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SWIFT NEWSLETTER STORIES

Hello and welcome to the 23rd edition of SWIFT!

If this edition feels a bit more "sparkling" than usual, it's because we are still catching our breath from a historic milestone. This past November, ActionAid Nigeria turned 25! From our humble beginnings to a federation of courage, AAN@25 was more than a corporate anniversary—it was a family reunion. A special highlight was hosting Arthur Larok, the Secretary General of our International Federation. Since it was Arthur's first time in Nigeria, we shared a running joke with him: if you haven't been to Nigeria, you haven't truly been to Africa yet!

Arthur joined us for a deeply moving visit to the Pasepa community in the FCT. As a community where we have implemented child sponsorship since 2006, Pasepa holds a special place in our hearts. Walking through the renovated health centre and the skill acquisition centre, Arthur saw firsthand how the long-term commitment of our supporters has transformed the lives of children and families over nearly two decades.

The celebration continued with a grand gala at the Transcorp Hilton, Abuja. It was a night of joy, reflection, and deep gratitude as we premiered a legacy documentary that brought community voices to the big screen and unveiled our legacy book, *Footprints*. The night was also about honouring the people who walk this path with us. We presented awards to institutional donors like

the Ford Foundation, government partners, and media allies who amplify our voice. Most importantly, we recognised the "community heroes"—the smallholder women farmers of SWOFON, education coalitions, and activists who are the true backbone of our work. We also took a moment of silence to honour fallen colleagues who gave their lives in service to this mission.

In this edition, you will also find my Seville Journals, where I took our demand for debt justice to the United Nations. But the real energy lies in the stories of our people: the "Return and a Rebirth" showing how the RECONNECT project is restoring dignity to returnees; "Na Us Dey Run Am," which explores the strengthening of youth-led NGOs through EVOLVE; and the story of Aisha, the woman mechanic breaking barriers in Geidam. You will also see our collective stand for justice through the "Fund Our Future" and "Pots and Pans" campaigns with MOT!ON.

If you would like to own a piece of our history, *Footprints* is available for purchase at our offices or online via Selar [here](#). After 25 years, the message is clear: this is just the beginning. Armed with our history to guide us, we are ready for the next quarter-century.

Have a good read!

Andrew Mamadu
Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria



Years of Action: Stories of Courage, Collaboration and Transformative Change

Twenty-five years ago, ActionAid Nigeria (AAN) set out with a radical vision to build a world where every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity. This past November, that journey reached a sparkling milestone. Far from being just a corporate anniversary, AAN@25 was a vibrant celebration of the lives touched, the systems changed, and the enduring bond between the organisation and the people it serves.

A FAMILY AFFAIR: JOY ACROSS THE OFFICES



The festivities kicked off with a burst of internal energy. Simultaneously, across offices in Abuja, Lagos, Borno, and Yobe, staff stepped away from their laptops and into their finest gorgeous outfits for an internal celebration. It was a day for the people who make the work possible, featuring a time of games, celebratory dances, and awards. The air was thick with institutional pride as teams reflected on the collective resilience that has defined AAN for two and a half decades.

FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO THE GLOBAL STAGE



The celebration was not confined to hotel halls. On the morning of Thursday, November 27, 2025, before the evening gala, Arthur Larok and the Senior Management Team visited the Pasepa community in the FCT, a partner community since 2006. Walking through the renovated health centre and the skill acquisition centre, Larok witnessed firsthand the physical legacy of community collaboration and the child sponsorship initiative.

Later that evening, the spotlight shifted to the Congress Hall at Transcorp Hilton, Abuja. The venue was transformed into a living history book, featuring a Gallery Walk that guided high-level guests, including public sector leaders, diplomats, and ActionAid alumni, through 25 years of transformative change. The evening felt like a reunion of the social justice family. Arthur Larok, the Secretary General of the ActionAid International Federation, joined AAN Country Director Andrew Mamedu, Board Chair Rabi Isma, and General Assembly Convener Dr. Steve Onya to welcome a room packed with allies and change-makers.

A major highlight was the premiere of a 15-minute legacy documentary featuring community voices that reminded everyone why these 25 years mattered. This was followed by a stirring spoken word performance by Dike Chukwumerije.

A LEGACY IN PRINT AND STONE



The centerpiece of the night was the official unveiling of Footprints: The AAN Legacy Book. The book, which captures the stories of courage that have paved AAN's path, was launched by the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Alhaji Mohammed Idris Malagi, alongside Country Director Andrew Mamedu. The audience also gained deep insights from Dr. Chichi Aniagolu Okoye, the Regional Director of the Ford Foundation, who served as the book reviewer. To look toward the future, the organisation also unveiled a prototype of the new AAN building, signaling that this 25-year milestone is just the foundation for what is next.



No celebration is complete without gratitude, and the night recognised the diverse ecosystem that makes social justice possible. Institutional giants like the Ford Foundation were honoured as long-standing donors, while SMEDAN, the Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, and the Enugu State Government were recognised for their enduring partnership and commitment to scaling sustainable development. Media allies including AIT, Arise TV, Vanguard, and Nigeria Info were celebrated for their consistent support in amplifying the voices of the poor and excluded.

The event also shone a light on community heroes, with awards going to the Smallholder Women Farmers Organisation in Nigeria (SWOFON), the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All, and the Lake Chad Peace and Development Initiative. In a deeply moving moment of remembrance, posthumous awards were dedicated to the families of staff who died in active service, specifically remembering late colleagues lost in the Bellview plane crash. The family of the late John Moru

was physically present to collect the award in honour of his selfless service.

As the cake was cut and the music filled the Congress Hall, the message was clear: 25 years is just the beginning. Armed with Footprints to guide them and new prototypes to build, ActionAid Nigeria is ready for the next quarter-century of action.

Physical copies of the book are available for sale at all ActionAid Nigeria offices in Abuja, Lagos, and Maiduguri or visit <https://selar.com/p751896524>



A New Chapter for Local Leadership in Lagos



When councillors from 22 LCDAs gathered for the grassroots leadership training in Lagos, many arrived unsure of what to expect. But they left with something far more powerful than new notes, they left with a new sense of responsibility.

For the first time, some councillors said they clearly understood how deeply their decisions shape everyday lives.

"This training opened my eyes," one participant shared. "I realised leadership is not about sitting in an office, it's about listening to the people who trusted us with their voices. -Hon. Mutiu"

Over the two days, conversations shifted from problems to possibilities. Councillors explored how to organise their communities, strengthen accountability, and rebuild the trust that many citizens feel they lost.

Another councillor reflected,

"I used to think engagement was a town hall once in a while. Now I see it as a continuous relationship. -Hon. Adetutu"

By the end of the workshop, participants had developed practical action steps—from improving ward-level communication to creating platforms where citizens can regularly share their concerns. Many left committed to becoming more present, more transparent, and more people centered.



The Climate Spark in Gwoza

... Butiya Paul Story



After returning from the Global Platform, Butiya Paul wasted no time turning his training into a movement. From September to November 2025, Gwoza saw a wave of climate justice initiatives that brought the community together in ways it hadn't seen before.

The momentum began with a vibrant march through the streets of Gwoza, where 30 young people chanted for climate justice. The energy soon shifted to the GSS IDP Camp, where 50 displaced women gathered for a session on the

realities of a changing environment. By November, the focus turned to practical health, as 57 women learned how proper waste disposal can prevent drainage blockages and environmental risks.

To ensure this impact lasts, Butiya launched Climate Clubs in three secondary schools—UBE, Sabon Gari, and Hambagda. With 150 students already enrolled, Gwoza is now home to a new generation of advocates ready to protect their environment and their future.





The Long Road Home

When my mother lost her shop, life became very difficult for our family. During this period, I was vulnerable, and a friend introduced me to someone who promised to help me travel abroad for work. I was told I would go to Russia to work as a hairdresser.

After several months, I arrived in Russia. The woman I was placed with told me I had to work to repay the cost of my travel before anything else. I worked tirelessly under her control. One day, she instructed me to steal from a client's home. When I was caught, I fled and lived in hiding for six months before I was eventually tracked down and arrested. The woman denied knowing me, and I was sentenced to three years in prison.

Before my arrest, I had already paid her a large sum of money. Life in prison was unbearable. I washed clothes for other inmates in exchange for food. My hands became damaged from constant washing, and conditions were so harsh that people back home believed I had died. By the time I returned, a grave with my name had already been prepared.

I was released and deported under painful circumstances. During that time, a man who

claimed to care for me took advantage of my situation. I later discovered I was four months pregnant when I was deported, although I had not realised earlier because I was still menstruating.

Returning home was extremely difficult. I felt ashamed, isolated, and deeply broken. I begged my mother to allow me to stay until I gave birth, after which I planned to leave. For days, I shut myself away and struggled to face anyone.

Through the RECONNECT programme, I found a community of people who understood my experience. For the first time, I was able to speak openly about what I had gone through and begin the process of healing. With the support of training organised by Genius Hub, GIZ, and ActionAid, I learned tailoring skills and began to rebuild my life.

”

Today, I can stand and share my story with confidence. I am no longer defined by what happened to me. My mother is proud of how far I have come.

Madam B., Benin City, Edo State

“

Putting People at the Heart of Justice

...from CLEAP JUSTICE to CiTi-Act



From CLEAP-Justice to CiTi-ACT: A New Step Forward

The CLEAP-Justice project started as a 24-month journey by ActionAid Nigeria to push for citizen-led accountability in post-election justice. It focused on making sure ordinary people could question and influence how justice was delivered after elections. It brought people closer to the courts, and the courts closer to the people.

But along the way, something became clear: the issues in our justice system go beyond just elections. If we want real change, we have to look at the whole system. That's how the idea for a new project was born: CiTi-ACT — Citizens' Actions for Judicial Accountability to Promote Democracy in Nigeria.

CiTi-ACT is not starting from scratch. It's building on what CLEAP-Justice began to do, but with a wider

lens. Now, it's about making sure citizens can engage with every part of the justice system, not just around elections, but every day, at every level. It's about promoting democracy and protecting human rights by putting people at the center of justice.

Citizens' Open Day was a close out for CLEAP and a launch of CiTi-ACT. It was a day of reflection and fresh energy. But one moment stood out: students from the University of Abuja Law Clinic took the stage to debate Independent Judicial Accountability Panel (IJAP) recommendations on the Supreme Court judgement. Some argued for it, some against it. What mattered most was that young Nigerians were engaging with real, complex issues of justice, boldly and publicly.

That debate reminded us of what this is all about. Citizens taking action. Young voices shaping the future. And the belief that justice must work for everyone, not just during elections, but all the time.



Pots and Pans Action 2025

ActionAid Nigeria stands with the Movement for the Transformation of Nigeria (MOT!ON) during the "Pots and Pans Action." Between October 1 and 17, 2025, Nigerians across all walks of life used empty pots to symbolise the reality of hunger and the urgent need for leadership that

prioritises the poor. The message is clear: the time for transformative change is now. The protest was a demand to the Federal, States and Local Governments for a country where no one goes to bed hungry.

Where Did the Money Go?

30 Journalists Get to Work

Across Nigeria, the story is often the same: a budget is passed, a project is promised, but a community is left waiting. Many citizens don't realise that when a school roof isn't fixed or a clinic stays empty, it is often because public funds have taken a "detour." But how do you turn a dry budget spreadsheet into a story that moves people?

Under the SPA II project, ActionAid Nigeria gathered 30 journalists from Lagos, Enugu, Borno, Akwa Ibom, and the FCT for a four-day deep dive into the world of public finance. It was a bootcamp in financial detective work. The goal was simple but ambitious, to equip the journalists to track government spending and report financial irregularities in a way that the average person can actually understand.

The energy from the room didn't stay in Lagos. Each journalist walked away with a commitment to dig deeper, signing an MoU to bring these stories to light and the results are already hitting the headlines. So

far, 20 investigative stories have been published, peeling back the layers on key financial issues that affect everyday lives.



Through SPA II, these journalists are becoming more than just reporters, they are becoming a powerful voice for transparency. They are proving that when you follow the money, you find the power to demand better for every Nigerian.





ActionAid Nigeria Drives National Policy Forum on Homegrown School Feeding

In 2025, lawmakers and policymakers, government representatives, civil society actors, development partners, and community leaders gathered at the Presidential Villa for the launch of the National Policy Forum on the Homegrown School Feeding Programme. Delegates from across Nigeria, joined by representatives of ECOWAS and Spanish Cooperation, came together to discuss how to ensure that every Nigerian child has access to nutritious meals, clean water, and safe hygiene in schools, and that these systems are sustainable and inclusive.

ActionAid Nigeria's presentation of the Political Economy Analysis sparked thoughtful dialogue. It unpacked long-standing challenges such as fragmented funding, weak coordination, and the absence of strong legislative backing, while also highlighting clear opportunities. With coordinated

policies, sustained investment, and community ownership, especially involving smallholder women farmers, school feeding programmes can deliver far-reaching social and economic benefits.

The most powerful reminder of what was at stake came from a young girl from Taraba State, who shared how school meals helped her concentrate in class and remain in school. Her voice grounded the discussions and reinforced a shared understanding that effective school feeding systems are about dignity, opportunity, and long-term national development.

By the close of the forum, participants left aligned around a clear understanding and commitment that institutionalising school feeding is essential to building healthier children, stronger communities, and a more inclusive future for Nigeria.

My Seville Journals: A Voice for the South

By Andrew Mamedu, Country Director

In June 2025, I joined the ActionAid Directors' Forum in Seville, Spain. This gathering brought together country directors from across the federation at a critical time. Rising geopolitical instability, shrinking civic space, and the growing politicisation of aid meant that civil society faced unprecedented challenges. The Forum was designed not just for strategy, but for leadership, an opportunity to reconnect, strengthen our collective voice, and focus on what matters most for the communities we serve.

Over three days, we engaged in interactive sessions that were far from the usual presentation-heavy meetings. We worked in groups, shared experiences, and learned from each other's successes and challenges. We reflected on how ActionAid can respond to a complex global environment with clarity, courage, and creativity. A key focus was on communications and storytelling- how to speak boldly in polarised times, influence decision-makers, and ensure our work remains relevant. We also explored fundraising strategies, social enterprise, and ways to grow unrestricted funding to maintain independence while advancing our mission.



The Forum provided a special space for women leaders as well. Female directors shared experiences, offered support, and strategised on promoting feminist leadership across the federation. These discussions were honest, inspiring, and reminded me of the strength that comes from solidarity and shared leadership.

After the Forum, I took part in the Fourth United Nations Financing for Development Conference, also in Seville. There, I spoke at a Multi-Stakeholder Roundtable on the governance of international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. For three minutes, I delivered a statement on behalf of the Civil Society Financing for Development

Mechanism, highlighting how unfair the global financial system is to countries in the Global South, including Nigeria, and calling for debt cancellation and governance reforms.

In my statement, I spoke about how the global financial system is unfair to countries in the Global South, including Nigeria. Many of these countries carry heavy debt but have little influence over the institutions that shape their economic future. I called for changes to how these institutions are governed and for concrete action on debt cancellation.

This moment was important for ActionAid because it reflected our long-standing work on economic justice. The global financial system prioritises profit over people, deepening inequality. Speaking at FFD4 gave me a chance to raise these concerns where real financial decisions are being made.

Outside the conference rooms, ActionAid joined other civil society organisations in peaceful protests calling for debt justice. We highlighted how debt repayments force governments in the Global South to cut spending on essential services, hitting the poorest and most marginalised the hardest.

By the end of the trip, the connection between local realities in Nigeria and global policy was clear. The Directors' Forum had reminded me of the importance of strong, coordinated leadership, while the UN conference showed the power of raising our voice where decisions are made. Together, these experiences reinforced ActionAid Nigeria's commitment to justice, fairness, and putting people, not profit, at the centre of development.



The National Summit on Agroecology, Climate Justice and Partnerships



For two days in Lagos, the National Summit on Agroecology, Climate Justice and Public-Private Partnerships, convened by ActionAid Nigeria, brought together farmers, researchers, policymakers, civil society organisations, youth and women's groups, and private sector actors from across Nigeria's agricultural landscape to discuss agroecology and reshape how food is grown, distributed, and sustained in Nigeria.

The conversations were firmly rooted in lived experience. Farmers spoke about restoring depleted soils through organic practices, preserving indigenous seeds, and reducing costs while improving yields. These insights reinforced a central truth of the summit: agroecology is not a theory; rather, it is a practical response to climate shocks, rising production costs, and declining food quality.

Nigeria's economic realities sharpened the urgency of the discussions, as participants reflected on the country's annual loss of over ₦543 billion in foreign exchange due to rejected agricultural exports linked to pesticide residues. This figure underscored the

high cost of chemical-intensive farming and strengthened calls for safer, climate-resilient alternatives.

The summit closed with the validation of Nigeria's National Agroecology Strategy, accompanied by a strong communique calling for phased reductions in hazardous pesticides, improved extension services, community seed banks, and financing models that place women and young farmers at the centre. Public-private partnerships were also emphasised as critical for expanding markets for sustainably produced food.



Addressing Harmful & Unhelpful Traditional Practices at the Grassroots:

A Father Rediscovered His Daughter



Nkasiri Ibeagha who participated in a community sensitisation event on ending Female Genital Mutilization (FGM) in Abua community Odual Local Government Area (LGA) in Rivers State, organised by members of the Rivers State Multistakeholders Action Committee on GBV Prevention¹, in December 2024, called the coordinator of the committee and requested that her husband be called on and convinced to sign an undertaking that he would not subject their teenage daughter, Samira to being circumcised and married off early. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is recognised as a significant harmful practice in the Abua community. The practice is noted for its high prevalence, driven primarily by strong traditional beliefs, and has been the target of intensive campaigns and legal action by government and non-governmental organizations.

Mr. Ibeagha honoured the invitation of the coordinator of the committee, Barr. Evelyn Membere-Asimiea Esq. who is also a member of FIDA Nigeria (International Federation of Women Lawyers, Nigeria) and works in the Rivers State Ministry of Justice. After some discussions with him, he reluctantly signed the undertaking but was downcast as he feared that he would be ridiculed by other men and members of the community for not conforming.

However, 2 weeks later, he called excitedly expressing his gratitude towards the coordinator because his daughter, Samira who prior to the signing of the undertaking was usually solemn, unhappy and somewhat rebellious, had suddenly turned a new leaf on hearing that she would not be circumcised and married off early. He shared that she is now happy and vibrant, open to partaking in family activities, now

willingly joins her mother to sell in the market and is innovate with the way she sells leading to more sales and making more profit. He is in awe at the drastic change in her countenance and behaviour and believes he now has a new daughter and was thankful that he made the decision not to circumcise and marry her off.

As part of its deliverables, the MAP GBV project support members of the Rivers State Multistakeholders' ActionAid Committee on GBV Prevention to roll out a media campaign that involved airing of an aspirational context specific animated video on local television, airing of an aspirational public service announcement on local television and radio and TV appearances to discuss GBV prevention related issues. After one of such appearances on a show aired on the Rivers State Television (RSTV), one of the committee members, Queen Esther Nwauka with a large following on social media, received a direct message via her Facebook handle from a woman based in Asaba who had watched the episode which addressed types of violence including economic violence. She shared that she realised that she was experiences economic violence from her husband who withholds funds for household upkeep at a wimp. She requested that the video clip of that appearance be sent to her so she would in turn share it with him and she was obliged.

About a month later, the lady reached out again but this time she had good news to share, after showing her husband the video clip and explaining to him that his withholding of funds for household upkeep was a form of violence, he stopped the act and has been consistent in providing funds for the upkeep of the household since then.

Sha'awanatu Journey to Empowerment Through VSLA in Sabo Mika



Sha'awanatu Adamu lives in Sabo Mika, a farming community where many families struggle to meet basic needs. For years, she depended entirely on her husband to provide for their seven children, and whenever she needed money to feed the family or keep a small business running, she had no option but to borrow from moneylenders with very high interest rates. This kept her in constant debt.

Her turning point came unexpectedly when she was invited to a training organised by ActionAid Nigeria and WACHEF (AAN's partner) under the Local Rights Programme. The three-day training introduced her to the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) model and it included how to save, manage loans, keep records, and work as a group.

According to Sha'awanatu,

As I listened during the training, I kept telling myself that this knowledge must not end with me. I needed to bring it to my community.

When she returned home, she mobilised women in Sabo Mika and shared what she had learnt. With support from ActionAid and WACHEF, the women in Sabo Mika formed three VSLA groups and received start-up kits and materials worth almost one million naira, these included record keeping books, passbook, ledgers and a vault. Over time, a fourth group was created due to the increasing number of interested women, and today 120 women in the community participate in the VSLAs.

The impact on her life has been significant. She began saving gradually, took a small loan to grow her food-stuff business, and repaid it successfully. During their first share-out in May 2025, she received ₦125,000 from her savings and returns. She used this to expand her farm and buy bags of rice to sell later at a profit.

Sha'awanatu explains,

For the first time, I can support my husband and plan for my children. I am no longer afraid of emergencies because I now understand how to save and make decisions about money.

The VSLAs have strengthened the entire community. Women now run small businesses, contribute to household welfare, and participate more actively in community structures. Almost half of the VSLA members are now involved in school committees and community meetings.

Reflecting on her journey, she says,

I was once a woman struggling and unsure of what to do. Today I am confident and empowered because someone believed I was worth investing in.

Sha'awanatu remains committed to helping more women in Sabo Mika break free from poverty through savings, collective action, and financial independence.



SWIFT WOMAN –

Now, They Call Me to Fix It: Aisha's Story of Becoming a Mechanic and Changing the Future of Water in Geidam

In Geidam, Yobe State, when a borehole breaks down, people used to wait. Sometimes for weeks. Sometimes for months. Women and children would walk for hours in the sun just to fetch water, returning home exhausted.

"That used to be my life. My name is Aisha. I'm a mother of two. I live in a quiet part of Geidam, where the land is dry and the sun doesn't play. For years, every day started with one question: "Where will we find water today?" I used to wake up before dawn, carrying buckets with other women in my community. We would walk miles, praying that the hand pump at the next village wasn't broken. Often, it was. And when one borehole stopped working, it could take forever before anyone came to fix it—usually a man from town who might show up after a month, or not at all.

Everything changed the day I learned how to fix a borehole.

I never imagined myself becoming a mechanic. Where I come from, women are not seen doing technical work. We're expected to take care of the home, raise the children, cook, clean, and somehow still find water, no matter how far it is. That's just how it's always been.

So when I heard that ActionAid Nigeria, through the WEAVE Project, was training women to become Local Area Mechanics, I was surprised. And curious. Then afraid. Would my husband support it? Would the community laugh? Would I even be allowed?

But something in me said yes. I was tired of the stress that comes with fetching water. My children had missed too many school days due to sickness. I was tired of waiting.

The training was not easy at first. We learned about borehole parts, preventive maintenance, how to troubleshoot problems, and how to use tools like spanners, pipe wrenches, and testing rods. They gave us toolkits and uniforms and linked us to the WASH committees in our communities. For the first time, I felt like my hands could do more than just



carry water—they could fix the system. About six (6) women have so far been trained as Local Area Mechanics (LAMs). Now, when there's a problem with the borehole, they call me or anyone from the LAM. The same people who used to wait for a man from town now come to us. They respect us. The men in the community ask our opinion. The women come to learn.

"Since we started, my team has fixed up to 10 boreholes in Geidam and nearby communities. We don't wait anymore. Children are no longer late to school because of water. Diarrhoea cases have dropped. I know the lean season is getting worse. The sun is harsher. More families are arriving in search of food and safety, but with clean water flowing, we at least have one less worry. And I believe women like me are part of the solution. We are not just fixing pipes. We are fixing the future. I am proud to be a Local Area Mechanic. I never thought I'd say that, and I carry my wrench with pride."



ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The WEAVE Project, implemented by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with Jami Al Hakeem Foundation and supported by the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund (NHF) through UNOCHA, is building community resilience in northeast Nigeria by training women as borehole mechanics, improving access to safe water, and challenging gender inequality in crisis-affected areas.

RECONNECT: The Return and a Rebirth



In February 2025, ActionAid Nigeria, in partnership with GIZ, launched RECONNECT—Reintegration and Empowerment for Connecting and Nurturing Opportunities of Vulnerable Populations and Returning Migrants. The project is a bold, timely initiative designed to support Nigerian returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities, and survivors of violence as they reintegrate into society.

The launch in Abuja brought together 53 participants from government, civil society, media, and the private sector. Suwaiba Dankabo Mohammed, Deputy Country Director at ActionAid Nigeria, opened the event by highlighting the need to move from fragmented reintegration efforts to a unified, people-centered approach. She emphasised that true reintegration goes beyond numbers and basic support, it must address the emotional and mental toll of migration, offering dignity, opportunity, and hope.

The event also featured messages of goodwill from partners including the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, NCFRMI, ILO, and GIZ. Senator Ireti Kingibe, represented by Dr. Adaeze Ibekweh, delivered a keynote stressing inclusive policies and long-term support for returnees, particularly women and persons with disabilities.

A presentation of a needs assessment from Lagos, Edo, and the FCT painted a sobering picture: returnees face limited job opportunities, social isolation, stigma, and emotional distress.

These findings became a compass for stakeholders, underlining that reintegration must go beyond jobs and shelters to support mental health, identity, and community rebuilding.

By May 2025, RECONNECT had moved from planning to implementation. ActionAid Nigeria hosted a three-day training for 25 civil society organisations from Lagos, Edo, and the FCT, focusing on trauma-informed reintegration, emotional support, and sustainable community-led care. Participants explored modules on referral pathways, first-line emotional support, and migration trends, and were encouraged to reflect on their own well-being—many noting it was the first training acknowledging their emotional labour.

David Habba, Migration Programme Specialist at ActionAid Nigeria, shared that previous reintegration programmes often overlooked returnees' emotional scars.

“People would give them training or starter packs, but no one ever asked how they were doing. This project is here to change that.”

GIZ's Sandra Vermuijten-Alonge echoed the importance of shifting migration programming toward long-term, sustainable partnerships that prioritise care and collaboration.

To ground the project in real community needs, town hall meetings were held in all three states. Traditional leaders, youth groups, government agencies, returnees, religious leaders, and grassroots organisations came together to discuss gaps in past efforts, data needs, and the importance of involving returnees in decision-making. Key recommendations included community mentorship, long-term follow-up, and integration of reintegration programmes into local development plans, as well as addressing systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and governance.

“I am a returnee. My experience was terrible and very difficult. While travelling illegally to Europe, I suffered greatly and nearly died. For three days, I had to drink my own urine because there was no water. I saw many people die, and those memories still leave scars on my heart.”

In a prison in Libya, I spent two years. I did not see the sun. My skin burned because the place was unbearably hot. There were about 6,000 people, with 400 packed into one small room. Food was given only once a day—half a loaf of bread that had been expired for three months, with flies everywhere. The flies themselves almost became part of the food.”

“The day they rescued me, when they called my name, I wanted to run, but my knees and joints were weak and I fell to the ground. When I returned, I could not believe that this was the life I had lived.”

Through the trainings organised in the Reconnect project, I have learnt how to bake. I am now rebuilding my life. I am also speaking to young people who want to migrate illegally, to warn them not to try it. Mr. A. Uromi, Edo State



From “Who Send Us?” to “Na Us Dey Run Am”: The EVOLVE Story

MENTORING YOUTH-LED ORGANISATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Remember FLOURISH? Last year, ActionAid Nigeria launched this initiative to plant the seeds of possibility for youth-led NGOs. Today, that seed has grown into EVOLVE—a bold mentorship and training programme designed to equip emerging youth-led organisations with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to run vibrant, accountable, and impactful institutions.

From governance and compliance to fundraising, project management, safeguarding, financial accountability, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, and storytelling, EVOLVE leaves nothing on the table.

Across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, young founders of newly formed community organizations arrived with big visions and many questions: How do we build an NGO that lasts? How do we attract partners? How do we move from passion to impact?

EVOLVE was designed to answer these questions, not with theory alone, but through mentorship, practical tools, and real-life lessons from practitioners who once stood where these young leaders stand today. This next phase of ActionAid Nigeria's youth support pathway goes deeper than FLOURISH. It strengthens operational systems, proposal development, human resources, financial management, and governance structures that transform ideas into sustainable institutions.

Participants describe EVOLVE as a safe space, a

place for candid conversations about failure and resilience, for first proposals that didn't get funded, and for the courage to try again. Many shared stories of starting “with just a table, one banner, and plenty of belief.”

Through the programme, young leaders began to see themselves not just as founders, but as builders of institutions capable of attracting resources, mentoring others, and leading lasting community change.

”

Aisha from Yobe said, As a young person from the North-East, people always count us out. EVOLVE counted us in.

Simon from Adamawa added, “For the first time, I truly understand what resource mobilisation is.

“

EVOLVE is more than a programme. It is a launchpad for youth-led transformation, equipping the next generation of Nigerian leaders to turn passion into impact, and to run organisations that matter long after a single project ends.

FLOURISH Mentorship Programme was a capacity-strengthening initiative by ActionAid Nigeria, specially designed to build the leadership, governance, financial systems, and organisational capacities of underrepresented, young women-led organisations in humanitarian and emergency contexts in the BAY States (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe).



RWVL IS LIVE

The Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership (RWVL) project is now launched. Funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the project builds institutional capacity, promotes networking and alliances, and empowers women-led organisations to advance gender equality and women's rights. Through innovative approaches, advocacy, and strategic support, the initiative aims to enhance organisational sustainability, amplify women's voices, and create lasting social, legal, and policy change in Nigeria.





When the Nation Paused to Listen - National Dialogue on Poverty

In a year when new data revealed that more Nigerians had slipped deeper into poverty, ActionAid Nigeria chose not to accept the numbers as mere statistics. Instead, we turned the moment into a call for reflection and collective action. This gave rise to the National Dialogue on Poverty, an opportunity to pause as a nation, listen deeply, and rethink our approach to lifting millions out of deprivation.

When stakeholders gathered at RockView Hotel in Abuja, the atmosphere felt different from the typical conference space. Policymakers, community members, farmers, young people, women leaders, academics, and private sector actors came together, not out of obligation, but conviction. Their shared purpose was clear: examine the realities behind the 139 million Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty and co-create a stronger path toward ActionAid's commitment to lift 5 million people out of poverty by 2034.

Discussions throughout the day revealed the depth and complexity of poverty in ways many had not encountered before. Participants connected hunger, housing, safety, climate shocks, and access to essential services with the broader picture of exclusion and resilience. Government institutions found common ground with civil society, community leaders saw their struggles reflected in national data, and new insights emerged about what is working and what urgently needs change. The Dialogue strengthened advocacy efforts and produced a practical framework for action across different levels.

Beyond the intended outcomes were powerful, unexpected results. Genuine solidarity filled the room as grassroots representatives shared their daily realities and hopes. New alliances formed organically among ministries, civil society groups, private sector actors, and community networks, setting the stage for collaborative poverty-reduction efforts beyond the event. Young people and women voiced their perspectives boldly, many for the first time at a national forum, and their contributions helped anchor the day in humanity and inclusiveness. Above all, the Dialogue restored a sense of hope grounded in evidence, empathy, and shared responsibility.

While no single event can end poverty, the National Dialogue created something invaluable, a united front committed to honest assessment and coordinated action. It reminded the country that poverty is not just a number; it is a lived experience that demands courage, clarity, and collaboration. ActionAid Nigeria now carries forward the momentum generated that day, working with partners and communities toward a future where dignity and opportunity are accessible to all. The Dialogue was not an ending, but the beginning of a collective journey toward lasting change.





Could the Special Seats Bill Fix Nigeria's Gender Gap in Politics?

In a country of over 200 million people, where women make up nearly half of the population, it is shocking that women hold less than 5% of elected positions in Nigeria's National Assembly. Despite being at the forefront of activism, caregiving, entrepreneurship, and community development, Nigerian women remain largely excluded from the highest levels of political decision-making.

The Special Seats Bill is a constitutional amendment proposed to the National Assembly, which aims to create reserved legislative seats exclusively for women in both the National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives) and State Houses of Assembly.

Specifically, the bill proposes one additional Senate seat per state, including the Federal Capital Territory- totalling 37 reserved Senate seats; one additional House of Representatives seat per state- totalling 37 seats; and three reserved seats in each State House of Assembly- totalling 111 seats nationwide. These seats will be exclusively contested by women candidates, creating a pathway for increased female political participation without altering the existing structure of elected positions. This provision is temporary and intended to last for three electoral cycles (12 years).

Nigeria ranks among the lowest in the world for women's political representation. In the 2023 general elections, the statistics were dismal: only 3 out of 109 Senators were women (about 2.8%); only 14-17 out of 360 Members of the House of Representatives were women (roughly 3.9% to 4.7%); and out of 1,019 female candidates who contested for seats in State Assemblies, only 48 won, reflecting a success rate of just 4.7%.

This severe underrepresentation is not due to a lack of capable or interested women, but rather the result of deeply entrenched structural, cultural, and economic barriers. Women often face limited access to campaign funding, discrimination within political parties, and social norms that discourage female leadership.

The Special Seats Bill is not a permanent fix, but a corrective measure designed to give women a fair starting point in the political race. By intentionally creating space for women in governance, the bill seeks to bridge a historic gap and foster a more inclusive democracy.

Nigeria is not alone in this journey. Several African countries have adopted gender quotas or similar temporary special measures and seen significant improvements. Rwanda leads the world, with over 60% of its lawmakers being women. Senegal

has reached 46%, while South Africa and Burundi both have over 38-40% female representation. These gains didn't happen by accident, they were the result of intentional laws and policies that opened the door for women to serve. Nigeria is simply trying to catch up.

If passed, the Special Seats Bill would mark a turning point in Nigeria's democratic evolution. It would immediately increase the number of women in decision-making positions, serve as a pipeline for future leadership, and allow women to build experience, visibility, and influence. It would also improve the quality of governance, as research consistently shows that diverse legislatures are more responsive to citizens' needs. Importantly, it would set a precedent for inclusive policymaking, especially in areas that disproportionately affect women and families, such as healthcare, education, and social protection.

ActionAid Nigeria is actively supporting the passage of the Special Seats Bill through advocacy, research, and community engagement. As an organisation, we are actively working to raise public awareness about the importance of women's political participation, conducting workshops and dialogues with communities to challenge cultural and social

barriers, and engaging policymakers to encourage legislative action. By highlighting the stories and experiences of women leaders and amplifying their voices, ActionAid Nigeria aims to ensure that the bill translates into meaningful representation, creating a stronger, more inclusive democracy where women can fully participate in shaping the country's future.

The fight for gender equality in politics isn't just for women, it is for all Nigerians who believe in fairness, progress, and justice. You can help by raising awareness about the bill in your community and on social media, engaging your representatives to support the bill, joining advocacy campaigns pushing for gender inclusion, and sharing information to help others understand its importance.

The Special Seats Bill is not about giving women an unfair advantage, it is about levelling the playing field in a country where the odds have long been stacked against them. Representation matters. And when women lead, nations thrive. By supporting this bill, we're not just pushing for numbers; we are investing in Nigeria's future.

Sign The Bill Now!!



10 THINGS NGOS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Fundraising

— BY ADEDEJI ADEMEFUN

Broadly, effective fundraising is not just about securing money; it's about building trust, demonstrating accountability, and mobilizing resources to advance social justice. For NGOs committed to transformative change, fundraising must reflect integrity, solidarity, innovation, and the pursuit of equity. The following ten principles capture essential ethos every NGO should understand to strengthen and sustain their fundraising work.

1. FUNDRAISING IS MISSION-DRIVEN, NOT MONEY-DRIVEN: Successful NGOs anchor fundraising in their mission, values, and impact at scale. Every proposal, partnership, or campaign must align with the organization's purpose and long-term vision for change.

2. BUILD AND COMMUNICATE TRUST: Donors, partners, and communities give to organizations they trust. Transparency in reporting, ethical storytelling, and consistent communication about results help reinforce credibility. Trust is built when NGOs demonstrate accountability not only to donors but, more importantly, to the communities they serve.

3. DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES: Sustainability comes from a balanced funding portfolio combining institutional grants, individual giving, social enterprises, and local philanthropy. Avoid over-dependence on a single donor or funding stream. A diverse base provides flexibility and resilience in changing donor funding prism.

4. EMBED RIGHTS AND DIGNITY IN COMMUNICATION: Organizations like ActionAid Nigeria and other rights-based organizations emphasize that people are not “just beneficiaries” but rights holders. Fundraising communication must uphold dignity, avoid victimizing narratives/safeguarding concerns, building resilience, and leadership within communities in line with rebalancing power.

5. STRENGTHEN DONOR STEWARDSHIP: Fundraising doesn't end when a grant is secured. Sustained donor

engagement through timely reporting, impact updates, and shared learning builds long-term partnerships.

6. INVEST IN SYSTEMS AND PEOPLE: Professional fundraising requires investment in skilled teams, robust data systems, and clear processes for proposal development, donor tracking, and impact measurement. Capacity strengthening is key to scaling resource mobilization strategically.

7. ALIGN FUNDRAISING WITH ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY: Fundraising should reflect the priorities outlined in the organization's strategic plan/CSP. Each fundraising opportunity must directly contribute to advancing strategic goals and programmatic outcomes, ensuring coherence and focus.

8. UPHOLD ETHICAL AND TRANSPARENT PRACTICES: Ethical fundraising means adhering to international standards of integrity, such as the International Statement of Ethical Principles in Fundraising. This includes avoiding partnerships or funds that conflict with organizational values or human rights principles.

9. INNOVATE AND LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY: Digital platforms, data analytics, and online giving tools have transformed global fundraising. NGOs must embrace innovation, crowdfunding, virtual campaigns, and social enterprise models. **DONORS WILL CHECK YOU OUT ONLINE**

10. MEASURE AND COMMUNICATE IMPACT: Donors fund impact, not activities. NGOs should use evidence and human stories to show how their work leads to real, measurable change. Demonstrating results through monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks strengthens donor confidence and supports continuous improvement.

Conclusion

FUNDRAISING IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.



The Governor of Kaduna State, Senator Uba Sani; the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Abubakar Kyari; and the Country Director of ActionAid Nigeria, represented by Azubike Nwokoye, participated in the 47th National Council on Agriculture and Food Security



Secretary General of ActionAid International, Arthur Larok (third left) with AAN Board members at the 57th Board Meeting held in Abuja



Swearing of General Assembly Executives at the annual GA meeting in 2025



Media Dialogue in commemoration of the World Food Day 2025



NATIONAL SUMMIT AND NSAS WORKSHOP ON THE CAADP KAMPALA DECLARATION AND THE CAADP PP IN RWANDA



Local Conference of Youth 2025



FundOurFuture campaign in Akwalbom



Young people across Lagos, Enugu, Borno, and Akwa Ibom stormed the Senate Adhoc Committee on Constitution to present the change they want to see in the constitution



National Dialogue on Finance for Development



A cross-section of leaders and stakeholders at the 47th National Council on Agriculture in Kaduna



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Lagos Office:
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