

\* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58817690>

Once the focal communities were selected, contact was made through the identification of liaison persons in each community. The importance of having a liaison person in each community transcended the ease of mobilisation of eligible rightsholders for participation. Breaking through a community without stepping on traditional and communal toes could only be possible through the help of an influential gatekeeper who is very familiar with the community leadership and the people at the grassroots levels, too and would aid in reducing the wariness of these close-knit communities of outsiders. The thorough selection of these liaison persons was by leveraging existing youth network leaders in addition to low-key visits to ascertain their influence and positive reputation within their communities as the criteria for these persons were taken very seriously.

Next, the job of convincing rightsholder communities of the credibility of the project, the processes and programs that will be taking place, and what is expected from them was delegated to these liaison officers. In issues of community mobilization, it is easier to let a familiar face explain modalities to community members than a strange person who would spend extra time trying to break the ice and reduce the suspicion of the people. Delegating to the liaison persons also cut down the finances that might have been expended if the project team had gone straight to community leadership because the liaison person knows exactly who to meet to ensure that everything works out well.

The liaison persons also handled the selection of the rightsholders who participated in the digital literacy training and, subsequently, the political awareness with an inclusivity criteria list prepared by the project handlers for direction. This ensured deep community reach, which is evident in success stories submitted by different rightsholders.

The deployment of an innovative and effective community entry strategy by empowering liaison persons who are from and for the focal communities was a great contributor to the success of the project.

Another innovative strategy employed during the project was the use of town announcers and traditional social gatherings to mobilize rightsholders for activities. Rather than isolate the project activities from the cultural way of life of the people, it was advantageous to use these activities as a channel of trust-building to ensure an easier run of the slated programs. For instance, by cancelling a training exercise on the day of a burial ceremony and then allowing the town announcer to broadcast the new date to the community, a sense of togetherness and deep respect for the people was projected.

This project was implemented by Integriti Technologies in partnership with Yes We Can Initiative and was supported by Voice.



# BRIDGING DIGITAL EDUCATION GAPS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Politeracy

### About Integriti Technologies and Yes We Can Youth Leadership Initiative

Integriti Technologies is a full-scale Information technology company with presence in Nigeria and have provided cutting-edge solutions over the years, utilizing proven methodologies to achieve world-class results. Integriti Technologies has served clients in private, public and non-governmental organisations, providing and localizing technology solutions to resolve challenges and engender efficiency.

Yes We Can is a youth-led organization that is committed to the empowerment of young people.



# SUSTAINING YOUTH ACTIVISM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

## From Protest to Action: Activating our New Nigeria



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation, Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Citizens Common

**From Protest to Action** was an intervention spearheaded by Citizens Common Advocacy International targeted at Nigerian youths across the whole country.

### The Problem

The #EndSARS protests left Nigerian youth feeling disheartened,\* as many believed that ending the protests would render their sacrifices meaningless. Consequently, the protests persisted for days, culminating in the tragic events of October 20, 2020, with the **Lekki Toll Gate shootings**.\* The grievances aired during the protests extended beyond police brutality to encompass broader demands for improved governance.\*

As the protests concluded, there was concern that the dispersal of the passionate youth activists would also disperse the momentum for change they had ignited. With a forthcoming general election, there was an opportune moment to channel the energy and demands from the protests into a coherent agenda for selecting the next leaders.

### The Intervention

Through the "From Protest to Action" project, the dispersal of youth post-protests didn't mark the end of documenting their aspirations. Instead, the project aimed to consolidate these grievances into a clearer, sustainable format and offer legal aid to those unjustly arrested during the protests.

The project sought to answer key questions such as – how do we keep the energy from the streets and sustain the interest of young Nigerians in demanding accountability? How do we ensure adequate protection and safety for youth leaders speaking amid government crackdowns? How do we ensure the rights of protesters, youths, women, and vulnerable groups are protected?

### Innovations and Impact

To gather diverse contributions from across the country and create an inclusive agenda, innovative methods were essential. The project established an accessible online platform, the **Youth Action Nigeria website (www.youthaction.ng)**, featuring a simple design and tools for youth to voice their ideas and influence policy.

\* <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/10/18/how-nigerian-youths-failed-to-utilize-opportunities-of-endsars-protests>

\* [https://www.academia.edu/62238979/THE\\_KILLINGS\\_OF\\_UNARMED\\_ENDSARS\\_PROTESTERS\\_AT\\_LEKKI\\_TOLL\\_GATE\\_LAGOS\\_ON\\_20\\_10\\_20\\_WERE THEY\\_CRIMES\\_AGAINST\\_HUMANITY](https://www.academia.edu/62238979/THE_KILLINGS_OF_UNARMED_ENDSARS_PROTESTERS_AT_LEKKI_TOLL_GATE_LAGOS_ON_20_10_20_WERE THEY_CRIMES_AGAINST_HUMANITY)

\* <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2021/12/13/endsars-a-evaluation-of-successes-and-failures-one-year-later/#:~:text=Although%20the%20%23EndSARS%20movement%20achieved,of%20creativity%20and%20political%20will>



The website hosted an online survey addressing critical issues like unemployment and education. To enhance participation, an innovative **'voice survey'** format was introduced, allowing rightsholders to answer questions comprehensively without requiring strong writing skills. This inclusive approach reached over **16,000 participants**, a significant achievement facilitated by the online platform.

The project implemented two significant initiatives: the **"Youth Conversation for New Nigeria"** and the launch of **"Nigeria for the Many, Not the Few"**, a comprehensive youth manifesto outlining the desired future of Nigeria. This extensive 100+ page report encapsulates the concerns, hopes, and aspirations of young Nigerians, reflecting on both current challenges and future prospects for the nation. It emerged from an exhaustive and engaging consultation conducted across more than **34 communities and 20 states nationwide**. Additionally, it incorporates insights from the inaugural Nigerian Youth Voice Survey, which collected data from young Nigerians to provide valuable perspectives on the issues shaping their lives.

In response to the pressing issue of police brutality, the project leveraged strategic partnerships to provide support to victims, particularly during the protests. Recognizing the bureaucratic challenges inherent in dealing with governmental organizations, such as the National Human Rights Commission, the project forged a beneficial collaboration with a legal entity. This partnership facilitated the provision of free legal assistance to affected individuals, ensuring a streamlined process and timely access to justice for rightsholders.

The project forged collaborations with diverse community influencers and mobilizers, playing a crucial role in connecting with rightsholders. These partnerships facilitated consultations in different states, gathering valuable feedback. Partnering with the Nigerian Youth Parliament enabled consultations across states, capturing diverse perspectives. Simultaneously, collaboration with the Community Change Enablers facilitated online surveys, expanding outreach.

Despite challenges posed by the ASUU strike in 2022, which threatened progress, innovative partnerships ensured the project's resilience and impact. These strategic alliances were instrumental in maintaining continuity and effectively engaging with rightsholders across society's diverse sectors.

Citizens Common Advocacy International executed this project in partnership with **SOZO Empowerment and Mentorship Initiative** and **McAnderson Institute of Technology**, with the support of Voice.



# SUSTAINING YOUTH ACTIVISM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

## From Protest to Action: Activating our New Nigeria

### About Citizens Common, SOZO Networks and McAnderson

Citizens Common International is an Abuja based non-profit organization that empowers everyday people to take action to solve small and big societal challenges using people power, collaboration, innovation and technology.

SOZO Networks is a non-profit organization known for promoting the participation of young people in civic leadership and social entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

McAnderson is a technology development and education organization committed to resourcing Africa with technology skills for the future. The company has worked with organisations like the Africa Development Bank, UNESCO, Microsoft to design and implement mass digital skills training in local communities and campuses across Nigeria.



# EMPOWERING YOUTH, ENSURING JUSTICE & POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

## Soro Soke/Park Well



**Rightsholder Group:** Vulnerable elderly and youth

**Impact Themes:** Space for political participation, Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics

**Soro Soke**, a Yoruba slang for **'Speak Up'** and **'Park Well'**, is a common slang that Nigerian security officers, mostly men of the police force, use when they want to extort motorists. This project was led by the Center for Social Awareness, Advocacy & Ethics (CSAAE) in all the Southeastern states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The rightsholders (target population) of the project were youths in these states. The aim of the project is to replace the culture of intimidation and silence, inspiring young people to speak up.

### The Problem

The nationwide eruption of the **#EndSARS protests** was a culmination of years of enduring police brutality in silence. Rightsholders had endured oppression for generations but finally broke their silence during the protests. However, following the traumatic events, the challenge emerged of sustaining momentum even after the protests ended and ensuring that the efforts were not in vain. This required individuals and communities to continue taking a stand collectively and individually.

### The Intervention

Utilizing boot camps, stakeholder meetings, and social media campaigns, the Center for Social Awareness, Advocacy & Ethics (CSAAE), alongside consortium members, aimed to maintain the spirit of **"speaking up without fear"** among rightsholders following the

conclusion of the **#EndSARS** protests. Ensuring the persistence of the protest's energy beyond its end involves continually motivating youth to advocate fearlessly in their respective communities.

### Innovation and Impact

The first innovative approach involved mapping out all the local government areas in the southeast region. Rather than concentrating solely on urban centers, the intervention extended to grassroots levels, encompassing a total of **95 local government areas (LGAs)**. Subsequently, young and dynamic advocacy activists were carefully selected from each LGA to form a cohort of 95 passionate individuals, known as **"Youth Anchors."** These Youth Anchors were tasked with inspiring and mobilizing rightsholders within their respective communities, employing a ripple effect strategy. This method streamlined the process, eliminating the need for multiple programs in each LGA to reach a broader audience of rightsholders.

The selection process for young civic space actors was meticulous, particularly favoring individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement, journalism, or advocacy. This deliberate choice stemmed from the recognition that transferring passion and knowledge to fellow rightsholders required more than just a basic understanding of civic engagement and advocacy.

The 95 chosen individuals underwent comprehensive training, equipping them with the necessary skills and tools to effectively monitor and oversee the implementation of adjusted police regulations in their communities. They were also tasked with educating rightsholders on their rights and proper redress procedures in a safe and respectful manner. Additionally, these actors were responsible for regularly reporting their findings to ensure the sustainability of the project.

The training sessions were conducted through boot camps held in each state, after which the 95 cohorts were mobilized into action. These **Youth Anchors** actively promoted the **toll-free hotline** established by the project, encouraging victims to swiftly report cases of police brutality. In doing so, they served as effective advocates and raised awareness of the project within grassroots communities.

The timing of launching the cohort was particularly strategic given the prevalent security challenges in the Southeast, which often hindered intervention efforts. Amidst concerns such as Monday *sit-at-home* orders and threats to travelers' safety, having a project representative stationed in every community became imperative, making the innovative cohort launch all the more timely.

Part of the project goals was to track cases of unjust detainment of rightsholders and ensure that justice is served. The expenses of finding legal counsel for these cases and paying through till resolution would have been exponential.

To tackle this, CSAAE then built a team of young lawyers who can work **pro-bono** in partnership with the cohort of 95 to track these cases in their own communities and bring them forward to the legal team for action. The **C-Advocates**, as they were called, worked on the legal front to free unjustly imprisoned rightsholders, as pointed out by the community representatives. The C-Advocates were able to advocate for special courts inside the prisons, which led to the **successful release of over 30 illegally detained and incarcerated inmates.**

The Youth Anchors were also integrated into digital platforms and networks with stakeholders in the police force and other law enforcement agencies so as to provide effective reporting systems to report brutalities and human rights violations for speedy resolution of pending cases. As people who were previously passionate about creating better climates for social justice due to their field of work and study, this was no hard feat for them. Through this one innovative act of creating a force with the natives of the land, the success, as well as the sustainability of the "**Sorosoke or Park Well**" project, was assured.

The project was executed by the Center for Social Awareness, Advocacy & Ethics (CSAAE) in partnership with the Youth Empowerment Solutions Project Initiative (YES-P) and the Centre for Health Education and Vulnerable Support (CHEVS) and was supported by Voice.

# EMPOWERING YOUTH, ENSURING JUSTICE & POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

## Soro Soke/Park Well

### About CSAAE, YES-P and CHEVS

The Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics is a non-profit dedicated to helping young people become effective leaders and embrace their roles as critical actors in building a better Africa.

The Youth Empowerment Solutions Project Initiative is a youth focused nonprofit organization founded for the purpose of building youth capacity, advocating and promoting youth participation in democratic governance.

The Centre for Health Education and Vulnerable Support is a nonprofit with interest in the overall health and benefit of women, children, the elderly, the LGBTQ+ community, the economically vulnerable, persons with disabilities and other marginalized persons in the society.





# Empowering Rightsholders





# NIGERIA EMPOWERMENT GRANTS AT A GLANCE



## NAYA

Novel Association for Youth Advocacy

### PROJECT:

#### CHANGE Project

A project showing the transformative potential of empowerment among young women.

## HOOMSEN

Hoomsen Women Farmers' Cooperative Society

### PROJECT:

#### Mu Ma a Yi Da Mu

A project enabling women to be voices of change in their communities.

## ICEHD

International Center for Environmental Health and Development

### PROJECT:

#### Badagry Women Empowerment Project

A project changing the lives of women farmers in Badagry Lagos state Nigeria

## DDF

Dewdrop Foundation

### PROJECT:

#### Women Empowerment & Inclusive Governance

A project that builds the capacity of women for leadership in communities

## MAMA CENTRE

Mothers and Marginalized Advocacy Centre

### PROJECT:

#### Accountability for Empowerment

A project pushing for infrastructure improvements and economic empowerment for local women

## IFA

Ike Foundation for Autism

### PROJECT:

#### H.E.A.L Autism project

A project supporting and advocating for inclusion for persons with autism

## FIRC

Female Inmates and Returning Citizens

### PROJECT:

#### Access to Self-Reliance for Female Inmates and Ex-Female Inmates' project

A project empowering female inmates and ex-inmates

## CAPRIGHTS-VP

Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable Persons

### PROJECT:

#### Reclaim our Future

A project empowering women for a brighter future

## TAF

The Albino Foundation

### PROJECT:

#### We Live To Shine

A project empowering people living with albinism





## VOICES EMPOWERED

### Transforming Lives and Communities Across Nigeria

From bustling city centres to remote rural communities, stories of empowerment echo across Nigeria, driven by the guiding principle of 'Nothing About Us Without Us'. Through the Voice Empowerment Grants, various organizations are leading initiatives to foster a more inclusive future, one empowered voice at a time.

In the urban slums of Kubwa and Mpape communities, Celestina's journey epitomizes the transformative power of empowerment. Thanks to the **CHANGE project by Novel Association for Youth Advocacy (NAYA)**, Celestina transitions from economic despair to entrepreneurship, becoming a beacon of hope for others.



In Shendam LGA of Plateau state, the **'Mu Ma a Yi Da Mu' project by Hoomsen Women Farmers' Cooperative Society** breaks gender barriers, empowering women like Matnagya Maryamu Lazarus to serve as voices of change within their communities.

Traveling to Udi LGA in Enugu State, Aloh Victoria Nwazonam advocates for change through the **Accountability for Empowerment project**, implemented by **Mothers and Marginalized Advocacy Centre**, successfully pushing for infrastructure improvements and economic empowerment for local women.

In Kwali Area Council, FCT Abuja, the **'H.E.A.L Autism' project by Ike Foundation for Autism** raises awareness and understanding of autism, empowering community members like Terna Isaac, who was previously ignorant about the condition, to advocate for inclusion.

Through initiatives like the **'Access to Self-Reliance for Female Inmates and Ex-Female Inmates' project by Female Inmates and Returning Citizens (FIRC)**, female inmates gain skills and independence, paving the way for a brighter future.

Meet Louisa, a seamstress empowered by the **'Reclaim our Future' project** by the **Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable Persons (CAPRIGHTS VP)**, who transforms her struggling business into a thriving enterprise.

*"Now I can say I am my own madam. And with the skills we have learned, we intend to train other young ladies to know how to make hair for their own future." - Celestina*



## Transforming Lives and Communities Across Nigeria



Witness the resilience of women like Shefau Lamidi, who find their voices and solutions to agricultural challenges through projects like the **'Badagry Women Empowerment' project** by the **International Center for Environmental Health and Development (ICEHD)**. Through the project, women in Badagry now have community representation and can speak at the monthly Badagry Central Authority council meetings about issues that affect them in the community.

In Umuode, Enugu State, Annie Faithful discovers her voice and leadership potential through the **'Women Empowerment and Inclusive Governance' project** by **Dew Drop Foundation**.

Finally, in Plateau State, Jabir Abdulkadir and Hajiya Sa'a find support and empowerment through initiatives like the **'We Live to Shine' project** by **The Albino Foundation**, inspiring others to embrace their uniqueness and advocate for change. As a teacher, Jabir advocates for persons with albinism in schools, helping many previously hidden children to enroll and receive education. Similarly, Hajiya Sa'a and her friends formed a support group for parents of children with albinism.

These stories are just a glimpse of the transformative impact of Voice Empowerment Grants across Nigeria, demonstrating the power of collective action and inclusive empowerment in driving positive change.

***"I could never stand up in public to speak but through DewDrop's training on leadership and farming, I can do anything. We were carried along and through this, we formed a Cooperative called Chizaram Multipurpose and can now join the town union. Now we are pioneers of ourselves and also encourage each other to make profit from what we do, resolve local and domestic issues and provide for our families."** - Annie*



# EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

## CHANGE Project



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to resources and employment

**Grantee:** Novel Association for Youth Advocacy (NAYA)

In the urban slums of Mpape and Kubwa in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, the '**CHANGE**' project by NAYA has sparked transformation. Targeting vulnerable young women like Celestina Habila, Angel Samson, and Hajara Adamu, it aimed to boost their economic standing through vocational, leadership, and financial training. By empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) aged 18-30, the initiative aimed to break the cycle of poverty, enhance financial resilience, and empower them against gender-based exploitation and violence.

Celestina, 19, passionate about hairstyling, discovered the CHANGE project through her aunt's suggestion. "*I was thrilled about the NAYA project,*" she says. "*Now, I'm earning from hairstyling.*" With enhanced skills and financial knowledge, she runs Lady C.F.F. Beauty Salon with her colleagues, Faith and Faith, also CHANGE participants.

"*Now, I'm my own boss,*" she proudly declares. "*...I couldn't afford higher education due to financial constraints. But now, I can, thanks to my savings. I have learned a lot. I have learned about self-esteem. I could not stand in front of people and talk, but now, I can talk. And I can save money now because before, I used to spend carelessly.*" Celestina aims to empower other young women with her skills. "*We'll use what we know to train others for their future,*" she adds.

Angel, a 21-year-old survivor of gender-based violence (GBV), has transformed into a fashion designer thanks to the CHANGE project by NAYA. She was pleasantly surprised to not only receive training but also gain access to a fully equipped workshop for herself and two others. "*I never expected such sincerity,*" she admits. "*It was a surprise to receive these machines and have the shops opened for us.*" Angel's life changed after experiencing GBV at a young age. "*I was alone with my baby,*" she recalls describing her life before the CHANGE intervention.

Encouraged by a friend's mother to join a youth empowerment program, she hesitated at first but eventually participated wholeheartedly. "*I was a victim,*" she says, "*but now I'm independent and living happily.*"

### The CHANGE Project

"CHANGE" is an acronym for '**Creating Hope Among Nigerian Girls through Economic Enterprise**'. It was a 24-month Voice-funded Project implemented by NAYA in 2 urban slums within the Kubwa and Mpape communities of the FCT, empowering 16 adolescent girls and young women in these community areas.

**"I was a victim, but now I am independent and living happily" - Angel**

The rightsholders for this project comprised mostly vulnerable and economically viable girls who were exposed to gender-based violence but without any solid substance or support or any form of income. The CHANGE project gave them training on vocational skills of their choice and empowered them with financial literacy to guide them towards financial independence.

Recognizing the importance of buy-in as a first step for successful community entry, NAYA sought the support of local leaders to introduce and endorse their project. From the project's inception to its completion, NAYA received unwavering support from community leaders, including the Chief, district heads and leaders from various ethnic groups. These leaders not only endorsed the project but actively participated in monitoring activities where they visited the training points to ensure the welfare of their community members and provide encouragement for their active participation. This collaborative effort between NAYA and community leaders played a pivotal role in the project's success, as it created a sense of ownership and commitment among all stakeholders.

Mallam Musa Audu, Madakin Mpape (2nd in command to the ruling Chief of Mpape), lauded the CHANGE project for its impact. *"If other organisations can do that, it will reduce the rate of unemployment and joblessness, ... Why this one is different because as they started, they followed up. There are some that when they start, you will not see them again. I like this one. It is different...What I see is that if they continue like that, it is our achievement, and we would like to expand more so that the program will reach more people."*

NAYA relied on two key tools for project implementation: **a Vulnerability and Needs Assessment tool and a mentorship assessment plan.**

The careful selection process focused on identifying vulnerable young women and girls, particularly Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) most in need, such as those out of school or facing exploitation and violence within the communities.

The mentorship assessment plan played a vital role in sustaining participants' interest and ensuring project completion. It helped monitor commitment, participation, and learning milestones during monthly visits. This plan facilitated the selection of the top 12 candidates who received startup kits. Additionally, NAYA assisted participants in opening bank accounts, emphasized financial literacy, and provided guidance on self-esteem and conflict resolution, essential for maintaining harmony within community hubs. Encouraging participants to mentor others aimed to establish a cycle of empowerment and skill development in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

During implementation in the Mpape community, NAYA faced a challenge in finding a suitable space large enough to accommodate the six young women in one hub for their vocational training, as they had done in the Kubwa community. Their goal was to centralize the women in one location. To address this, they acquired two spacious shops, tailored to the specific needs of the participants. Each shop accommodated three young women, with one hub dedicated to tailoring and fashion design and the other for salon and hairdressing services.

The impact of the NAYA Change project, empowering 16 young women with skills in tailoring, bag making, and hairdressing, along with engaging with over 30 stakeholders in each community, has sparked discussions and initiatives on women's rights, education quality, and empowerment, while also tackling the issue of gender-based violence. Providing startup kits to 12 of these women further empowered them, creating a ripple effect as they, in turn, trained others in their communities.

Hajara Adamu was formerly a petty trader selling charcoal. Her life took a positive turn when she embraced tailoring through NAYA's program. *"At first, I didn't believe it was true,"* she admits. Yet, with her husband's encouragement, she took the leap of faith. Today, as a skilled tailor, she's excited about the direction her life is heading. *"I have learned how to appreciate life and how to go about with my life. I don't have to go and beg. Tailoring is way better for me than selling charcoal,"* she shared. Now, she shares her journey with others who would listen: *"I have told my friends about it, and even my elder brother said if there will be another opportunity like this, I should tell him because he will want to enroll one of his wives."*

During implementation, NAYA discovered the importance of counseling and mentoring to sustain motivation and focus among participants. They acknowledged that individuals might encounter challenges or periods of low enthusiasm and provided continuous support and guidance. This proved crucial in helping participants grasp their goals and stay dedicated to achieving them.

### About NAYA

NAYA, a national NGO, was established by individuals passionate about solving common issues faced by disadvantaged and marginalized groups, focusing on vulnerable children, adolescents, youth, persons with disabilities, and the poor. Their mission is to address health, economic, social, and educational challenges, particularly among adolescents and youth, combating issues like gender-based violence and illiteracy. NAYA has grown into a coalition of 67 active youth organizations in Nigeria, collaborating to create a prosperous and engaged young population.



# CULTIVATING CHANGE THROUGH WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

## Muma A Yi Damu Project



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to resources and employment, Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education

**Grantee:** Hoomsen Women Farmers

'Mu Ma A Yi Da Mu', which refers to 'Women involvement in Leadership', is a project spearheaded by the resilient **Hoomsen Women Farmers Cooperative Society** in Shendam Local Government Area of Plateau State. Their journey towards empowerment, marked by perseverance and solidarity, has not only transformed the agricultural landscape but also shattered long-standing gender barriers. Led by the indefatigable Ruda Ngwan Chinka, the women of Hoomsen embarked on a journey of empowerment, determined to break free from the shackles of gender-based discrimination. Ruda shares the motivation for championing the cause, saying, *"We thought about this project as a way of empowering women, especially with the unfair practices done to us by our menfolk. Whenever we farm our produce, they collect the produce, sell it and do not give us the proceeds, leaving us stranded in taking care of our children. We decided to come together as women to help ourselves and our children"*.

Driven by a shared vision of self-sufficiency, they used their previous Voice-funded 'Our Land, our Right' project to challenge stereotypes and gain farmland access. Their initial success shattered cultural norms, allowing women to own land and acquire farmland for the cooperative. Through advocacy and capacity-building efforts, the cooperative has grown from 2 groups of 20 members to 26 groups totaling 520 women, showcasing their unwavering unity and determination.

In this current project, the women desired to score another first – **to get a woman into the traditional council of the community's Kingship structure**, which is exclusively preserved for men in furtherance of enduring patriarchal systems. They knew they had many hurdles to cross and put several innovations in place to do so. The first approach was knowing that they could make a stronger case for their cause if they **'show rather than tell'**. So, under the project, they organized capacity-building sessions that were open to all women on financial literacy and political participation.

Modules were aimed at building the confidence of women to face their leaders – in a society where women should be seen and not heard. The women were able to work together to strategize on how best to advocate for their needs and cascade the conversations to others in their community. The HWF leaders carried out peer mentorship for the ward leads, who are charged with the responsibility of organising the members under their wards. This approach ensured more effective coordination of women across various wards and clans.

This integrated approach was eventually leveraged in organising women for the rally to the chief's palace to demand representation, where their interests were adequately voiced and decisions favourably influenced within the traditional council. As a result of their regular briefing sessions with the Chief on the strides the cooperative society was making, The Chief decided to support and encourage the women by giving the association a parcel of land for their rice farming. The women took further steps to advocate for representation during the rally with a massive turnout of women across the community.

In an unprecedented response, the Chief heeded their plea, and they were able to secure the appointment of a **'Magajiya' for the first time in the community's entire history.**

Matnagya Maryamu Lazarus, a member of the royal family and the newly appointed 'Magajiya,' now serves as the voice of the women in the traditional council, effectively relaying decisions that impact their welfare. This historic appointment marks a significant milestone in the community's history, underscoring the importance of gender-inclusive representation and equitable decision-making processes.

Another key approach employed by Hoomsen Women Farmers was the forming of strategic partnerships with community gatekeepers such as members of the Traditional Council and All Farmers Association Nigeria (AFAN), who are a part of HWF events and have secured their buy-in for the project.

A key stakeholder is Kenneth T. Bako, Chairman of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) in Shendam LGA of Plateau State. Bako was initially skeptical about the project, as he candidly admits, *"I knew about the program when the project coordinator, Madam Ruda, was constantly advocating to me about leadership positions for women farmers. I said that it was not possible. You know, here we keep women aside when it comes to the issue of farming"*. However, their unwavering determination compelled him to reconsider, and he pledged support to ensure equitable opportunities for women farmers in Shendam.

After witnessing the impressive accomplishments of the HWF's Cooperative Society firsthand, Bako felt compelled to take action. *"When they invited me to see their cooperative society, I was astounded by their progress, surpassing even our men's association. Their savings scheme and skills training sessions, with over 200 women involved, left a lasting impression on me,"* he reflects.

Moved by their resilience, Bako extended support by supplying improved rice varieties suited to their soil and organizing knowledge exchange sessions with AFAN officials. This collaboration marked a significant milestone for both the project and the women farmers involved.

One of the project's rightsholders - 49-year-old Korkat Iliya, a farmer for over 30 years cultivating crops such as yam, rice, guinea corn and seasonal vegetables, shares her transformative experience. *"Honestly, I have benefitted immensely from this project because I attended workshops where I learnt about financial literacy and proper home management skills. We have also received fertilizer support to boost crop production. We also learnt about leadership skills and the business skills needed for growing our farming business. I never knew that this ordinary farming I was doing was a business, but now I know that it is, and I have been taught to keep proper records"*. Korkat has also expanded her business to produce local seasoning and become a mentor to other aspiring farmers, sharing the opportunities available.

In a separate instance, Mama Asabe, a retired farmer at the age of one hundred, has discovered a renewed sense of purpose and companionship within the cooperative. *"Whenever I see them going out, I would ask questions. I also requested to be made a part of the project so I can be part of you young people and learn as well. That was how I got enrolled. I have profited so many things since joining. I am able to get food to eat through the proceeds distributed by the cooperative"*. she shares. Through her resilient spirit and steadfast dedication, Mama Asabe epitomizes the enduring legacy of community collaboration and shared progress.

Under the project's auspices, the women of Hoomsen not only honed their farming skills but also diversified their income streams, embracing entrepreneurship and political advocacy, propelling their farming endeavors from subsistence to profitability.

As the women of Hoomsen continue to cultivate change, their story serves as a source of hope and inspiration, leading the path towards gender equality and inclusive development in Shendam LGA. In their unwavering determination and resilience lies the promise of a brighter, more equitable future for all.

**About Hoomsen Women Farmers**

The Hoomsen Women Farmers Co-operative Society is a co-operative society registered by two groups of women farmers. They both started as an association of twenty women farmers, located in a small farming village called Namess in Shepwan community of Shendam Local Government Area in Plateau State. The group saw the need to come together and support each other at individual and group level through communal farming activities, at times for a fee or as support to members as is culturally practiced.

The co-operative is currently made up of a total number of forty fully registered members. As a registered co-operative group they cultivate jointly, harvest, store and later sell the harvest in the market and some of the proceeds is plowed into the co-operative's account to serve as a loan to members during the lean farming season that is characterised with lack of food in some households.



# EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

## Accountability for Empowerment Project



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved access to resources and employment, Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education, Space for political participation

**Grantee:** Mothers and Marginalised Advocacy Centre (MAMA Centre)

Rural women encounter hurdles in accessing markets and advocating for their rights. Community-led projects are vital for their empowerment, requiring support avenues. The **Accountability for Empowerment (A4E) project**, funded by Voice, aimed to empower women farmers in Udi LGA, Enugu, Nigeria. Implemented by **MAMA Centre**, it focused on rural communities grappling with market access challenges due to remote locations and poor infrastructure. Over several months, the project focused on advocacy, skills development, and community engagement.

In 2022, women from Udi LGA reached out to the MAMA Centre, expressing their desire for a project similar to EMPOWER, a previous Voice-funded project implemented in the Amachala-Ngwo community. The Udi women are predominantly indigenous farmers who derived their livelihood from selling farm products yet experienced loss in revenue due to poor road networks from their villages to markets or neighbouring towns. As a result, the women earned little or no income from their harvest as they could not get their produce out of their villages to where they could be profitably sold. In some instances, they experienced loss due to spoilage of the perishable items.

Previous governments awarded contracts to build roads connecting rural areas to cities, aiming to facilitate transportation for smallholder farmers. However, these projects were abandoned due to a lack of contract monitoring.

Udi women farmers sought capacity building to demand accountability from the government regarding these abandoned projects. With Voice funding, they initiated the **Accountability for Empowerment project**, running from September 2022 to December 2023.

Mrs Grace Okwo, a farmer and retired teacher, shares that, *“Mama Centre taught us that we have a say in whatever the government uses the budget to do. So, if there is a project that favours us directly, we should draw their attention to that project through advocacy skills.”* A4E project utilised capacity strengthening and advocacy strategies to address challenges faced by women farmers, including poor road infrastructure and limited market access. MAMA Centre educated Udi women farmers on government budgets, implementation and accountability for budget and their rights as members of the community.

The women were informed about their rights to be informed about projects affecting them and to engage with the government. They strongly urged for the completion of abandoned projects, equipping themselves with the skills needed to advocate for change. They visited the Local Government Chairman and articulately expressed their concerns, requesting action on the unfinished projects. The Chairman was surprised, as he had never encountered a group of women collectively voicing their concerns in such a manner before.

During the visit, they advocated for the need to fix the bad road affecting their business and livelihood; they also advocated for a popular space they were already using as a temporary market structure to be made into a permanent market with stalls to sell from.



The Chairman approved. The women continued to engage with local leaders on various women's rights and gender inclusivity issues. Despite challenges with government project execution, the Chairman committed to completing one access road before the end of his tenure, marking a significant breakthrough for the community.

Aloh Victoria Nwazonam recounted, *"Through advocacy, we met with the LGA Chairman, Nze Phillip Okoh. We told him about how we farm a lot but don't have access roads. We women need to be empowered because with the access roads we can take farm produce to the market and profit from them and encourage other people to go into farming. Chairman Okoh built Obinagu road from scratch and got it done. The local women before would need rubber boots to protect their legs, carry their produce on their heads or several trips with bikes. Now bus, okada, keke can go there."*

Excitingly, Mrs. Nwazonam has utilized her increased profits to purchase a bus for transporting farm produce to larger markets and has re-enrolled her children in school.

Under the guidance of MAMA Centre, women in the community maintained regular meetings and engaged with local government officials, fostering dialogue to tackle infrastructure deficiencies and advance women's economic empowerment. Organizing themselves into clusters based on shared concerns, such as livelihoods or local issues, each community appointed a champion to lead and coordinate efforts. Leveraging digital skills for communication and organization, these champions mobilized women from all 20 wards in Udi LGA to form cooperatives. This cooperative structure enabled access to government incentives like grants, seeds, and fertilizer.

In Udi South, 12 cooperatives were formed across 11 wards, each comprising 30 women. Similarly, Udi North established 9 cooperatives, totaling 21 cooperatives **impacting 630 women in Udi collectively**. These cooperatives received sponsorship from their representatives in the State House of Assembly.

These cooperatives received sponsorship from their representatives in the State House of Assembly.

Through the A4E project, **more than 150 women farmers gained direct empowerment**, with many others indirectly benefiting, allowing them to advocate for their rights and necessities. Two significant outcomes were the construction of an access road in Obinagu and the establishment of a perishable foods market, enhancing market access and boosting economic opportunities for Udi women farmers. This project showcased the far-reaching impact of women's empowerment, amplifying their voices in advocating for broader community development and holding leaders accountable for positive change. The Udi women now understand their significance and are confident in approaching the government to demand what is rightfully theirs. Their numbers and heightened awareness have empowered them to express their concerns in a unified and representative manner, particularly regarding inadequate road networks.

Teacher Collins Amalu, Secretary to the Local Government, Udi LGA from 2022-2024, was thrilled at the approach the women adopted. He said:

***"...Udi women are consciously and selflessly advancing the cause of women in the community. Not in a beggarly manner as many other groups do, but pushing for development at the grassroots level. And when authorities listen to them, there is development, giving the rural people something to smile about, like the access road in Obinagu through which people now have access to farm produce from the community."***

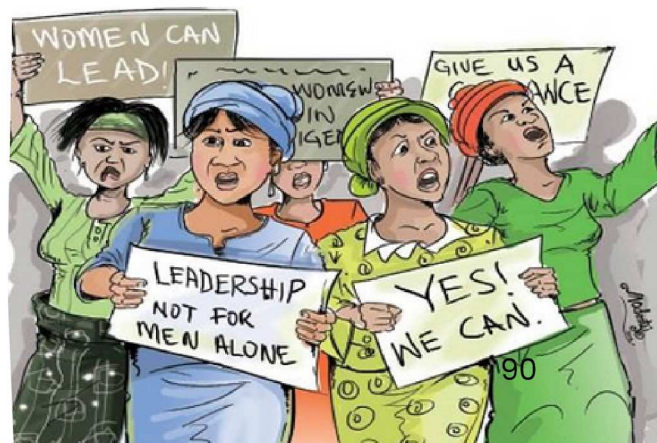
# EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

## Accountability for Change Project

A significant lesson learned by MAMA Centre during the A4E project implementation was the value of inclusivity, as it involved multiple communities with diverse women possessing varied knowledge, skills, and interests. This diversity contrasted with their previous single-community project, resulting in a more comprehensive approach. Notably, women with political interests played a crucial role in engaging key stakeholders, contributing to the project's effectiveness through collaborative efforts.

### About MAMA Centre

The Mothers and Marginalised Advocacy Centre (MAMA Centre) is an NGO dedicated to advocating for the rights of marginalised groups through legislative and policy engagement. Their mission is to empower marginalised communities towards self-determination and socio-economic independence. Through advocacy, capacity building, research, and networking, they promote gender equality, reproductive rights, and shared responsibilities in households. MAMA Centre focuses on women's empowerment through education, financial literacy, and income-generating activities, driving self-sufficiency and collective action within communities. They conduct field-based research to create platforms for socio-economic empowerment, enabling women to enhance existing livelihoods, develop financial skills, and diversify income sources.



# EMPOWERMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

## H.E.A.L. Autism Project



**Rightsholder Groups:** People with disabilities

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education; Space for political participation

**Grantee:** IKE Foundation for Autism (IFA)

The H.E.A.L. Autism Project, implemented by the Ike Foundation for Autism (IFA), is a Voice-funded initiative designed to raise awareness about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disorders in communities across Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. The goal of the project was to improve the capacity of stakeholders in the Autism community through training as a pathway for improving the welfare of children and other people living with Autism by easing their access to essential services in health.

H.E.A.L. Autism, an acceleration project targeting six local councils in Abuja, sought to build upon the outcomes achieved during the implementation of a similar project funded by Voice in 2018 called the **“Capacity-building of Parents and caregivers of Kids with Autism” project**. Beginning with Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), then to Bwari, Kuje, Gwagwalada, Kwali, and Abaji, the H.E.A.L. Autism project employed a 4-phase approach representing four pillars as tools for engagement:

- **Health:** focusing on medical referral, assessment and diagnosis in partnership with the Ministry of Health.
- **Education:** focusing on early intervention for identified cases of ASD by providing advisory services to foster inclusive education and acquire therapy/teaching aids to improve their learning.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** focusing on increasing awareness and understanding of autism within local communities, giving them a voice in advocating for widespread community participation in the inclusion of individuals with ASD in educational and social settings.

- **Learning:** focusing on research and capacity building to improve the skills/abilities of stakeholders, parents, caregivers and service providers to provide care and essential services for people with autism

Owing to the knowledge gap they already knew existed, IFA was strategic in engaging with the stakeholders, particularly within the local communities they implemented. They embarked on community sensitization starting with the community leaders to educate them and seek their buy-in before reaching out to the community members. They collaborated with town criers, village heads, and other local leaders to disseminate information that seeks to combat misconceptions about autism. The involvement of community members in the planning and implementation was crucial in creating a sense of inclusion and overcoming resistance. Through this targeted approach, challenges such as widespread ignorance and stigma were addressed.

Central to IFA’s initiative is a commitment to delivering **multifaceted support services**. To achieve this goal, IFA established partnerships with National Hospital, schools and MDAs to ensure the provision of essential resources and support systems. The project also received support from various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, Area Council authorities and community leaders, while also collaborating with organisations such as Live Well Home Therapy Nigeria Limited and Pat Silver Educational Support and Therapy Centre, among others.

The project ran from September 2022 to October 2023, **reaching over 1,400 rightsholders across the six area councils** and witnessed significant improvements in awareness and understanding of ASD through the capacity-building training:

1. Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) – 145
2. Bwari – 139+
3. Gwagwalada/Kuje – 180+
4. Abaji/Kwali – 450+
5. Refresher course (AMAC) 413+

Rightsholders expressed newfound knowledge and commitment towards expanding awareness about ASD. An example is Terna Isaac, a teacher from Kwali Area Council, who had limited knowledge about autism before his involvement in the project; he didn't know what Autism really meant and expressed shock at the level of misconceptions of ASD prevalent in his community. *"Sincerely speaking, I was not aware of autism before; this was the first time. This program exposed me to the children who have this. I knew them, I had them around but I didn't know the English name. We refer to them as 'imbecile'".*

He goes on to share that in his community, children with autism and other special needs are not enrolled in schools. Such children are hidden from public view or abandoned to fend for themselves on the streets. They are also labelled with witchcraft or demon possession. *"I have learnt that Autism is not demonic as people might think ... it is not curable, but it can only be properly managed by experienced tutors and caregivers."* He is committing to creating awareness of this condition within his community.

Liman Yunusa, representing the Office of Sports and Health in Abaji Area Council, was deeply moved by the project's impact. He was hearing about 'Autism' for the first time during the HEAL Autism Project community sensitisation workshop.

*Wow," he exclaimed, "I must say that I have been to a series of programs, but there is no program that has ever swept me off my feet like this very one ... and for those of us that are even having an interest in supporting these people, we never had a clue on how to go about it but having attended this kind of training, we've gotten more enlightenment and even condemn the discrimination against them."*

He recognised the importance of integrating special needs education into the local curriculum and advocated for greater support and inclusivity for individuals with autism. Liman has met with his acting Executive Secretary to integrate special needs education into the curriculum of schools under their purview so that awareness can be created about these conditions.

A major learning from the project included the critical need for ongoing education and advocacy to address the pervasive stigma and misconceptions surrounding autism. According to Francis Mohie, the Director of Ike Foundation for Autism, *"We knew that there was a gap, but going into the field, the experience was something else."*

IFA hopes to drive continuous capacity building, targeting a broader participant base from various local councils while engaging in continuous community involvement and collaboration with local authorities effectively to achieve more mileage.



**About IKE Foundation for Autism**

The vision of the Foundation is to have a society with equal opportunity for all persons with albinism. The project enables persons with albinism to have equal opportunity in accessing health facilities, educational attainment and mainstreaming of albinism into government policies and programmes in the state. The Mission of the Foundation is to be an advocacy organisation that empowers persons with albinism and educates the society about albinism in Nigeria and the world. The project enables the foundation advocate for the inclusion of persons with albinism in social services in the state, empower them to take their rightful place in this services and sensitise the duty bearers and the society on the issues and challenges facing persons with albinism and how to address them.



# EMPOWERMENT FOR FEMALE INMATES

## Access to Self Reliance for Female Inmates



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education; Improved Access to Resources and Employment

**Grantee:** Female Inmate Returned Citizens (FIRC)

Access to Self-Reliance for Female Inmates and Ex-Female Inmates" was a Voice-funded project that aimed at addressing the challenge of accessing sanitary pads within custodial facilities in Nigeria. The project was implemented by Female Inmates and Returned Citizens (FIRC) with technical support from Carmelite's Prisoners' Interest Organisation (CAPIO) and builds on the gains of a previous project that empowered over sixty (60) female ex-inmates and incarcerated women and girls in Suleja Custodial Centre in the production of sanitary pads.

The FIRC intervention is an offshoot of ex-inmates with a desire to enhance the welfare of inmates, being conversant with their challenges. The project is led by Lucy Dangana, a rightsholder and now trainer, who works with other returned inmates to replicate the project in other Custodial Centres across the country. The main objective is to **enhance access to self-reliance opportunities and health rehabilitation** for incarcerated women and girls in Nigeria implemented in Enugu and Lagos States.

Access to sanitary pads is a vital aspect of the menstrual cycle of every woman, which is a challenge for female inmates in Custodial Centres in Nigeria due to their incarceration status and non-provision by the authorities. According to Godwin Ugbor, Program Manager (FIRC), *"Where there are no sanitary pads, the inmates may resort to unhygienic means of managing menstruation, which can pose several health hazards."*

FIRC's initiative is crucial because inmates typically rely on handouts from public entities, which is unsustainable and can lead to potential abuse.

The "Access to Self-Reliance for Female Inmates and Ex-Female Inmates" project is an empowerment project which equips inmates and ex-inmates with skills in production of the reusable sanitary pads and also creates a pathway to economic empowerment and financial independence for returning citizens.

FIRC's innovation involves teaching inmates to produce their sanitary pads to ensure that they have consistent access without having to rely on unpredictable handouts. Their approach involved setting up workshops equipped with machines and necessary materials for sanitary pad production within Custodial Centres. Here, female inmates are taught the rudiments of sewing and how to use this skill to make reusable sanitary pads. Additionally, FIRC supports ex-inmates who face the challenge of stigma when trying to reintegrate into society. Under the project, a workshop outside the prison was set up where female ex-inmates could choose to work and use the materials and equipment there to earn a living for a soft landing after their time in incarceration. These activities, such as producing reusable pads, not only empower ex-inmates but also offer them opportunities for income generation, where they can sell the pads and earn an income.

To ensure inclusiveness, FIRC collaborated with stakeholders from the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) in planning meetings in both Enugu and Lagos to x-ray the challenges female inmates face in accessing sanitary pads and the health implications of not having these.

FIRC used the planning meetings as an opportunity to engage with the media to amplify the voices of female inmates. Engaging the media in the planning of the project helps inform the public about the plight of females in Custodial Centres and the challenges they face in accessing what should be a basic provision.

The project's impact extends beyond access to sanitary pads. The training in sewing and tailoring provides extension skills that can be applied to other forms of tailoring for fashion and design, thus providing additional avenues of income for returning female citizens. According to the Executive Director of CAPIO, Father Jude Isiguzo, the *“workshop is to enable them to continue learning how to sew not only sanitary pads but clothes, bags, and whatever they can learn.”*

One recurring challenge involved the need to adjust schedules to accommodate the commitments of some ex-inmates. For example, in Enugu, there was a conflict with the schedule of an ex-inmate leading a production workshop due to a pre-scheduled examination. To address this, activity times were extended to ensure her participation and maintain the project's momentum. Despite such challenges, **the project reached over 47 inmates and ex-inmates in Lagos and Enugu.** The numbers keep increasing as ex-inmates, driven by passion, continue to step down their training to inmates, participants like an ex-inmate in the Lagos States Kirikiri Correctional Facility, expanding the project's impact.

FIRC has been actively collaborating with the NCoS in implementing this project and working to secure their commitment and ownership of the project.

For instance, if the NCoS authorities make equipping the production workshops for female inmates a budget line item, this will facilitate the project's sustainability. This conversation features each time FIRC has an engagement with the leadership of the NCoS and they continue to advocate for this. Meanwhile, FIRC is looking to address this challenge by introducing other areas of vocational training in subsequent interventions, such as soap making, which inmates could market and sell as well as display on shelves for visitors to the Correctional Centres to purchase on a charity basis. The proceeds from the sales could go into purchase materials to sustain the production of sanitary pads.

Over the one-year period, the "Access to Self-Reliance for Female Inmates and Ex-Female Inmates" project has empowered female inmates and ex-inmates with skills and opportunities for economic independence. By addressing the critical need for sanitary hygiene and vocational training,

FIRC is making meaningful strides in supporting the rehabilitation of women in Custodial Centres across Nigeria, as well as the meaningful reintegration of ex-inmates into society.



# EMPOWERMENT FOR FEMALE INMATES

## Access to Self Reliance for Female Inmates

### About FIRC

Female Inmates and returned citizens (FIRC) is a cooperative society and non-government in Nigeria. It started three years ago (2021) with a group of female ex-inmates in Nigeria. The organization was born out of the passion of female returned (ex-inmates) who want to change their ugly experiences while incarcerated and improve the general welfare of all female inmates and returned citizens in Nigeria's custodial centers. FIRC is committed to partnership with other NGOs and CSOs for correctional reforms.

Vision: An inclusive and safe platform for all female inmates and returned citizens to be empowered, reformed, and re-integrated into societies above all odds of discrimination and stigmatization.





# EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR THE FUTURE

## Project: Reclaim Our Future



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education; Improved Access to Resources and Employment

**Grantee:** Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable Persons (CAPRIGHTS-VP)

In the bustling markets of Ikotun, a densely populated area in the heart of Lagos – Nigeria's commercial capital, the transformative work of CAPRIGHTS VP is leaving an indelible mark on the lives of women and their communities. Through empowering initiatives supported by Voice, the Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable Persons (CAPRIGHTS-VP) is helping women reclaim their futures, one step at a time.

The **Reclaim our Future** initiative was born out of gaps identified during a previous project, the '**Voices of Freedom project**', where CAPRIGHTS VP identified a need to extend their support to the parents and guardians, particularly women, of school-aged girls. During implementation, they encountered numerous cases of girls who had been abused by someone close to them but did not speak out. In a particular case where one of the girls was abused by an uncle, her mother sought intervention and, in this instance, CAPRIGHTS VP collaborated with the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Nigeria, to address the crime committed against the teenager.

The "Reclaim our Future" project specifically targets women, aiming to **empower them through family planning, resources, and economic opportunities**. The goal was to strengthen the capacity of Igando-Ikotun Community Women with the knowledge, skills, resources, and opportunities needed to achieve financial independence and exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights, thus empowering them to take charge of their lives and reclaim their future.

The initiative ran from 20 Sep 2022 to 20 Dec 2023, reaching 155 community women across Ikotun, Lagos State, through innovative and inclusive strategies to achieve its goals.

**Florence**, a Ugwu (fluted pumpkin) leaf seller, learned vital skills in resource management and entrepreneurship, transforming her business and supporting her family financially. She now advocates for women's empowerment in her community.

**Louisa**, a seamstress, went from struggling to make ends meet to running a successful tailoring business, providing for her family's needs. Through the Village Savings Loan Association (VSLA) too, she learned the importance of saving and financial independence and now contributes confidently to the upkeep of her family, strengthening her voice in decision-making processes at home.

**Kehinde**, whose journey with CAPRIGHTS VP gave her a voice and transformed her personality and lifestyle. Despite past challenges, she found solace and camaraderie in meeting other women empowered by the initiative, learning invaluable skills in finance management and self-reliance. Now, she stands tall as a beacon of hope for other women in her community, spreading the same message to other women.

**Ekenedukwu**, from being jobless and confined to her home, now owns a thriving bookshop, thanks to the initiative's support and guidance. Armed with knowledge in family planning and financial literacy, she is paving the way for a brighter future for herself and her family.

### Innovative Inclusion

CAPRIGHTS VP's approach is to provide women with the resources and support that they need to take charge of their lives through education, counselling, and family planning services to promote financial independence for women by providing them with skills training and opportunities to earn income. The Reclaim Our Future initiative harnesses the innovative power of community.

**Creating a Safe Space for Women:** CAPRIGHTS VP established a welcoming environment for women in the Igando-Ikotun community, hosting monthly meetings on the last Thursday of each month. These gatherings became safe havens where community women co-created agendas and selected discussion topics, incorporating activities tailored to their interests. Through interactive games, discussions, and bonding opportunities, the meetings fostered camaraderie and enjoyment. This supportive atmosphere encouraged connection, sharing of experiences, and mutual learning among participants, empowering them to advocate for themselves and their families. Drawing strength from each other's stories, they became catalysts for change within their own lives and communities.

**Village Savings Loan Association:** Originating from the safe space meetings, CAPRIGHTS VP introduced a savings scheme in collaboration with local bankers. Initially seeking loans, the women collectively proposed a secure savings plan. With assistance from CAPRIGHTS VP and partnering bankers, the scheme was established, enabling women to save monthly and access small loans for businesses such as selling 'pure water'.

**Family Planning:** Recognizing the holistic needs of women, they introduced natural family planning methods. Considering religious beliefs and past experiences, the women were trained in the Billings Method, a periodic abstinence

approach monitored through cervical mucus patterns. Collaborating with the Health Center at Ikotun and experienced women from the Catholic Church, CAPRIGHTS VP provided education on cycle tracking and chart interpretation, utilizing mobile apps for guidance.

### Learning Journey

The Reclaim Our Future initiative has reinforced valuable lessons, including the following:

1. The Reclaim Our Future initiative emphasized **empowering women**, recognizing their need for support, especially regarding family planning and economic opportunities. Surprisingly, the demand for safe spaces exceeded expectations, with 155 women, including 10 with disabilities, attending meetings by project closeout.
2. **Collaboration** played a crucial role in the initiative's success. CAPRIGHTS VP partnered with Voice grantee organizations like NAYA, ICEHD, DDF, and FIDA, enhancing project implementation through knowledge-sharing activities.
3. **Success stories** like Florence, Louisa, Kehinde, and Ekenedukwu highlight the initiative's impact, showcasing how empowered women are driving positive change within their families and communities.

### Project Impact

The project impacted 155 women in seven communities: Ijegun, Akesan, Obadore, Ikotun, Igando, Ejo, and Ijegemo.

**Stakeholder Collaboration:** CAPRIGHTS worked with community stakeholders, including the Primary Health Center at Ikotun and FIDA. Women gained access to free family planning resources and learned about their rights through capacity-building sessions with FIDA during safe space meetings.

# EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR THE FUTURE

## Project: Reclaim Our Future

**Village Savings Loan Association (VSLA):** A 100 women joined the VSLA, enabling them to access small loans for starting businesses, fostering financial independence and reducing the risk of gender-based violence. Even after the project ended, the women continued the savings initiative with support from CAPRIGHTS VP and AXA MANSARD Investment Limited.

**Sexual Reproductive Manual:** CAPRIGHTS developed a Family Planning Guideline for women, available at the community Primary Health Center, to extend knowledge beyond monthly meetings and reach more women in the community.

**Continued Engagement:** The Igando-Ikotun Community women continue monthly meetings to uphold inclusive programming and share knowledge, empowering themselves and others like Florence, Louisa, Kehinde, and Ekenedukwu to reclaim their futures.

### About CAPRIGHTS-VP

Centre for the Advancement and Protection of the Rights of Vulnerable People (CAPRIGHTS-VP) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded out of a passion for the advancement and protection of the rights of vulnerable people, particularly women children, orphans, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the youths. The organisation values research, innovation, and social transformation and works to address societal norms and empower vulnerable people through education and skill development. CAPRIGHTS-VP takes pride in its low-cost successes and the partnerships it built with others who share its vision.



# EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS IN BADAGRY

## Badagry Women Empowerment Project



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Resources and Employment

**Grantee:** International Center for Environmental Health & Development (ICEHD)

Mrs. Lamidi received an invitation to a community meeting organized by another NGO, unsure of its purpose. Despite initial skepticism, she decided to attend, thinking, "no harm in going, maybe there's something valuable." To her surprise, the meeting didn't offer cash or handouts but provided valuable knowledge instead. Though disappointed at first, she found the exchange of experiences and solutions regarding climate challenges among the women refreshing and empowering.

Implemented by the International Center for Environmental Health and Development (ICEHD), the **Badagry Women Empowerment Project**, funded by Voice, equipped women farmers with knowledge in climate-smart agriculture and water conservation techniques to adapt to changing weather patterns. They also learned about resilient crop varieties. Importantly, the project empowered these women to voice their struggles to local authorities. This newfound ability to advocate for themselves marked a significant shift. Today, Mrs. Lamidi and her fellow women stand taller, united in empowerment—a testament to the transformative impact of projects like ICEHD's Badagry Women Empowerment Project.

### Badagry Women Empowerment Project

Many rural women in Badagry face significant challenges in achieving economic independence and food security due to limited access to resources, skills, and knowledge. These women bear a disproportionate economic burden due to sociocultural barriers and climate change, leading to loss of opportunities, markets, and profits, worsened by COVID-19. These barriers include early child marriage, lack of equal access to resources, training, education, and participation with men for livelihood, which hinders economic opportunities, and the absence of a secure means of sustenance. These burdens accelerate poverty and poor well-being without access to re skilling. This marginalization hinders their ability to participate in the agricultural sector and improve their livelihoods.

The Badagry Women Empowerment program provide sustainable solutions for rural women farmers in Badagry to access resources and be equipped with knowledge, skills, and implements. Project beneficiaries gained economic resilience, sustainable income, economic justice, and the capacity to project their voices against exploitation and marginalization. The project ran from 20 September 2022 to 20 December 2023, and **reached 155 Badagry women directly**.

### Innovative inclusion

The Badagry Women Empowerment project enabled women to gain employment, start businesses for sustainable income, increase food security, and economic growth. Through community engagement and collaboration with local leaders, ICEHD gained entry and addressed the community's specific needs and challenges.

**"Before the project, I faced challenges due to climate change and limited resources. But with mentorship and training, I improved my farming techniques and gained the confidence to advocate for myself and other women."**— Shefau Lamidi, Badagry, Lagos

**ICEHD prioritized inclusion** by actively involving the women farmers in every step of the project. Facilitated meetings allowed for open dialogue and collective decision-making, ensuring their voices shaped program design. Initially, reaching these farmers, mostly without mobile phones, posed a challenge. To overcome this, the implementation team organized smaller units for easier communication, evolving into mentoring groups led by appointed women leaders.

**Collaboration with stakeholders:** Recognizing the significance of community leadership, ICEHD collaborated closely with local women influencers in Badagry. These leaders, who held influence and credibility within the community, played a vital role in advocating for the project and mobilising support among the women farmers. The Oba, for instance, was very supportive of the project.

ICEHD conducted a **comprehensive assessment of community needs**, focusing on women's empowerment, agriculture, and climate change. Drawing from past experiences, key areas for intervention were identified, including training, economic empowerment, and participation in local governance. Implementation strategies included:

- **Training and capacity building:** 40 women received training in climate-smart agriculture and innovative farming techniques from academic and industry experts. They learned about soil quality testing, local irrigation methods, and waste conversion for manure.
- **Access to resources:** ICEHD facilitated connections to agricultural tools, funding opportunities, and markets to improve productivity and income for Badagry Women Farmers.
- **Voice amplification:** Empowering women to advocate for their rights and participate in decision-making processes. Through collective action, they secured representation in monthly Badagry Central Authority council meetings to address pertinent issues.

### Project Impact

**Women's lives and livelihoods directly impacted:** The Badagry Women Empowerment Project has significantly impacted the community, directly **reaching 155 women farmers in Badagry, including women with disability**. These women were trained and given access to educational resources. **40 women** farmers benefited from capacity-strengthening tools focused on climate-smart agriculture, enhancing their ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

**Extended reach beyond project rightsholders:** Beyond the female rightsholders who directly benefited from the intervention, the project's reach extended indirectly to **2509 individuals across various interventions**. This figure reflects engagement in project campaigns, advocacy meetings at the policy level, and interactions with local authorities and community leaders. The project covered 11 communities, including Agave, Agbojetho, Iwore, Apa, Ihunpa, and Ikoga villages, spanning Badagry Central and Badagry West Local Government Areas of Lagos State.

**Improved farming practices:** Women adopted new techniques leading to better crop yields, improved food security, and increased household income, as attested by Mrs Lamidi; "...with this project and the mentors that we had who were putting us through, it has improved our output. Now, I farm tomatoes, cassava, maize, tomatoes, and cucumbers. I had problems with my cassava, but the mentor helped me."

**Enhanced leadership and advocacy:** Badagry Women Farmers gained the confidence to speak up for themselves, participate in local meetings, and represent the community's concerns. They now have a seat at Badagry central authority monthly meetings. The project supported women to form clusters of movements among themselves and have grown their confidence and influence to the extent that they now engage directly with the Head of Agriculture to discuss pertinent issues.

# EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS IN BADAGRY

## Badagry Women Empowerment Project

*“Women were not always called for meetings initially but now the women have been brought closer and they can speak. The women can now cater for some responsibilities in the home. More women that were reluctant are now coming out. The project has given women a voice and helped them to be more confident and that way it will be difficult for this GBV of thing, to be perpetuated against them.” – Mrs Ifeoma, Community Mobilizer*

**Community empowerment:** The project fostered collaboration and knowledge sharing among women, creating a support network and promoting social inclusion. They set up mentor networks who were able to mentor smaller groups of women in the community, teaching them some effective farming techniques.

*“With my experience and what I have been taught, I can empower other women. As a mentor, I supervise other farmers and advise them on the right crop to plant on the soil...” – Mrs Ajimoh*

### Learning Journey

Dr. Bowei, the implementing partner for the Badagry Women Farmer’s project, emphasized the unpredictable yet transformative nature of project outcomes, highlighting an instance where a woman was able to afford her children’s school fees from the proceeds of a successful farming season.

For the ICEHD team, witnessing the farmers’ harvest and the project’s impact was immensely gratifying. They recognized the power of community engagement, from identifying challenges in agriculture to addressing them with empowered solutions that intersected with climate, gender, and leadership issues.

### About ICEHD

ICEHD, established in May 2004, is a non-governmental, non-profit international organization registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission. Its primary aim is to promote health, particularly among women and girls, advance socio-economic inclusion and development, and empower marginalized individuals and communities.



Saturday, Feb 18th, 2023, 10am. Chamber Hall Badagry Local Govt Secretariat Ajara, Lagos.

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# EMPOWERING WOMEN- LED COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

## Women Empowerment and Inclusive Governance



**Rightsholder Groups:** Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Resources and Employment, Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education

**Grantee:** The Dewdrop Foundation (DDF)

In 2018, **Dewdrop Foundation (DDF)** launched the '**Inclusive Governance**' project, funded by Voice. This project achieved the historic inclusion of two women in the governance structure of Umuode village in Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu state, Nigeria. However, despite these successes, many women faced challenges in pursuing further leadership roles due to economic constraints and caregiving responsibilities.

Recognizing this need, DDF implemented the '**Women Empowerment and Inclusive Government**' project in Umuode Community from September 2022 to February 2024, with additional funding from Voice. This project aimed to enhance women's leadership capacity and economic independence through targeted training programs and entrepreneurial initiatives. Additionally, the project facilitated the acquisition of land for farming by the women's group, aiming to ensure sustainable income generation and protect against social exploitation and gender-based violence.

The first step in implementation was an advocacy visit to the Igwe's cabinet for support and buy-in, after which the DDF team held a project inception meeting with key stakeholders in the community, which included the Igwe of Umuode, the Onowu of the community, President General of the Town Union, Women representative of the Igwe's cabinet and other key stakeholders, to discuss the implementation strategies and expected outcomes and, also to solicit the support of the cabinet towards the implementation of the project.

The project focused on training workshops for the women and advocating for their access to community land for commercial farming, which would empower them to carry out commercial activities and contribute to the growth of the community.

DDF undertook various activities throughout the implementation, including:

1. Leading **strategic advocacy** efforts by women's groups to engage community stakeholders, facilitating women's access to communal land for cooperative farming and sustainable income generation.
2. Hosting **capacity-building and training workshops** on leadership and advocacy for key community stakeholders, including the land committee, to enhance leadership skills and advocate for women's rights.
3. Establishing the **Women Voice Roundtable forum** and the Umuode Community Women Farmers' Cooperative, providing platforms for collective operation, advocacy, and capacity-building.
4. **Facilitating monthly Voice Roundtable dialogues**, led by women from the Traditional Ruling Council, allowing women to voice concerns, discuss important issues, and initiate community development projects. These discussions led to the formation of a committee to address gender-based violence (GBV) issues, resulting in community-led actions against perpetrators.
5. **Organizing Enterprise Development Clinics** to offer training and mentorship for women in small and medium enterprise (SME) development, empowering them with the skills needed to establish and manage successful businesses in their communities.

### Project Impact

#### **Enhanced Women's Leadership Roles:**

equipping women in the community with the skills and knowledge necessary to take on leadership positions through training programs and workshops. Emphasis was placed on the importance of women's involvement in decision-making processes.

**Annie Faithful**, a 41-year-old Teacher and Farmer in the community, was excited about the things she had learned during the workshops and beamed with her newfound confidence. She said, *"I could never stand up in public to speak but through DewDrop's training on leadership and farming, I can do anything. We were carried along, and through this we formed a Cooperative called Chizaram Multipurpose and can now join the town union. Now we are pioneers of ourselves and also encourage each other to make profit from what we do, resolve local and domestic issues and provide for our families"*.

The Chairperson of the women's cooperative group, Chizaram Multipurpose Cooperative Society, **Lolo Fidelia Ugwu**, echoed a similar sentiment as she described the project's impact on their community. *"Dew Drop is special to us because it helped us understand women's inclusiveness in leadership. This one is outstanding. Our representation in local leadership has encouraged us even to consider representing our community at the state level."*

*"I learnt a lot,"* said **Helen Nnaji**, a civil servant and teacher, speaking about women's representation in the Igwe's Cabinet and at the Town Union. *"It was said before that a woman cannot come to the public to speak before the men,"* she reiterated. *"However, with the training we received from Dew Drop, we have our women now able to speak at the Town Union and in the Igwe's Cabinet, associating themselves in other things that men are known to do."*

**Advocating for Land Ownership:** The project recognized the hurdles women face in accessing land for economic activities. They advocated for women's collective ownership of community land for farming, emphasizing the benefits to both the community and families. The DDF project team and Resource Persons guided women through the land acquisition process, including filling out forms for community land acquisition and setting up a Cooperative which today boasts of up to 40 members. The women were allocated 6 hectares of arable farming land and they devised a zoning strategy for land management, dividing it into zones for specific crops and livestock farming, further subdivided into plots for cultivation or rearing. Currently, the Chizaram Multipurpose Cooperative has secured a larger portion of community land for farming. Helen Nnaji stated, *"Through our cooperative, we've cultivated rice on over 15 hectares of land just in the past year. Our rice is renowned across Nigeria."*

**Economic Empowerment:** By gaining access to land for farming, women were able to generate income and achieve economic independence.

**Edeh Amaka** testifies to this, *"I don't buy rice anymore. I can use the little I make to support my family without always waiting for my husband."* The project also provided training on financial literacy and entrepreneurship to enable women to manage their businesses effectively.

**Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** The cooperative serves as a platform for effective conflict resolution within the community. With support from the Igwe's Cabinet and the Town Union, domestic issues leading to conflicts within households are addressed. For instance, husbands selling palm kernel heads without sharing proceeds with their wives was a common problem, depriving women of household money and essential ingredients like palm oil. To combat this, the women presented their case to the Igwe's Cabinet, leading to the implementation of an accountability system. Women would be fined for purchasing palm heads from neighbors' husbands, encouraging fair practices and economic empowerment. This initiative significantly reduced conflicts and violence at home.



## EMPOWERING WOMEN- LED COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

### Women Empowerment and Inclusive Government

In cases of violence against women, non-violent group actions were taken, such as collectively expressing displeasure at the perpetrator's home until he understood the seriousness of the issue. Men were also encouraged to report cases of spousal abuse, with the focus on resolving disputes amicably and maintaining unity. As **Amaka Edeh** stated, *"Women in our community no longer quarrel. When there is an issue, we go together as a group to resolve it. There is peace in our community."*

**Sustainability and Expansion:** The project laid the groundwork for sustainability by encouraging cooperative farming practices through continuous engagement with Community Leaders. Umuode Community women, with their newfound confidence, are eager to take up positions in leadership. Annie Faithful, shares her next steps: *"At the grassroots, I want to be a women leader in local government now...I can do it...I can represent any group now. With this thing we have been gathering from Voice, we can step out to be something else in the future. We're encouraging our children to emulate us".*

#### About Dewdrop Foundation

The Dewdrop Foundation (DDF) is a non-profit organization established in 2002, with the goal to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in society, especially in rural communities, by developing their capacity to fight for their rights; and engage in enterprises that guarantee them sustainable livelihoods.

*"Through our cooperative, we've cultivated rice on over 15 hectares of land just in the past year. Our rice is renowned across Nigeria." -*

*Helen Nnaji*



# EMPOWERING PERSONS WITH ALBINISM

## We Live to Shine project



**Rightsholder Groups:** People with disabilities

**Impact Themes:** Improved Access to Social Services, Health and Education

**Grantee:** The Albino Foundation (TAF)

**Hajiya Sa'adatu Sani**, fondly called Sa'a, was excited when she became pregnant with her first child not long after she got married. When her daughter was born, the first thing she noticed was that the child was as white as snow. Sa'a was told that her tender daughter, who had never cried since birth, was also diagnosed with jaundice and would only become sicker. The baby was labelled a witch, and the whispers only got louder. This devastated the new mum, who was also dealing with mental health challenges simultaneously. She continued to suffer discrimination from the rest of the family and community, and this was the case until the infant eventually died.

By the time she was pregnant again, Sa'a hoped and prayed for her child. She birthed a healthy son – born kicking and screaming with albinism. *"I had never seen anyone that was as white as my son except on television"*, she recounts. People in her community repeatedly told her that he was an evil child who would also die soon, like his sister. Her breakthrough occurred when she came into contact with TAF's Voice-funded project **"We Live to Shine"**. This project supported Persons with Albinism (PWAs) and their parents to understand the condition and manage it effectively. There, she finally found her 'tribe'. During the workshop, Sa'a was made to understand the nature of Albinism and how best to care for her children and boost their self-esteem as well as her own in the process.

**Jabir Abdulkadir**, a Person with Albinism (PWA), faced discrimination and bullying due to his condition, making him feel different. However, after learning about the Voice-funded project 'We Live to Shine' through community mobilization by TAF in Plateau state, Jabir has used his role as a teacher to raise awareness about albinism and disabilities. He identifies other PWAs and encourages their involvement in the project, leading to the enrollment of many previously hidden children with disabilities into schools.

A reigning beauty queen, **Pearl** cuts a picture of elegance and confidence. Her journey to the world of pageantry is a testament to what empowerment looks like. *"Growing up as a child with a disability was very traumatic. Even within the family, most people didn't understand me... I didn't interact with the world due to the stigma I got from school and the challenges I got from home; I felt there was no need to interact and speak out. In 2020, I was selected amongst many to contest in a beauty pageant"*. Pearl went on to clinch the beauty pageant and her confidence has grown by leaps and bounds. In addition to the businesses she runs in Point of Sales (POS) machines and hairdressing, Pearl also runs a WhatsApp support group where she mentors other young people using the skills she has learnt.

The 'We Live to Shine' project revolves around establishing a secure environment for individuals with PWA in Plateau state while expanding upon the achievements of the previous VOICE-funded project titled **"My Nature, My Pride"** undertaken by the Foundation.

Its primary objective is to ensure that PWAs are well-informed about their rights, thereby enhancing their access to essential social services and facilitating their active involvement in political and electoral processes. Some of the myths that the team found in communities visited include the fact that PWAs are not eligible to be married within the community. This situation is getting better with advocacy and awareness creation, as one of the staff got married during the course of the project.

Another reality found was the myth that PWAs die early and are therefore not eligible to get an education so as not to 'waste' limited resources. With the awareness created for PWAs on how to take care of themselves and their children with Albinism, community leaders and members have also come to understand the support required for PWAs to live a bountiful life.

The innovative approaches employed in the 'We Live to Shine' project, and the resulting impact are evident through its multifaceted strategies aimed at empowering PWA in Plateau State. First, the project orchestrates a series of **comprehensive workshops** strategically distributed across the three senatorial districts of the state – Northern, Central, and Southern zones – **totalling six workshops**. The workshops facilitated spaces that allowed for conversations around building self-confidence and upskilling, as well as in-depth discussions on PWA rights, political participation and advocacy efforts.

Particularly noteworthy is the creation of safe spaces, which proved instrumental in empowering PWAs to articulate their concerns effectively and cultivate the self-confidence necessary for employment opportunities.

Secondly, the project ensured sustained support through monthly check-ins conducted by zonal leaders, fostering continuous dialogue and guidance for rightsholders. Leveraging these interactions, leaders actively identified and registered PWAs for coordinated efforts.

Thirdly, the use of a **dedicated WhatsApp group** served as a dynamic platform for ongoing learning, knowledge exchange, and resource-sharing among PWAs. Notably, coaching sessions on interview strategies have resulted in successful job placements for some participants, underscoring the tangible impact of the project's initiatives in enhancing the socio-economic prospects of PWAs.

Additionally, the project team consistently **engaged with stakeholders** to amplify the voices of PWAs. This strategic positioning yielded fruit with the **deployment of 17 election observers from the Albinism community during the 2023 general elections**. This also saw massive support for a PWA candidate in his bid for office, a sequel to massive awareness creation already established in communities. For the first time, PWAs in Plateau state felt a sense of belonging, thereby fostering genuine political participation evident with the turnout of PWAs to vote.

An unexpected outcome witnessed in the process of implementing the project as a result of strategic advocacy was that the TAF team was able to collaborate with a doctor who began offering **pro-bono medical evaluation** during activities under the project. Several PWAs with the onset of skin cancer were detected, and treatment commenced immediately, thus increasing their life expectancy.

# EMPOWERING PERSONS WITH ALBINISM

## We Live to Shine project

The 'We Live to Shine' project strived to cultivate an environment where individuals with albinism can flourish without encountering stigma, discrimination, rejection, injustice, social marginalization, stereotypes, or the threat of violence stemming from socio-cultural misconceptions and ignorance.

In total, the project reached a diverse audience of **1094 individuals across Plateau state** by implementing activities aimed at boosting self-awareness and confidence among PWAs through capacity-building initiatives targeting rightsholders and brokering advocacy engagements with influential stakeholders.

### About TAF

The vision of the Foundation is to have a society with equal opportunity for all persons with albinism. The project enables persons with albinism to have equal opportunity in accessing health facilities, educational attainment and mainstreaming of albinism into government policies and programmes in the state.





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