PERL Learning from Evidence-Based Results (JULY 2024)

Engaged Citizens Constitituency Influence Story No.2:

Open Government: Public eyes and ears increase scrutiny of government spending in Nigeria

The drive for more open, responsive, and inclusive government supported by three generations of UK Government-funded governance programmes has helped put open government on the map in Nigeria. Open government is now taking root across the country – from the building of local hospitals through to scrutiny of the federal government budget plans approved by the National Assembly.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Nigeria seeks to strengthen citizens' involvement in public spending in federal, state, and local government. Since the country joined the OGP initiative in 2016, at least 26 of Nigeria's 36 States have signed up with support from PERL and donors. The OGP is co-created by government and civil society. It is co-chaired by government and community (civil society) representatives, enshrining the principles of cooperation and mutual accountability around public spending.

Box 1: Open Government in Nigeria: principles and practices

The Open Government Partnership rests on five pillars:

- Technology: Technological advances have opened up unprecedented new ways to share information between the government and those it governs.
- Open Budget: Ensuring public oversight and a voice for citizens in budgeting in the National Assembly and the State Assemblies.
- Open Procurement: Providing the opportunity to scrutinise public procurement, including major investments in public services.
- Support for poor and vulnerable households: translating better governance into better lives for poor and vulnerable households.
- Better health and education: facilitating greater community say over government spending on schools and hospitals

The UK Government-funded Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) programme has played a pivotal role in fostering this collaboration between different partners in three northern states: Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa as well as Federal. It has done so by encouraging communities and government to work closely together to identify, monitor and evaluate public spending, providing technical support and facilitating peer to peer learning and links between federal, state, and local OGP initiatives.

Kaduna: Citizens to the fore

As early as 2015 Kaduna State opened its budget to public scrutiny in town hall meetings. Toll free phone lines allowing citizens to voice concerns about public spending were established. Kaduna State also released its budget and audited financial results and answered questions from a citizen-led budget monitoring team.

While citizens have been active in holding government to account in Nigeria for decades, Kaduna was the first State in Nigeria to join the OGP in July 2017. Kaduna went on to develop its first OGP State Action Plan (OGP-SAP 2018-2020), second SAP 2021-2023 and third SAP 2024-2025 with civil society organisations and donors ensuring the sustainability of the co-creation standards

The Eyes and Ears Citizens Feedback App has also been part of a drive to ensure transparency and accountability over how public money is spent and make sure spending is responsive to local needs. Launched by the Kaduna State Government with support from PERL for citizens to effectively utilise it, the app allows citizens to identify potential government waste and corruption in the State especially concerning project execution.

Since 2016, the Citizens Feedback App and associated mechanisms received a total of 508 complaints from citizens across the state. 476 (94%) were verified and 266 (52%) were resolved. The Eyes and Ears dashboard online also revealed that 2,857 government projects were visited with an average performance of 76% completion.[i]

Box 2: Citizens' use of the Eyes and Ears App

Tangible achievements include stories like that of Aisha, a resident of Jema'a LGA, who came across a clinic that is not in good shape in Ninte Community. She logged her complaint using the Citizens Feedback App on her phone. The Eyes and Ears monitoring team verified the complaint, and the Governor directed the immediate repair of the clinic. After this was carried out, the monitoring team went with Aisha to the health clinic and showed her that her complaint has been resolved.

"This clinic may not have affected me directly, but I couldn't stand by knowing others were suffering. The Eyes and Ears App gave us a way to make our voices heard, and it worked." Aisha

Another good example is a primary school constructed in Tudun Wada, a suburb of Kaduna South LGA, in 2019. The project was reported to be completed by the contractor, but through Eyes and Ears App, citizens reported that it wasn't and notified the school's management committee. The contractor was called back by government to complete the construction.

[see corresponding **Human Angle Story No.2**]

Sources: [i] [ii] [iii] [iv]

The app is symbolic of greater community say over government spending on schools and hospitals and provides citizens with unprecedented scrutiny over public spending.

Kano: Listening to citizens critical to gaining trust

Addressing citizens' complaints and concerns is critical to underpinning trust in open government, particularly when things don't run smoothly. Recovering cash matters too.

In 2018, PERL was instrumental in convincing Kano State Government to sign up to OGP, establish a OGP Secretariat, and 'co-create' a State Action Plan and Technical Working Groups in partnership with Kano citizens. The OGP Secretariat in Kano is hosted by the Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission (PCACC), reinforcing its commitment to address public complaints on citizens' rights and corruption cases channelled through its offices in all 44 local government areas. Technical support to the OGP Secretariat to date has served to creating an enabling environment for the PCACC's anti-corruption agenda, its broad operational mandate, and its public acceptability.

In 2022, the PCACC reported receipt of 1,550 cases of public complaints, suggestions, and petitions, out of which 1,019 (66%) of cases were resolved through investigation, mediation, dispute resolution or in court. More recently, the Commission reported recovering more than 500 million Naira in cash and property (including 100 plots of land) – a marked improvement on the 80 million Naira it recovered in 2021.

Civil society is also playing a critical role as a partner to government in the State of Kano. Here community groups have targeted political parties and gubernatorial candidates to commit to a Kano State Citizens Charter of Demand (CCD). This was developed by a coalition of civil society organisations, academics and media representatives (long-standing partners of PERL) under the banner of 'Hasken Kano.' Hasken means to 'light up' in Hausa. It included 94 spending recommendations in areas including education, health, agriculture, environment, information technology and infrastructure. Crucially, these recommendations were aligned with the Kano State Development Plan and OGP State Action Plan (SAP)[1].

Charting a better course for Nigeria

Other open government initiatives are also going from strength to strength in Nigeria. UK support has played a critical role in this, both in Abuja, through technical assistance to the National OGP Secretariat, and across states, through tailored support matching the pace of OGP developments in FCDO partner states, shared learning and guidance to other states.

Community charters enshrining the role of citizens in identifying public spending priorities and then monitoring and evaluating budgeting, procurement and spending by federal, state, and local governments are also marking a sea change for open government in the country.

At the heart of these charters is the concept of co-creation and consultation. They short-list community needs for inclusion in local government budgets. The use of these charters has boosted financial openness and promoted participation and accountability. [see **Story 4 – Citizen Budgeting: how citizen charters promote more transparent, accountable public finance in Nigeria's states**].

While not all States have finalised the implementation of their State Actions Plans (SAPs) to turn open government from an aspiration into reality, many are making progress. According to a review in August 2023, 17 states had developed an SAP Implementation Plan with nine more states in the process of doing so. In Kaduna, these SAPs also support the State Development Plan (SDP) 2021-2025, and in both Kano and Kaduna, OGP and many of its principles are also reflected in the current ruling parties' political manifestos.

[1] *These action plans support OGP global recommendations, including open budgeting, open contracting, ease of doing business, access to information and civic participation to support economic and social development.*

Box 3: Boosting citizens' role in budget scrutiny

The Nigeria Open Government Partnership (OGP) provides technical assistance to states striving to boost the involvement of citizens and communities in budgeting and public spending. This includes:

- Increasing Citizens' Participation in the Budget Process.
- The States Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) programme.
- Citizens Accountability Report (CAR).
- State Level Accountability Mechanisms (SLAMS).

Nationally too, PERL has supported open budgeting, open contracting and public participation in public spending, and worked with civil society groups and the media to keep open government in the public eye and at the top of the political agenda. This includes supporting civil society organisations eager to scrutinise the annual federal draft budget at the National Assembly and publicise the results of independent budget tracking in the media.

But challenges remain to open the doors of government wider

To this end, PERL is supporting increased citizens' participation in budgeting and supporting states in being able to publish a Citizens Budget and standard Citizens Accountability Report (CAR). The CAR is a critical component of OGP initiatives, promoting greater accountability, transparency and openness between governments and citizens. Moreover, that accountability must pass the test of transforming the lives of citizens through better healthcare and education.

Multilateral lenders such as the World Bank are playing their part too. The recently completed States Fiscal Transparency, Accountability, and Sustainability (SFTAS) Program-for-Results (PforR) for Nigeria aimed to strengthen fiscal discipline in participating states. It complemented OGP by providing significant financial rewards for improvements in public financial management (PFM), including published Citizens Budgets and Citizens Accountability Reports, with grants for improving public services. Despite a change in political leadership in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa following elections in 2023, all three state governments have shown commitment to sustain the reforms introduced or strengthened by OGP and SFTAS.

With even greater public pressure on Governors now to fulfil their electoral pledges – which included many of these commitments because of their public popularity – and technical assistance from PERL to government and civil society to monitor their implementation, SFTAS Sustainability Plans and OGP State Action Plans are indeed being executed or renewed.

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[i] *https://kadunaeyesandears.org/*

[ii] *https://www.ogpstories.org/eyes-and-ears-to-improve-public-services/*

[iii] *Kaduna-OGP-Model-of-Co-Creation-and-Change Story, page 29, published on http://pbc.kdsg.gov.ng/?q=model%20of%20co-creation%20and%20change%5C&limit=20*

[iv] *When a Government's Eyes and Ears Improves Public Service – podcast available on Spotify*