



CSO Partner Navigator Initiative Workshop Report

10/14/20

Abuja, Nigeria

Introduction

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Africa play a crucial role in enhancing transparency, good governance and informing policy making. Amidst the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs have continued to play key roles in information and evidence generation, raising awareness, providing relief services, distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and palliatives, combating misinformation, among others.

However, CSOs in Africa have continued to face challenges that often times limit their capacity and ability to perform their functions. These challenges include but are not limited to financial sustainability, inadequate capacity, and lack of visibility.

To this end, the CSO Partner Navigator Project funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, with the Results for Development (R4D) and the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) as implementing partners is introducing an online platform that seeks to provide peer CSOs, government officials, funders, and global partners with information about the organizational capacity and effectiveness of CSOs based in Africa.

The CSO Partner Navigator Initiative workshop was organized to highlight the features of this platform and carry out the assessment phase/pilot survey of the initiative. The workshop was held on October 14, 2020 at the Wells Carlton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria.

The CSO Partner Navigator Project

Africa's success is reinforced by a vibrant relationship between CSOs and other stakeholders including policymakers, businesses, social enterprises, investors, and international partners. Countries with weak CSOs, where the voices of members of the society are not taken into account, are unlikely to achieve sustainable growth and development.

As such, CSOs need to be strengthened particularly in the areas of elevating community-based solutions in global and government agendas, policymaking, and programs; unleashing the potential of people to reduce poverty; and making the authorities accountable. To achieve this, CSOs require information on how to obtain funding, enhance their influence and impact, and learn from peer organizations.

The CSO Partner Navigator Project aims to fill this gap by providing CSOs with specific areas for strengthening and potentially pairing them with capacity building such as training, coaching, and funding. In addition, information on the organizational capacity and effectiveness of CSOs will be made available to leaders and government officials; funders and international partners; businesses, the media, and opinion setters, which will enable these stakeholders learn more about CSOs.

Accordingly, the CSOs are required to take an assessment survey covering core components of CSO organizational capacity, including board representation, registration, human resources, quality control, and financials. The information collected will develop and shape a resource that we believe will ultimately be an important platform to build the organizational capacity of African CSOs and foster partnerships between them.

Session 1: Perspectives of CSOs/PSOs in achieving success in mobilizing funds, capacity building, and policy impact

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected economies around the world and the role of Policy Support Organizations (PSOs) has become paramount. However, CSOs/PSOs face the challenges of effectively delivery. This session provided a platform for panelists to share their challenges and success stories on funding, capacity building and policy impact.

Discussion summary

- Competition is high among CSO's and funding has become a challenge in recent times. As such, to ensure that CSOs stay afloat, it is essential that they maintain credibility and are accountable in order to have more engagements with donors.
- For CSOs to also enhance their funding strategies, it is important to strengthen skills in proposal writing and have a well-defined resource mobilization plan.
- In the area of capacity building, CSOs need to increase their visibility by contributing evidence-based research on key issues and participating in national debates.
- CSOs need to increase gender participation for better impact in some unique projects; for instance, the Women Environmental Programme (WEP) Nigeria, involved more women in some of their community projects in Zamfara State which helped to increase impact and ensure that the projects were conducted effectively.
- Knowledge management is key and it is also important to build relationship between staff to increase retention and strengthen organizational capacity. Similarly, it is important for CSOs to train younger staff regularly to develop their capacity.
- CSOs need to enhance their visibility by effectively utilizing platforms such as social media and websites.
- In order for CSOs to stand out, they should develop expertise in their core research areas which would enable donors and other development partners or stakeholders to identify and engage them using their strengths.
- It is also imperative that CSOs maintain a good relationship with other organisations through collaboration and networking.

Session 2: Feedback on the CSO project and the pilot survey

This session featured group discussions to obtain feedback from participants on the CSO navigator project and the assessment/pilot survey including ease of use and sensitivity of information.

Participants' feedback on the CSO Project:

- Most of the participants showed keen interest in using the platform, however, they expressed the need for a more detailed description of the project to be provided.
- Participants noted that questions in the survey required sensitive financial information. Most CSOs are uncomfortable sharing their financial reports for public viewing. Their reason was that certain information, such as financial ones, should be classified for security reasons. They advised that should a donor require the financial information of any CSO, this should be directly communicated with the CSO and they will be happy to provide this directly to the donor.
- The survey was lengthy and the information asked for was quite difficult to acquire. The survey questions seemed to be more concerned with the financial aspect rather than the policies. The survey was not straightforward enough and a lot of the questions seemed too ambiguous.

Recommendations:

- Participants suggest that questions relating to monetary aspect should use ranges rather than exact value as it makes it easier to provide.
- Some of the survey questions were ambiguous, it was suggested that these questions should come with options to enable participants select their best options.
- There is the need for wider participation with emphasis on the inclusion of young organizations who would likely find capacity building and networking most handy. The navigator platform would enable CSOs to build more partnerships and collaborations in areas they share interest in.
- Participants also suggest that the survey should ask more policy related questions and not just the financial aspects; this would help the project be more useful to funders, mentor organizations, and other potential partners.

Other aspects of the project that required further clarification include:

- What is the difference between the CSO Database and the Online Platform?
- How do you engage the CSO's in terms of capacity strengthening?
- Are there special ways the initiative will connect CSOs to donors?
- Will CSOs be partnered together to source funds?
- What do CSOs need to advance themselves?

Concluding remarks

Moving forward, the information that has been collated from participants would be used by funders to develop and shape a resource for building the organizational capacity of African CSOs and developing new partnerships between these CSOs. Once the platform is up and running it would be shared with all participants. Key aspects of the project include using the data from the assessment to rank CSOs and provide support to build the organizational capacity of each CSO. Hence, based on data from indigenous organizations, African CSOs will be able to see how they rank with peers, partner with peer CSOs for capacity building, and increase their visibility.

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The Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) is a non-profit think tank that conducts independent and high quality applied research on economic and development issues in Africa. CSEA's objective is to use its research findings to facilitate evidence-based policymaking. www.cseaafrica.org

Picture Gallery



Participants List

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