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Hello and welcome to the 24th edition of SWIFT!

The first half of 2026 has been a season of reflection and renewal for ActionAid Nigeria. In June I joined more than fifty Country Directors and federation leaders in Dakar for the 2026 ActionAid Directors Forum, where we asked ourselves hard questions about collective leadership, feminist practice and what decolonisation must mean for how we work. You will read my reflections from that week in this edition, including the commitments Nigeria is bringing home.

At home, our work with young people has never felt more urgent. From the National Young People's Convening on NDC 3.0 to the Nigeria Youth Climate Summit and the launch of the Generation Vote movement, young Nigerians are showing that they are not waiting to be invited into climate action and democratic accountability. They are already leading, and our role is to stand with them.

This edition also carries stories of transformation from our work to end gender-based violence. Religious leaders in Anambra, community champions in Borno and women in the riverine community of Bakana in Rivers

State are challenging norms that once seemed unmovable. Alongside these, you will read about women farmers proving the case for agroecology, the close of the SUPIA II project after years of strengthening women's voices in agricultural governance, and people across Edo, Lagos and the FCT rebuilding their livelihoods through RECONNECT. We are equally pleased to introduce new work to our portfolio.

The EU Support for Strengthening Social Protection in Nigeria project, known as ESSPIN and funded by the European Union, is designed to strengthen social protection systems and public trust in the National Social Register.

Every story in these pages belongs first to the people and communities who lived it, and we are grateful for the trust they place in us by allowing us to share their journeys. I hope you enjoy this edition. Until next time, happy reading! In solidarity,

Andrew Mamedu
Country Director



Dakar Reminded Me About Who We Must Be

2026 ActionAid Directors Forum, Building Collective Leadership in Uncertain Times, Senegal, 8 to 12 June

Earlier this year I travelled to Dakar, Senegal, for the 2026 ActionAid Directors Forum, where more than fifty Country Directors, Global Secretariat leaders and members of the International Board gathered for five days of reflection and collective decision making. The theme was Building Collective Leadership in Uncertain Times, and the uncertainty was not abstract. Civic space is shrinking, anti-rights movements are gaining ground and aid budgets are collapsing, so we did not come to Dakar to pretend otherwise. We came to ask what ActionAid must become in a world like this.

The week began with the Women Directors Forum, two days of honest reflection on the 2023 Marafa Declaration and the progress made since. The conversations were not comfortable, and they should not have been. One commitment emerged and was later endorsed by the full Forum, that every ActionAid member must establish or strengthen a Women's or Feminist Forum by the end of 2026. I have brought that commitment back to Nigeria seriously.

We also left the conference rooms for the Saloum Islands, where communities working with ActionAid Senegal reminded me why we do this work. Community knowledge is not a resource to be extracted. It is leadership

to be supported.

“

Decolonisation is not a historical reflection. It is an ongoing challenge, and it requires practical shifts in partnerships, funding and leadership now.

”

The moment that stayed with me most came on Goree Island, a site indelibly associated with the slave trade and the violence of colonialism, where Aicha Awa Ba and Professor Demba Moussa Dembele challenged us on what decolonisation means in practice, a shift in how power, resources and decision making work within our own federation.

Three programme propositions are now taking shape across the federation, on agroecology and food systems, on energy justice and community power, and on mobilising young women for global justice. ActionAid Nigeria will play its full part in what was decided in Dakar, and when the Forum reconvenes in 2027, Nigeria will have something to present.

ANDREW MAMEDU, COUNTRY DIRECTOR



ENGAGE! Tech, Art and Three Days That Set the Tone for 2026

Inside the 2026 Programme Planning Meeting and Innovation Week, 19 to 21 January, where 156 ActionAiders from five offices came to plan a year and left with a shared mission

Planning a year takes more than spreadsheets. Anyone who walked into the venue on the morning of 19 January would have understood that immediately, because the first thing they would have met was not a flip chart but a photo session, colleagues in suspenders, berets and gowns borrowed from another decade, posing for the cameras before a single agenda item had been touched. Old School Day had opened the 2026 Programme Planning Meeting and Innovation Week, and over the next three days, 156 ActionAiders from the Abuja, Damaturu, Gashua, Maiduguri and Lagos offices would review the year behind, argue for the year ahead and remember why they chose this work in the first place. The theme said it plainly, ENGAGE, Tech and Art for Development.

INTENT, IMPACT AND A ROOM THAT LISTENED

The Board Chair, Rabi Isma, set the tone before the strategy did. Her opening session on creating a conducive work environment turned quickly from pleasantries into something more searching, a conversation about intent versus impact and the uncomfortable truth that good intentions do not erase negative outcomes. Staff spoke, managers listened, and by the time the question and answer segment closed, the room had agreed on something simple and hard, that feedback has to travel in both directions for trust to hold.

Then the Country Director took the floor with the strategic direction for 2026, and reframed the whole exercise in one line.

“The central goal for 2026 is to shift from collective action to collective results.”

It was a challenge dressed as a theme. In a pre-election year of weakened institutions and inflationary pressure, he argued, the organisation cannot be content with activity. It has to show evidence, measure outcomes and hold its own culture to the same standard it asks of power.

THE STRATEGY, PUT ON TRIAL



What followed was closer to a review than a rally. Directorates and units screened digital showreels of their 2025 results and 2026 plans, and the AI-generated videos from day one became an instant talking point, with colleagues amazed at what the technology could produce. Then the Country Strategy Paper itself was put on trial. Staff were clustered into groups and asked, plainly, which parts of the strategy they believed were not achievable. The responses were gathered rather than defended, a baseline survey was promised as part of the strategy's first two years of learning, and the Country Director closed with a commitment to simplify the document further, including a dedicated session with the organisation's youngest staff so their perspectives shape the next draft. A session on the indicator matrix pressed the same point from another angle, indicators are not paperwork but the proof that people are being lifted out of poverty, and a new partnership with the National Bureau of Statistics and International Poverty Action will hold that proof to global standards.

THE BOX NOBODY AVOIDED

Day three carried the sessions colleagues talk about afterwards. The Pandora Box put the Senior Management Team on a panel and handed the floor to staff, questions about

workloads, salaries and accountability asked in the open and answered in the open. A safeguarding session revisited the SHEA framework with a reminder that lands harder each year, that even a casual joke is harassment if it is unwelcome to the person receiving it. The Reflect session returned the organisation to its participatory roots through picture codes and power flowers, and a conversation on artificial intelligence set the boundary clearly, the tools may be impressive but their use in the organisation stays minimal, referenced and governed by an ethics policy now in its final stages.

NATIVE WEAR, AWARDS AND A TWENTY-YEAR SURPRISE



By the final afternoon the venue had turned into a celebration in native wear. The directorate standings were announced, with Business Development and Innovation taking first place at 82 percent, People and Culture close behind, and the Values Awards honouring colleagues whose everyday conduct carries the organisation's principles. The Fun Awards carried titles that could only have been written by colleagues, from the Always Online Award to one for the person Most Likely to Say Let's Circle Back. And in the middle of the laughter came a quieter moment, a Long Service Award marking twenty years of dedicated service by the Country Director. By the time the closing remarks were delivered, the commitments were on record and the tone for 2026 was set. Now the work begins.

Generation Vote:

Reigniting the Power of Young Nigerians

In 2023, millions of young Nigerians queued under the sun with hope in their hearts and voter cards in their hands. For many, it was more than an election. It was a declaration that their voices mattered, and a refusal to remain silent after the heartbreak and anger that followed the #EndSARS protests three years earlier.

For the first time in years, young people mobilised in unprecedented numbers. Social media became a tool for political education, young Nigerians convinced their friends to register, organised community sensitisation drives and debated the future they wanted to see. There was renewed belief that change was possible through the ballot box. When the election results were announced, however, that hope gave way for many to frustration and deep disappointment, and to a feeling of being sidelined once again.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 elections, the effects of that disappointment are visible everywhere. Conversations around politics are increasingly met with apathy, and many young people no longer believe their participation matters. Yet silence has consequences. When young people withdraw from civic engagement because previous efforts did not produce immediate results, they create more room for the very systems they are frustrated with to continue unchecked. Disengagement does not weaken poor leadership. It strengthens it.

This is why the Generation Vote movement, known as Gen V, was launched across the Strategic Partnership Agreement II project states of Enugu, Lagos, Akwa Ibom, Borno and the Federal Capital Territory. The movement is creating safe and empowering spaces for young people to re-engage with democracy, rebuild trust in collective action and understand the power they still hold. Through trainings, grassroots mobilisation and community engagement, Gen V is equipping young people to become champions of voter registration, civic participation and electoral accountability in their communities.

The scale of the opportunity is clear. According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission, more than 37 million young Nigerians registered to vote in the 2023 elections, yet only about 11 million cast their ballots on election day. Over 26 million young voices never made it to the polls. Gen V believes those numbers can change in 2027 if more young people are at the forefront of community mobilisation, encouraging first-time voters to register, leading conversations around accountability and reminding one another that political participation is a continuous process rather than a one-time event.



37m

young Nigerians registered to vote in 2023



11m

cast their ballots on election day



26m

young voices never made it to the polls

The Young People Who Would Not Let Go: HOW ORON WON BACK ITS COASTLINE

Strategic Partnership Agreement II, Akwa Ibom State

For decades, the people of Idua Assang and neighbouring communities in Oron, Akwa Ibom State, lived with the consequences of a collapsed and long-neglected coastal embankment. Residents were exposed to frequent flooding, severe coastal erosion and unsafe marine transport. Homes and farmland were destroyed, businesses were disrupted and lives were lost. The waterfront market, once a busy hub of trade and community life, became increasingly difficult to access. What the community needed was an organised voice that could bring the full weight of the issue to those with the power and resources to address it.

That voice came from a network of young people trained under the Strategic Partnership Agreement II project. Through the project, young people in Oron were trained in civic engagement, budget monitoring and evidence-based advocacy, practical tools for a community with a clear and urgent need and a government that required well-organised information to prioritise and act. Participants learned how to read public budgets, document community priorities and build a credible case that decision makers could act on with confidence.

From that training emerged the Oron Youth Advocacy Network, a structured, youth-led and community-rooted organisation. Its members conducted participatory consultations across communities in Oron Local Government Area, documented what they heard and identified the issues that mattered most. From these consultations they produced a Community Charter of Demand, a formal, evidence-based document that captured the community's priorities as a clear call to government. At the top of that charter was the reconstruction of the Idua Assang coastal embankment. The

charter was formally submitted to the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Economic Development, and the network followed up persistently to keep the demand on the table.

Following this structured engagement by the network and other community stakeholders, the Akwa Ibom State government formally approved the reconstruction of the embankment, and the project was officially flagged off. For a community that had carried this challenge for so long, the flag-off was a meaningful milestone, a visible sign that their voices were heard and that government and citizens can achieve great things when they work together.

The results are already reshaping daily life. The waterfront market, closed for years due to flooding, has reopened and economic activity has resumed. Coastal neighbourhoods now benefit from greater protection against tidal surges and the recurrent flooding that previously disrupted livelihoods and damaged property. The marine route between Oron and Cameroon is being restored, reviving the movement of people and goods that once supported the local economy, and young people are finding new opportunities in trading, logistics, fisheries and marine services along a coastline that was once unsafe.

The skills these young people carry will not expire when the project ends. The Oron Youth Advocacy Network now exists as a permanent civic institution that will continue to monitor budgets, follow up on commitments and advocate for its community. Beyond Oron, its approach offers a replicable model for other climate-vulnerable coastal communities in Nigeria, showing how organised young people can translate community voices into government action.





From Passion to Power:

Digital Advocacy Bootcamp 5.0 Builds a New Generation of Changemakers

Through the Strategic Partnership Agreement II project, ActionAid Nigeria recently concluded the fifth edition of the Digital Advocacy Bootcamp, welcoming another cohort of young Nigerians ready to use digital tools to drive change in their communities.

The Digital Advocacy Bootcamp is a flagship initiative under the project, designed to train young people in digital storytelling, social media advocacy, content creation, strategic communication and online campaigning. It is built on a simple belief, that young people, especially young women and those facing marginalisation, should not just be subjects of policy conversations but active voices shaping them. For the fifth cohort, that belief was made tangible. Participants arrived full of ideas and concern about the issues around them. They left with skills, strategy and a network of peers equally committed to turning their voices into action.



“

I always wanted to contribute to conversations about governance and development, but the bootcamp showed me how to use digital platforms strategically. It gave me the skills and confidence to create content that informs and inspires other young people.

”

Those are the words of Francisca, a graduate of an earlier cohort whose journey reflects the trajectory the programme is designed to create. Today she runs a YouTube channel where she breaks down governance, civic participation and the Sustainable Development Goals into content that reaches hundreds of young Nigerians every week.

The fifth cohort now steps into that same tradition, equipped not just with technical skills but with the confidence to engage in spaces that have long excluded young voices. When young people are given platforms and support to tell their stories, the impact reaches far beyond their screens. It reaches communities, influences policies and helps build a more just and inclusive future.

The Spark That Lit a Bigger Journey

Abasiam Cyril is a development communicator with a strong passion for environmental sustainability, youth leadership and governance advocacy. Driven by the desire to create meaningful change, she has continued to position herself in spaces that strengthen her voice, expand her knowledge and increase her impact as a young leader.

In 2024, Abasiam was selected to participate in the Digital Literacy and Advocacy Campaign Bootcamp 3.0, hosted by ActionAid Nigeria under the Strategic Partnership Agreement II project. The bootcamp brought together young people from diverse backgrounds and equipped them with practical knowledge of digital advocacy, storytelling, civic engagement and the use of digital platforms as tools for social change.

For Abasiam, the experience became a turning point.

Beyond the technical skills gained, the bootcamp sharpened her thinking, strengthened her confidence and expanded her network of fellow young changemakers across the country. Inspired by the exposure gained during the training, she applied to the EU Youth Sounding Board, a platform that amplifies youth voices and strengthens youth participation in development processes, and was successfully selected as a member, a significant step in her leadership journey.

Her story reflects what becomes possible when young people are given intentional spaces for learning and growth. Initiatives like the bootcamp are nurturing a generation of informed, confident leaders who are driving positive change in their communities and beyond.



CiTi-ACT Project Updates

Establishment of the Generation Vote Movement

In June 2026 the CiTi-ACT project, implemented by ActionAid Nigeria to strengthen citizens' engagement with the justice system, worked with the Social Mobilisation Unit to convene Generation Vote gatherings across Akwa Ibom, Enugu, Lagos, Borno and the Federal Capital Territory. The engagements reached 75 young people and strengthened their capacity to advocate for judicial accountability and electoral transparency. The convenings culminated in the formal establishment of the Gen V movement, with governance structures and a comprehensive action plan setting out short, medium and long term priorities for promoting democratic accountability.



COJAR Review Meeting Strengthens Coordinated Action on Judicial Accountability

The CiTi-ACT project convened a two-day review meeting with members of the Coalition on Judicial Accountability and Reform, known as COJAR, to assess progress, reflect on lessons from previous engagements and strengthen coordinated civil society action on judicial accountability. The meeting resulted in actionable plans, strengthened internal accountability mechanisms and the reactivation of the coalition platform, fostering renewed commitment and collaboration among members.





Young People at the Table:

The National Young People's Convening on NDC 3.0

Inclusive Food Systems Project, with support from GIZ Nigeria and the Heinrich Boll Foundation

When young people talk about climate change, they are talking about their own realities. They are talking about farms that no longer produce as much as they used to, communities affected by flooding, rising temperatures and uncertain livelihoods. Yet despite being among those most affected, many young people feel their voices are not adequately reflected in the policies designed to address the crisis.

This was a recurring concern during the National Young People's Convening on Nigeria's third Nationally Determined Contributions, known as NDC 3.0, organised by ActionAid Nigeria under the IFSP project with support from GIZ Nigeria and the Heinrich Boll Foundation. Bringing together young climate advocates, researchers, civil society organisations and development partners from across the country, the convening created a space for young people to openly discuss Nigeria's climate commitments and the role they can play in making them a reality.

Over two days, participants shared experiences from their communities and reflected on what climate change looks like in different parts of the country. While the experiences varied, the message was common. Young people want to move beyond being consulted and become active partners in climate action.

The discussions were practical and solution driven. Participants reviewed key sectors within Nigeria's NDC 3.0, identified gaps in implementation and proposed recommendations on renewable energy, agriculture,

sustainable livelihoods, water and sanitation, and climate-resilient health systems. There was strong emphasis on ensuring that climate policies are not only ambitious but also inclusive and responsive to the realities young people face.

One of the most important outcomes of the convening was the development of a Youth Position Paper capturing the collective recommendations and priorities of participants. The meeting also led to the establishment of a Steering Committee under the Nigeria NDC Youth Coalition, providing a platform for continued collaboration and engagement beyond the convening itself. The conversations demonstrated that young people are not simply asking to be included in climate discussions. They are ready to help shape and drive the actions needed to achieve Nigeria's climate goals.





From Belem to Abuja:

Young Nigerians Are Not Waiting for Climate Justice

Post-COP30 Dialogue, Strategic Partnership Agreement II

When COP30 ended in Belem, Brazil, the commitments made in those halls needed to land somewhere. The Strategic Partnership Agreement II project made sure they landed in Abuja, in a room where young people could look government officials in the eye and ask what happens now.

The Post-COP30 Dialogue brought together youth advocates, government representatives and key ministries and agencies for one purpose, to turn global climate promises into national accountability.

“

We follow these negotiations closely. We know what Nigeria committed to in Belem. What we needed was a space to ask, are we actually doing it? This dialogue gave us that space, and it gave us the right people in the room to answer.

”

Those are the words of Fatima, a member of the Nigerian Youth Climate Negotiators, for whom the dialogue represented something she had been working toward for

years. Young participants did not come as observers. They came with questions about Nigeria's climate commitments, the adequacy of finance reaching affected communities and the real pathways for youth participation in climate governance. It reflected a belief that has always guided the project, that climate justice cannot be negotiated without the people who will live longest with its consequences.



More Time, More Harvest, More Hope: Lucy's Story

Local Rights Programme, in partnership with the Justice Development and Peace Commission, Enugu State

Long before support arrived in Ihenyi community, Lucy was already a determined farmer. Every planting season she rose early and spent long hours on her rice farm, working to provide for her family. Farming was her livelihood and her hope for a better future, yet despite her hard work, progress was slow.

Like many rural women farmers, Lucy relied entirely on manual planting. Completing the planting of her rice farm often took between two and three months. The work was exhausting and physically demanding, and it left her little time for her family or for other activities that could improve her household income. "Before, I spent months planting rice with my hands," she recalls. "It was tiring and stressful, but I had no other option."

Lucy knew that better farming equipment could improve her productivity, but purchasing such tools was beyond her reach, and accessing formal loans was equally difficult. Things began to change when ActionAid Nigeria, through the Local Rights Programme and in partnership with the Justice Development and Peace Commission, introduced the Village Savings and Loan Association model in communities in Enugu State. Through her association, Lucy gained access to a loan of ₦75,000. Rather than spending it on immediate needs, she invested in her future by purchasing a rice planter.

“

With the planter I bought through the VSLA, I now finish planting in one month. It has given me more time, more harvest, and more hope.

”

What once took up to three months now takes one. The planter has reduced the physical strain of farming, increased her productivity and freed up valuable time, and Lucy has fully

repaid her loan, showing how community-based finance can help women farmers invest in their livelihoods and build economic independence.



Her story is part of a wider change taking place across seven communities, where fourteen savings associations have been established. Today 348 registered members, and an estimated 700 people in all, are benefiting from increased access to savings, loans, financial literacy and economic opportunity.

"I am no longer as tired as before because the work is much easier," Lucy says. "The loan helped me buy something I could never have afforded on my own. Now I can support my family better, and I feel confident that each farming season will bring a brighter future for us." Rural women are not short of resilience, ambition or determination. What they often need is access to opportunity, and when women have access to finance and community support, they invest in their families, strengthen local economies and create lasting change. For Lucy, a small loan became more time, more harvest and more hope.





Reflecting on a Journey of Change:

Lessons from SUPIA II

Scaling Up Public Investment in Agriculture Phase II, end of project Learning Meeting

For many smallholder farmers across Nigeria, accessing resources, influencing government decisions and securing adequate support for farming has remained a challenge. Women farmers have often faced even greater barriers, including limited access to land, finance and opportunities to participate in decision making. Over the last few years, the Scaling Up Public Investment in Agriculture Phase II project, known as SUPIA II, has worked to change this reality by supporting citizens, especially smallholder women farmers, to engage more actively in agricultural governance and advocate for increased public investment in the sector.

As the project came to an end, stakeholders gathered for a Learning Meeting to reflect on the journey, celebrate achievements and share lessons for the future. Bringing together government representatives, civil society organisations, farmer groups and project participants, the meeting provided a space to look back on how far the project had come and the changes it helped create.

One of the strongest messages from the discussions was that when people have information, platforms and opportunities to engage, they can influence the decisions that affect their lives. Participants shared how women who once had little exposure to budget processes are now speaking confidently with policymakers, participating in advocacy efforts and demanding accountability in the agricultural sector.

The project's impact was also reflected in the lives of many women farmers. Findings from the end of project evaluation revealed a 133 percent increase in women's access to and

ownership of land. Beyond the numbers, participants spoke about increased confidence, stronger voices and greater participation in decisions affecting their farms and communities. The meeting also highlighted the important role played by the Small Scale Women Farmers Organisation in Nigeria, whose members strengthened their ability to engage government institutions, monitor budgets and champion the interests of smallholder farmers through training, mentoring and advocacy support.

A particularly memorable moment was the launch of the SUPIA Success Story Compendium, which captured stories of resilience and transformation from project communities, alongside a documentary showcasing the project's impact across the three project states.

While celebrating these achievements, participants acknowledged that challenges remain. Insecurity, climate change, inadequate infrastructure, poor budget releases and limited access to finance continue to affect farming communities, reinforcing the need for sustained advocacy and greater investment in agriculture, particularly for smallholder women farmers. The project may be ending, but the knowledge, relationships and momentum built over the years will continue to support efforts towards a more inclusive and accountable agricultural sector. More than a project, SUPIA II has been a story of women finding their voice, communities demanding accountability and citizens becoming active participants in shaping agricultural policies and investments.

The Imam Who Changed His Friday

MAP-GBV project, Anambra State

Awka, the capital of Anambra State, is home to a rich and diverse Muslim community, men and women of deep faith who have built mosques, raised families and sustained their traditions across generations. Among their leaders is Sariki Imam Haruna, a religious leader whose voice carries enormous weight and whose words on a Friday afternoon can shift the thinking of an entire neighbourhood.

Before the Multi-stakeholder Action for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence project, known as MAP-GBV, came to Anambra, Haruna held a belief that many men in his community shared without question. What happened between a husband and a wife was a private matter, something to be settled quietly within the walls of the home and never spoken about in public. It was not cruelty. It was simply the understanding he had grown up with and never had reason to examine.

“

After the first and second training, it made me have a completely different understanding.

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Haruna did not keep that understanding to himself. Every Friday his voice reaches his congregation, so that is where the message went first. He wove awareness about gender-based violence into his sermons and preaching sessions week after week until it became part of the fabric of what his mosque stood for. He sent word to other Imams and reached out to Islamic preaching centres and neighbouring mosques across

the community, spreading what he had learned to every religious ear that would listen. “I call my community every Friday. I take it to my Islamic scholars. Now they tell you the reality.”

His practice changed too. Domestic disputes could be mediated and counselled, but he made clear to everyone who came to him that cases of rape were different. Those went straight to the police and to the hospital, without negotiation and without delay. When a woman in the community fled her home with her children after a severe beating, Haruna sent people to bring them to safety. His first stop was the hospital, and only afterwards did he sit with the family to address the matter properly and completely. The hospital, witnessing how he handled the case, began inviting him to speak about gender-based violence to their staff and patients.

Women in his community have noticed the change in the atmosphere around them. Mothers who once concealed what had happened to their daughters are coming forward, knowing that when they arrive they will be heard and their child will receive medical care before anything else happens. “The women are not hiding it anymore. They know when they come, what they need will be done.”

Haruna has not stopped at his own mosque. He has carried the message to Onitsha, to Neil, and to Imams across the network, because what the MAP-GBV project gave him was not simply knowledge. It gave him a calling he intends to carry for the rest of his life. “Anywhere I go, I carry this message. It is not only for Muslims. It is for everybody.”





The Night the Phone Would Not Stop Ringing

MAP-GBV project, Anambra State

Anambra women have always been organised. In markets, in churches and in community halls, they have built networks of support and solidarity that have outlasted governments and survived generations. The women of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria are no different. They gather every week in congregations across the state, bound together by faith and by the quiet understanding that a woman who stands with other women stands stronger.

Their leader, Pastor Favour, came to the Multi-stakeholder Action for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence project, known as MAP-GBV, already carrying that understanding. She had spent years walking with the women of her congregation through their struggles, listening to what they carried in private but could not say in public. What the project gave her was a sharper lens, a clearer language and a framework that turned everything she had been doing instinctively into something deliberate and powerful.

She came home from her first training and sat down with her women. She told them what she had learned about gender-based violence, about warning signs, and about the triggers nobody talked about. She did not know what to expect. That night her phone did not stop ringing. Woman after woman called, seeking counsel, sharing what had been buried, asking questions they had never felt safe enough to ask before. The calls kept coming until her husband gently took the phone from her hands. "It was so much," she said, laughing softly at the memory. "He said, it's okay for the night."

From that night, her focus became prevention. Not waiting for violence to happen, but reaching women early enough that harm never got the chance to take root. She began teaching her women to identify warning signs and the conditions that allow violence to grow in a home before it becomes visible.

Poor communication, she told them again and again, is where so many things begin to fall apart. She taught them not just to speak but how to speak, how to raise a difficult thing without raising a fist in response, and how to sit a husband down and be truly heard.

The results spoke for themselves. One woman told her recently that she had been ready to walk out of her marriage, her bags already packed. Instead, she sat her husband down and told him for the first time that the way he treated her was not acceptable. He listened, and things changed between them in a way that years of silence had never allowed.

She goes further too. Poverty, she tells her women plainly, is one of the greatest enablers of gender-based violence, because a woman with nothing of her own is a woman with no choices and no exit. So alongside everything else she teaches, she talks about economic independence, and within the fellowship's savings circle women are being supported to build something of their own.

To make sure this work outlives any single programme or funding cycle, she convened all 21 local government coordinators of the fellowship's women's wing in Anambra State, eighty-two women leaders seated together, each one equipped to return to her community and keep the message alive every month, in every gathering, without waiting to be told. "Every month as we have a meeting, we talk about it. We find women who are willing to do something but don't have the means, and we help them."

The phone that would not stop ringing that first night still rings. But now, so do the phones of 21 coordinators across Anambra, each one carrying the prevention message further than one woman ever could alone.

From Perpetrator to Advocate:

Abubakar's Journey of Change

IWAP project, funded by the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund, Borno State

In a community in Konduga Local Government Area of Borno State, one of the most significant outcomes of the Increased WASH and Peak Lean Season Intervention project (IWAP) and funded by the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund (NHF) and implemented by ActionAid Nigeria and her consortium partners, has been the personal transformation of a Gender-Based Violence Champion, Abubakar.

Abubakar joined the project midway through implementation, like other community champions, he participated in ActionAid Nigeria's capacity-strengthening sessions and received continuous mentoring and one-on-one support to strengthen his understanding of gender-based violence, protection principles and positive community engagement.

Reflecting on his journey, Abubakar has spoken openly about who he was before the project. He was known in his community for aggressive and intimidating behaviour, and he acknowledges that he used violence and control in his own home, behaviours he did not then recognise as forms of gender-based violence. Through the training, mentorship and sustained engagement provided under the project, he began to critically examine his attitudes and actions. He came to understand the harm violence causes to women and girls, and to recognise that respect, dignity and equality are rights that must be upheld within households and communities.

“

As a GBV Champion, I realised that I could not ask others to change if I was not willing to change myself.

”

Today, Abubakar reports that he no longer uses violence at home and has adopted healthier ways of resolving disagreement and communicating within his family. Community members describe him as more respectful, approachable and supportive of others. As a champion, he now actively engages men and boys in discussions about the dangers of gender-based violence and its impact on families, community cohesion and shared prosperity. His personal experience has made his advocacy relatable, enabling him to connect with community members in meaningful ways and prompt reflection among his peers.



For ActionAid Nigeria and its consortium partners, Abubakar's journey represents one of the most significant achievements of the IWAP project. It demonstrates that transformative change begins with individuals, and that investing in community champions can create ripple effects that extend far beyond project activities. As the project approaches close-out, his transformation stands as a reminder that sustainable change is possible when communities become agents of change from within.





Building Confidence, Leadership and Change: Challu's Journey

IWAP project, Women and Girls Safe Space, Borno State

Challu Bashir Wanori, an internally displaced woman from Wanori community in Borno State, is one of many women whose lives have been shaped by the Women and Girls Safe Space activities implemented under the Increased WASH and Peak lean season intervention (IWAP project) funded by Nigerian Humanitarian Fund. For Challu, the project has been more than an opportunity to learn. It has been a journey of personal growth, leadership and connection.

At the beginning of the project, Challu was selected by her peers to serve as a women's group leader for her community during group psychosocial support sessions and learning activities at the Kalari Women and Girls Safe Space. The responsibility gave her a platform to engage more actively with women in her community and to represent their voices during project engagements.

Through the weekly sessions facilitated by ActionAid Nigeria, Challu gained knowledge on personal hygiene, gender-based violence, women's rights and the consequences of early and forced marriage. "Before these sessions, many of us did not fully understand the dangers of early marriage," she said. "Now we know how it can affect a girl's health, especially during pregnancy and childbirth. I use this knowledge to educate other women and families in our community."

Serving as a group leader strengthened her confidence and leadership. Through regular interaction with women leaders across participating communities, she developed stronger

communication, collaboration and problem-solving skills, learning how to mobilise women, facilitate discussions and encourage participation among diverse groups.

Beyond the knowledge gained, Challu describes the safe space as a place of healing, friendship and hope. As an internally displaced person, she initially had limited opportunities to interact with women from other communities. Through the weekly sessions, women from different communities and circumstances came together in a supportive environment where they could share experiences and build meaningful relationships. She fondly recalls sessions where women laughed together, played games and encouraged one another through difficult experiences. "The safe space made us feel alive again," she said. "It helped many women forget their worries, even if only for a while."

One of the most significant outcomes has been the solidarity that grew among women, whether internally displaced or members of host communities. Through regular engagement they developed trust, mutual respect and a shared sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of women and girls. Today, Challu continues to share what she has learned with other women and families in Wanori, promoting positive practices around hygiene, protection, girls' education and the prevention of early marriage. Her journey reflects how safe spaces can serve not only as centres for learning and healing, but as platforms for nurturing women leaders and strengthening social cohesion across communities.

From Silence to Strength:

Aisha's Journey of Voice and Change

Girl-Led Research and Action project

Eighteen-year-old Aisha Yisha from Kudai community was once a shy girl who barely spoke to her parents. For years, her family's way of communicating was through a small chalkboard. Whenever Aisha had something to say, she wrote it down. Words spoken directly were rare, especially between her and her father.

Like many girls in her community, Aisha grew up in a world shaped by early marriage, period poverty, unequal chores and rigid gender roles. School attendance was irregular, and confidence among girls was low. Things began to change the day she attended a community sensitisation session organised under the Girl-Led Research and Action project. She watched two young girl advocates speak boldly about the challenges girls face, and their passion sparked something in her. Determined to be part of that change, Aisha entered an art competition and won. That moment marked the beginning of her journey as a Girl Advocate.

Through training and mentorship, Aisha learned about intergenerational communication and how to bridge the gap between parents and children. Armed with that knowledge, she took a bold step. She walked up to her father and spoke, breaking years of silence in her family. The chalkboard that once carried written words of fear and distance has become a

tool for learning, where Aisha and her siblings now teach and learn from one another.

Her new confidence spread through her home. Drawing on training about gender roles, Aisha helped her mother see how much unpaid care work girls carry, and today her brothers share household chores equally. With more time to herself, Aisha now reads, learns new skills and dreams bigger than ever. Her mother, once sceptical, marvels at the change. "Aisha used to be so shy," she said. "Now she speaks with confidence and helps others understand. Our family communicates better, and even the boys now do chores."

Aisha's story is a testament to what happens when girls are supported to speak. Once silent, she now stands before her community, leading conversations on girls' rights and inspiring others to find their voice.

“

Never be silent about your issues. Speak up. Be open. Be confident.

”





Breaking the Barrier: Mariya's Journey to Secondary School

Local Rights Programme, Tudun Wada

Growing up in Tudun Wada, Mariya dreamed of continuing her education. She loved learning, worked hard in school and believed education could help her build a better future, but in her community that dream seemed almost out of reach. No girl had ever gone beyond primary school.

Deeply rooted social norms, concerns about girls travelling long distances and the absence of a secondary school meant that many girls ended their education after primary school. "When girls in my community finish from primary school, they stay back at home," Mariya explains. "Some of them continue to support their parents on the farm, while some of them are given away in marriage." For her, education was not simply about attending school. It was about creating opportunities for herself and showing that girls from Tudun Wada could achieve more when given the chance.

ActionAid Nigeria, through the Local Rights Programme, worked with community members, caregivers, religious leaders and traditional leaders to challenge harmful social norms and promote the importance of education, especially for girls. As attitudes began to change, Mariya's caregiver, Suraja, made a decision that changed the course of her life, arranging for her to live with relatives in a nearby community so she could continue her education at a government secondary school.

“

I am excited that I can now go to school again.
This has made me so happy.

”

Today Mariya is thriving academically and has earned the respect of teachers and classmates alike. Her dedication and leadership led to her selection into the school's Press Club, where she continues to build her confidence and communication skills, and she has become the first girl from Tudun Wada to access post-primary education.

Her success is doing more than changing her own life. It is helping families across the community see what is possible when girls are given the opportunity to learn. "When I grow up, I want to become a doctor so I can help my community," she says. Her ambition is rooted in a desire to give back, and she hopes that one day her community will have a secondary school of its own so that other girls can pursue their education just as she has.

Mariya's story stands as proof that talent and determination exist everywhere. What often holds girls back is not a lack of potential but a lack of opportunity, and by challenging harmful norms and supporting girls' education, communities can unlock the potential of an entire generation. For Mariya, going to secondary school was more than a personal achievement. It was the first step toward breaking a barrier that had stood for generations.

ESSPIN Project Updates

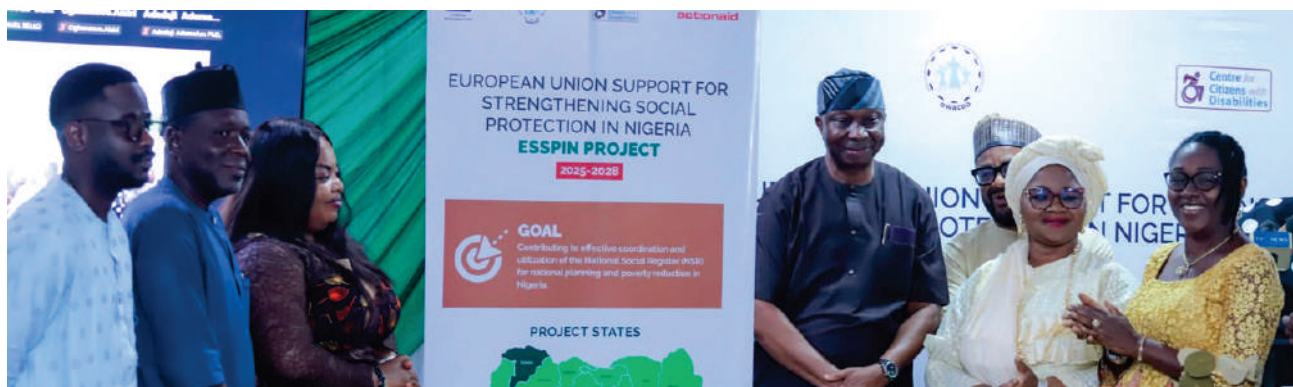
ESSPIN Project Officially Launched

The Support for Strengthening Social Protection in Nigeria project, known as ESSPIN and funded by the European Union, was officially launched at an event that brought together key stakeholders from government institutions, civil society organisations, development partners and the media. The launch introduced the project, highlighted its objectives and expected impact, and strengthened stakeholder buy-in. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to supporting efforts aimed at strengthening social protection systems and enhancing public trust in the National Social Register across the project states and the Federal Capital Territory



Inception Meeting Aligns Partners for Delivery

ActionAid Nigeria, through the ESSPIN project, convened an inception meeting with implementing partners, including the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities and the Okaha Women and Children Development Organisation. The meeting provided a platform to align project objectives, implementation strategies, partner roles and responsibilities, coordination mechanisms and expected outcomes, ensuring a shared understanding of the project's vision and delivery approach.



Rebuilding on Their Own Terms: The RECONNECT Story

RECONNECT project, Edo, Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory

Across Edo, Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory, 400 women and men made a decision. They enrolled in vocational training under the RECONNECT project, which works with returned migrants, internally displaced persons and others pushed to the margins by circumstance, not because someone told them to, but because they saw an opportunity and took it. They learned fashion design, catering, hairdressing, barbering, textile and adire making, and shoemaking. They showed up consistently, completed the training and earned their start-up kits, including sewing machines, gas cylinders, clippers and heat-press machines, tools that now sit in their homes and workshops generating income on their own terms.

Nineteen cooperatives have been built and are led by the participants themselves, creating structures for shared access to funds and markets. Fifty-eight members have linked themselves to these cooperatives, 75 have found their way into new market opportunities, 59 have stepped into internship and mentorship pathways through PIVOT-REM, and four are already in paid employment, hired on merit and standing on their own feet. Where legal barriers stood in their way, they sought support and had their cases heard. Where health challenges threatened their progress, they accessed care.

ActionAid Nigeria, alongside partners including the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, the Migrant Resource Centre and the Edo State Migration Agency, walked alongside them. The skills training, the kits, the legal support, the cooperative linkages and the healthcare were the scaffolding. The building was always theirs.

The people RECONNECT works with are returned migrants, internally displaced persons, survivors of trauma and persons with disabilities, Nigerians who found themselves at the margins not by choice but by circumstance. What they needed was not rescue. They needed space, resources and support to do what they had always been capable of, rebuilding their lives with dignity. RECONNECT does not treat irregular migration as a moral failure. It recognises it as a symptom of a system that has not yet served everyone equally. These 400 people have proven that when people have real alternatives and genuine support, they do not need to be saved. They save themselves.

As the project enters its final phase in 2026, 200 more people are ready to write their own chapter.





From Silence to a Community That Speaks Up

Medlene and Mercy, Bakana, Degema Local Government Area, Rivers State | MAP-GBV project

Bakana is not easy to reach. You board a boat at the jetty and travel twenty-five minutes across the water before the old riverine town in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State comes into view, a Niger Delta community where oil flows beneath the ground while opportunity remains scarce above it. For the women of Bakana, distance from the mainland has often meant distance from justice. With no market, no police station and no official structure for reporting abuse, gender-based violence had settled into the community like a permanent resident.

Medlene, 27, and Mercy, 26, are both mothers of four. They are neighbours, friends, and until recently, two women who shared the same quiet conviction that a man had every right to beat the woman he loved. Medlene moves through Bakana each day with a bucket of meat pies balanced in her hands, hawking her goods from one end of the community to the other. Mercy walks a similar path. Both women had watched violence play out in their community for years and called it normal.

“Na normal thing naa,” Medlene recalls with striking candour. “I feel say na man way to

take put woman for him place. I been dey also think say na love, because when the man beat you finish, and you cry, later him go come back buy you better gift.” Mercy nods in recognition. “That was all we knew,” she adds quietly. “We grew up seeing it. We thought it was just how things were between men and women.”

The silence went deeper than acceptance. Survivors of rape were blamed for what had been done to them, and families often protected the family name rather than the child who had been violated. With no police presence to receive reports and no language to name what was happening, perpetrators walked free while survivors carried shame that was never theirs to carry.

Then the Multi-stakeholder Action for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence project, known as MAP-GBV, came to Bakana, and Medlene and Mercy took part in training they had not expected to receive. What they encountered in that room rearranged something fundamental in how they understood their own lives. “It felt as if something fell off my eyes,” Medlene says. “I was exposed to something I had never

been aware of.” Mercy is equally direct. “I realised that what we had been calling normal was never normal at all.”

Medlene, who recently acquired a phone, now uses it as a tool for the work, sharing information from the training across WhatsApp groups and pushing knowledge about human rights, referral pathways and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act into the digital spaces where Bakana’s women connect. When she learns of cases of rape in the community, she no longer looks away. She reports directly to the cultural influencer, ensuring survivors have a route to support. Mercy is doing the same, moving through her own networks, speaking to women and young girls, and dismantling, one conversation at a time, the silence that once held the community in place.

Two women who once called violence love are now among the loudest voices calling their community toward something better, and they are bringing others with them.



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.

PHOTO REEL





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