

The Civility

“Where civil society is welcomed, communities are more safe, more secure, and more prosperous.”

-Ben Rhodes



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Introducing the Newsletter The CIVILITY

The CIVILITY is a quarterly newsletter publication of the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN), aimed at showcasing OCCEN's work of empowering citizens and communities across Nigeria to reach their full potential through promoting good governance, human rights and inclusive democracy that works for all.

This maiden edition of the newsletter is dedicated to OCCEN's partnership with the European Union Agents for Citizens-driven Transformation (ACT) Project which empowers CSOs to be credible and effective drivers of change for sustainable development in Nigeria.

It therefore focuses on the various activities of OCCEN in the first quarter of its implementation of the EU ACT Project titled: ***“Strengthening Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Decisions in Kano State.”*** The project strengthens Kano Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) capacity to demand for accountability and tackle social exclusion through participation in public policy discussions.

Accordingly, the newsletter captures stories of key activities implemented by OCCEN between September and December 2021 including a training for a group of Kano Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on civic participation in public policymaking and another training aimed at addressing the dearth of women's and girls' participation in public policymaking processes in the state.

Also inclusive in this edition is an in-depth review of Nigeria's shrinking civic space by OCCEN's Executive Director titled: ***“Expanding Nigeria's Civic Space Towards a Consolidated Democracy.”***

Signed

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The OCCEN EU-ACT Project at a Glance!

The European Union Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (EU- ACT) Project empowers CSOs to be credible and effective drivers of change for sustainable development in Nigeria. While the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN) is a nonprofit dedicated to helping citizens and communities reach their full potential through promoting good governance, human rights and inclusive democracy that works for all.

Thanks to funding support from EU-ACT, OCCEN is strengthening civil society participation in public policy making in Kano state. By improving CSO's capacity to demand for inclusivity and accountability, the project is entrenching citizens' participation in public policy and tackling the social exclusion of marginalized groups (women, youth and people with disabilities) which is enhancing political accountability and inclusive governance in Kano.

EU-ACT is tackling the interconnected challenges of low status of women, youth and girls and marginalised groups in Kano as well as their exclusion from public policymaking and benefiting



Participants during group work at CSOs training

from development programmes so as to deliver a long-term strategic change in their status. This is allowing women, youth and girls across Kano state the opportunity to have greater say in how programmes are designed and managed for the benefit of their families.

By making the government more accountable and responsive to Kano citizens' demands, EU ACT is reshaping and transforming the relationship between the state and its citizens whilst ensuring the delivery of public governance is significantly improved.



CSOs participants during capacity building training in Kano

Advocacy visit

to Kano State Ministry of Budget and Planning

Date: 1st November 2021

As part of OCCEN effort to start implementing the strengthening civil society participation in public policy project in Kano, funded by European Union Agent for Citizen Transformation Program (ACT) implemented by British Council. OCCEN paid advocacy visits to some key relevant institutions which include Kano State Ministry of Budget and planning. OCCEN request to meet with ministry was granted and met with Director Planning Mukhtar Yakasai.

Program goal and objectives were discussed and the expected role of MDAs in term of pushing for policy reforms on civil society participation in public policy decisions and gender mainstreaming in Kano state. After OCCEN's ED remarks, the director responded

to some of the issues raised by OCCEN including their request for the MDAs to participate in the program, especially around participation in policy dialogues to be organized by the project, in order to ensure citizens are given opportunity to influence public policy process in Kano. The director promised that they will do their best as an agency that coordinate most of the state policies and ensure the MDAs OCCEN is looking forward to working with are on board when it comes to the participation in the project activities. A plan has been scheduled for a follow up to make sure the areas are well articulated and the stakeholders to be involved are fully mobilized. A group picture was taken and the meeting called it a day.



OCCEN team during advocacy visit to Kano State Ministry of Budget and Planning

OCCEN EU-ACT empowers Kano CSOs to hold policymakers accountable

The European Union Agents for Citizens-driven Transformation (EU-ACT) Project and the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN) has trained a group of Kano Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on civic participation in public policymaking aimed at promoting good governance as well as enhancing political accountability in Kano state.

The selected civic activists who were trained on various aspects of public policy making and how to positively influence policymaking processes are now poised to bring about positive change in Kano's civic space, thanks to their newly acquired skills for engaging with those at the helm of their affairs.

One of the trainees who testified to the new skills he acquired at the EU-ACT/OCCEN capacity building training, Usman Garko of the Adolescent Health and Information Project (AHIP), said one of his major takeaways from the training was the understanding of policy evaluation as a core of aspect policymaking. He was convinced that the skills he acquired through the EU-

ACT training would enable him to influence policymaking not only in Kano state but Nigeria at large.

Another trainee, Adam Dakata of the Center for Awareness on Justice and Accountability (CAJA), said the EU-ACT training would help in addressing the existing huge void in terms of the capacity of civic activists like himself to understand and influence public policymaking. "Having been equipped with the requisite strategies for engaging stakeholders in the policy making process, we are now empowered to speak up when public policies do not reflect our interest," Dakata assured.

Following their participation in the OCCEN/EU ACT capacity building training, the participants will now conduct step-down training for their colleagues working at grassroots level. Indeed, the EU ACT project is through these capacity building trainings changing the narrative of citizens' participation in public policymaking in Kano. As the trainees stepdown the skills they acquired, the citizens of Kano are being empowered to have their say in issues of public policy.



Cross-section of Participants during CSOs capacity building training

OCCEN EU-ACT push for gender mainstreaming in policymaking in Kano



Participants during group work at women champions training

The European Union Agents for Citizens-driven Transformation (ACT) Project and the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN) are jointly promoting social inclusion in policy making in Kano state through addressing the dearth of women's and girls' participation in public policymaking processes in the state.

EU-ACT is achieving this all-important objective through the training of selected women and girls champions to tackle deeply-entrenched gender inequality by engaging power holders on political

accountability and inclusive governance. By empowering women and girls to positively influence decision-making processes in Kano society, EU ACT is addressing the age-long near complete absence of women and girls in public policymaking.

Due to socio-cultural factors policymakers in Kano do not feel accountable to women and girls who continue to suffer from various forms of abuses, namely domestic and sexual violence. Consequently, the voices of women's and girls' are rarely heard in the male-dominated civic space. Against this backdrop, EU-ACT is strengthening the capacity of women and girls from Kano to be able to identify their priorities, articulate their demands and engage policymakers.

The trained women and girls champions are now well-equipped to contribute to the formulation of gender-sensitive public policies, thanks to their newly acquired deep level of understanding of the concept of public policy making. The beneficiaries of the EU ACT capacity building training would be hosting a series of step down training for more women and girls across various communities of Kano, thereby growing the numbers of women and girls champions of inclusive governance.

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Women champions during group photo



Girls champions during group work



Expanding Nigeria's Civic Space Towards a Consolidated Democracy

*By Abdulrazaq Alkali, Executive Director, Organization for
Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN) and Reagan-
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The civic space empowers members of the civil society to communicate, interact freely, air grievances without hindrance, and engage in dialogue to address issues of common concern, as well as influence public policy. In other words, the civic space enables citizens and non-state actors to play a role in the political, economic and social life of a society.

Accordingly, participants within the civic space contribute to policy-making through dialogue and consultation, free access to information, and expression of views without fear or intimidation from state institutions. Consequently, a civic space is the bedrock of open and democratic societies.

A thriving and open civic space is necessary for civil society actors to access information, voice their views, and most importantly, influence in meaningful ways the outcome of government policies and programs for the benefit of ordinary citizens. A robust civic space is an essential precondition for good governance, rule of law as well as enabling citizens to shape their societies. Undoubtedly, open and pluralistic civic space guarantees freedom of expression, assembly as well as association, crucial necessities for democratic consolidation.

Unfortunately, today's civic space is threatened by repressive laws and increased restrictions on the freedom of civil societies to express, participate, assemble and associate with one another. Although new technologies have fostered the growth of the digital civic space, they have also given governments excuses to restrict free expression and gag the press, often under the pretext of security. The civil society's operating environment is getting leaner with civic activists and journalists being repressed and some even forced into exile.

Thanks to their role in election observation, legislative advocacy as well as monitoring and tracking government performance in Nigeria, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are regarded as agents of democratic consolidation. Despite CSO's crucial role in promoting and safeguarding democracy in Nigeria, they continue to grapple with challenges to do with capacity, lack of resources and compliance with legal frameworks guiding their operation, which collectively hinder their effectiveness as regards to fostering democratic consolidation.

Moreover, civic activism and political activism in Nigeria is hindered by Nigeria's tortuous political history and its resultant rivalry among the geopolitical regions. Thus, politics of

ethnicity and regionalism have created apathy and lack of trust, resulting in many CSOs folding their hands in moments that require collective actions. As a result, CSOs have failed to play their watchdog role over the government in a manner that can affirm and promote their autonomy and independence. This posture has ultimately undermined the civil society's effectiveness and confined them to issues that do not fundamentally challenge the status quo and bring about the desired change.

More than two decades after the country's return to democracy, democratic consolidation is increasingly becoming a necessity in post-military rule Nigeria, whose democracy is considered to be flawed. It is therefore high-time for Nigeria to focus on consolidating its still fledgling democracy. Nonetheless, for a country to achieve a consolidated democracy, it must have a vibrant, free, active and highly-rated civil society, which is lacking in Nigeria at the moment.

Consequently, Nigeria's democracy is in shambles because political leaders at all levels have failed to fulfill their promises of improving the lives of Nigerians. Therefore, the country continues to be bedeviled by various challenges that hinder democratic consolidation, namely widespread corruption evident in mismanagement of public resources, weak accountability mechanisms, lack of political autonomy for key democratic institutions, lack of truly independent civil society and high-level unemployment and abject poverty among citizens.

These unfortunate realities call for an expanded civic space to enable effective civil society oversight over the country's democratization process. Accordingly, there is a need to configure the nature of interaction between the state and civil society so as to promote the growth of a vibrant citizenry and subsequently foster a consolidated democracy. However, the civil society must be resourced enough to hold the government accountable as well as promote rule of law and human rights.

Despite these teething challenges, in recent years, there has been a significant transformation of the civic space, exemplified by innovative new actors bonded through digital networks and coalitions. Emerging digital spaces and disruptive technologies are promoting open and transparent civic engagement. Despite the challenge of fostering accountability in a time of funding constraints, civil society is attempting to reclaim their legitimacy through a self-regulatory framework.

Furthermore, the civic sphere is being reenergized by funding bodies such as European Union (EU), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), National Endowment for Democracy (NED) as well as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and MacArthur Foundation etc. They provide support for citizen-led projects and provide direct grants to CSOs to implement community-led projects by facilitating the formation of new grassroots organizations and creating new civil society organizations. This is resulting in an overall expansion of the civic space.

As a result, there is now a sense of cautious optimism as non-state actors work to promote an environment that encourages civic engagement and supports the important roles of citizens, communities and civil society in a democracy. This is in addition to encouraging the participation of new informal actors in civic engagement; establishing and maintaining meaningful dialogue and platforms that bring civil society, media and the government as well as with other stakeholders together.

However, there is a need for caution and more efforts towards expanding the civic space by promoting accountability in governance, freedom of expression, human rights and rule of law. This will help checkmate our leaders' growing tendency to embrace authoritarian and dictatorial ways of dealing with unfavorable political situations thereby endangering our hard-earned democracy.



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