

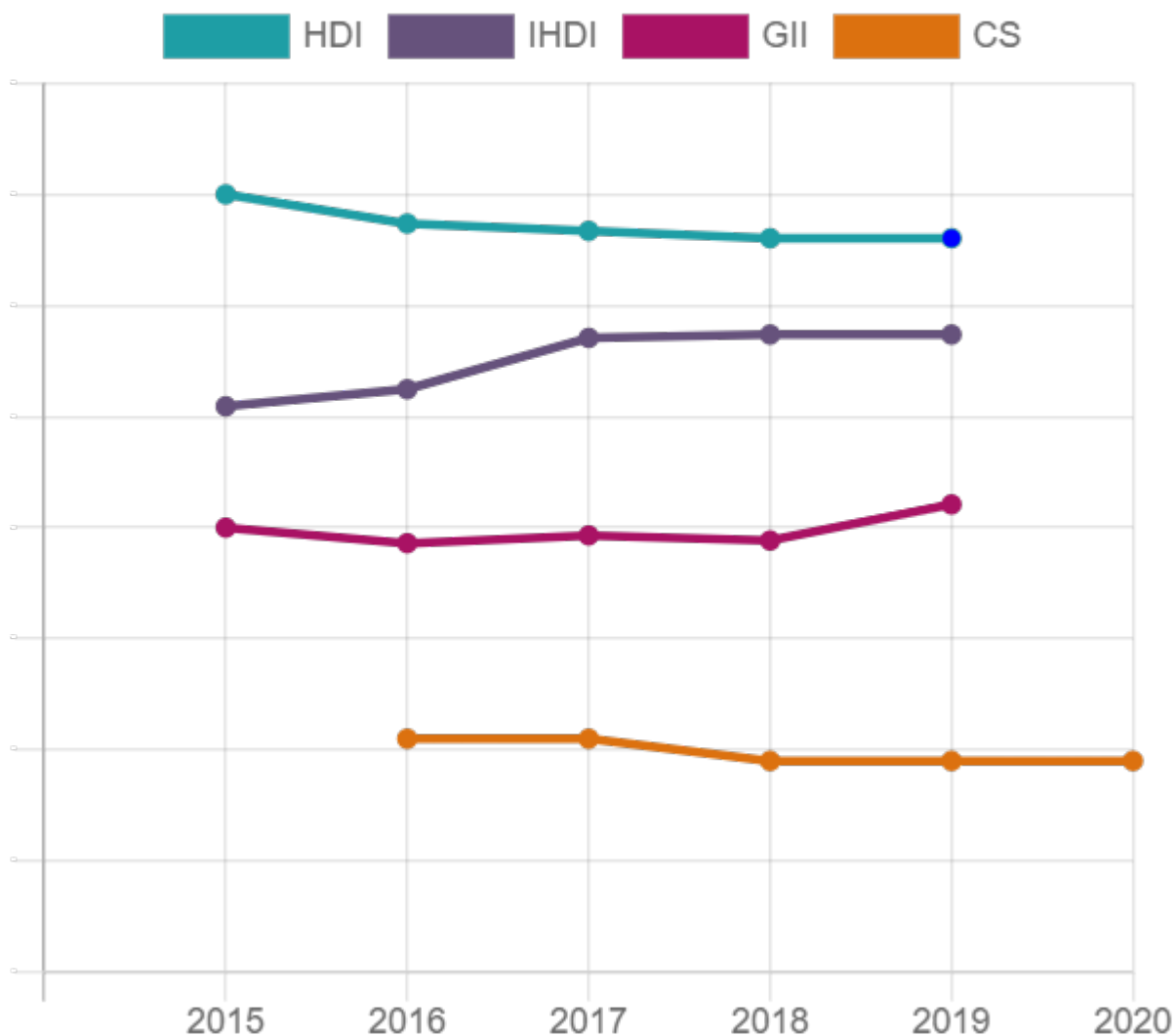
NIGERIA

"Nigeria is what it is because its leaders are not what they should be." Chinua Achebe

We live in a rapidly changing world – some changes may be for the better – others not so much. In order to continue to ground Voice in local lived realities, a country context analysis is organised every other year, engaging many stakeholders, grantees and rightsholders. The analysis is used to frame Calls for Proposals, to support the applications of grant-seekers and to advance the overall learnings. Below follows a summary of the exercise conducted in 2020, capturing the many views and perspectives of Nigerians. The summary is structured by presenting the big picture and slowly but surely to *zoom in* on the voices and aspirations of the rightsholders and to *zoom out* again by sharing the way forward for Voice. This page can also be downloaded at the bottom of the page. A detailed report is available upon request. Please contact Nigeria@voice.global

Zooming Out

The big picture



Human Development Index (HDI)

The Human Development Index is an index that combines data on life expectancy, education, and per capita income to rank countries. Nigeria's ranking between 2015 and 2019 has gone down 6 positions from 152 to 159, putting it in the low human development category.

Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI)

The IHDI measures the human development cost of inequality, or the overall loss to human development due to inequality. The closer to 1 the more equal a society is. The IHDI can inform policies towards inequality reduction. Inequality has slightly reduced between 2015 and 2019 but not yet translated into improved standards of living for ALL Nigerians - on the contrary.

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The GII is an inequality index, measuring the human development costs of gender inequality economically, health and education wise. The closer to 0 the better. Gender Inequality fluctuated substantially between 2010 – 2019, but recently has taken a nose dive due to rising Gender-Based Violence.

Civic Space (CS)

According to the independent Civicus Monitor which started in 2016, civic space worsened from Obstructed in 2016-2017 to Repressed in recent years. The main reason is the government's continuous clampdown on journalists and activists; its intolerance to dissent and opposition; and its renewed drive to regulate social media by the National Assembly.

Behind the numbers

Consultant: *"Don't you have anything good to say about Nigeria?"* **Participant:** *"Give me something good and I will add it."*

This is an excerpt from a conversation that took place between a consultant recruited for the context analysis exercise and two participants during a workshop to validate and adopt the findings of the Oxfam Nigeria context analysis update in August 2020. The report was so gloomy, but after taking account of the state of affairs in the country, one will be convinced by the indices. The oil price collapse, COVID and insurgency (a blow to agricultural growth) has made the economic situation too weak to lift the ever-increasing population of the country out of poverty. Politically, there is a lot of distrust of the current administration; allegations of favouritism of one ethnicity over others, allegations of suppressing the voices of Christians. There are legislative moves by the eighth assembly to obstruct freedom of expression, movement and association. The general election is not until 2023, but some governorship elections are happening in 2020 and the polity is already heating up. Responsibility of the government to protect and serve citizens is hardly the concern of the current generation of politicians. Nevertheless, the resilience of Nigerians to succeed remains one of the most admirable traits of the nation. Many seek survival by staying back to fight, others take to migration with Canada being one of the top destinations at the moment. In addition, despite homophobic attacks and unbearable experiences in Ghana, Libya, China amongst others the desire to migrate to these countries is not dwindling.

Political shifts

Nigerians yearn for freedom but the current administration seems opposed to any form of a dissenting voice. We see this in a series of legislative attempts to obstruct freedom of expression, speech, movement and association. It is still our undoing that Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act remains in force. We are abhorred by the use of federal might to silence dissenting voices - ignoring court orders that uphold fundamental rights of political opponents; attacks on judges and journalists. Thus, we've seen a government that is intolerant to dissent; security agents that are only answerable to politicians and not citizens and a court that remain slow in treating human rights abuses. Within this lockdown period, security agents are seen using their powers to violate the rights of citizens and set fear among human rights defenders. State actors are exploiting the pandemic to stifle dissent, clamp down on civic freedoms, and push through restrictive measures. Ongoing elections at the state level are already marred with a lot of irregularities and corrupt practices- trending videos of buying of the vote (exchange of voter's card with commodities that poor Nigerian need), violence and use of abusive expressions. This has led the US Government to ban some Nigerians -that may be involved- from entering the US. There has been no action/statement yet from the Nigerian government because most of these irregularities indict the ruling party.

Economic shifts

Nigeria is immensely blessed with different natural resources, but it is disheartening that unemployment persists. Nigerian youths who are energetic, resilient and productive end up in drugs abuse and migration out of the country. The dwindling oil economy, COVID and poor agricultural growth (as a result of insurgency) affect the economy and vulnerable communities struggle to survive. Massive migration to other countries is the immediate consequence, drains the country from its brains and those left behind have lost interest in pushing for success. Leading to an almost dead civic space; stagnant economy, rise in corruption and increase in inequality. As a follow-up to the outcry of Nigerians over the hardship currently experienced during the COVID pandemic, the Nigerian government increased the prices of petroleum and electricity tariff to over 100%. These are two commodities that affect all spheres of life in Nigeria, and the rise is causing chaos in the country. Several protests planned has seen protesters arrested by the Nigerian police, informing them they have no right to protest. Social and traditional media are agog with a dissenting opinion on this blatant denial of the right of Nigerians to express themselves.

Social shifts

Nigeria is socio-culturally diverse. We would have loved to see this diversity being optimised for the benefit of all. However, it seems that currently we are more divided than ever as we see the Federal authority favour certain sectors over others- Hausas over Igbos; Muslims over Christians etc. The greatest danger is that we perceive it as a war against each other, rather than ALL being united against a common enemy: inequality and corruption. . The last administration recognised the importance of gender balance and displayed this by not only passing the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act but also gave many women political positions in the administration. All these were shattered with the current administration as the president barely appointed women and has openly informed his wife that her place is in the kitchen. The rate of rape and gender-based violence is alarming, yet despite declaring it a state of emergency, the political will to stop the situation is lacking. This goes hand in hand with continued violation of the rights of vulnerable communities, refusal to recognise the rights of the LGBTIQI community and indifference to the plight of the people. At the same time, there is increasing use of social media as a medium of expression and an avenue to influence.

(Invisible) power shifts

There is a paradigm shift for all rightsholders of Voice. Nevertheless, we know that a lot of work still needs to be

done because barriers continue to persist to ensure political participation, due governance process, and general management of affairs of citizens. This became glaringly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic as we saw power-play demonstrated by the huge inequality gap between the elite and poor Nigerians - the latter is where many of the rightsholders of Voice belong. CSOs are recognising that democratic freedoms and civil liberties are shrinking because many Nigerians are prone to suffer from inter-communal clashes/violence, brutal killings and frequent bomb attacks, by insurgents like Boko Haram causing fear amongst CSOs. Unfortunately, CSOs are largely divided along political and ethnoreligious lines, which is also a threat to the unity and solidarity within civil society. There is a need to acknowledge that diversity is CSOs strength, and hence this negative spiral needs to be transformed into collective positive energy to stand up for our collective rights for ALL. On the flip side, many think that civic space is expanding because more people are engaging through various media platforms; and more Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are coming on board.

Covid-19

Enforcing the lockdown rule obstructed a lot of freedoms- movement, association etc. Many CSOs spoke out against it via social media. The measures affected small businesses hardest and thus increased poverty for already vulnerable people. It highlighted the deep gap of inequality as many could not afford to stock up while others could. Multi-nationals, rich Nigerians and corporate bodies raised millions to support the government's fight against COVID-19. Many feel that these funds should have gone to Nigerians directly, for instance. Instead of banks raising funds for the government, they could have paid it into citizen's account/reduced their bank charges. What did the Nigerian government do with these funds? There are allegations that it was shared among the elites/ruling powers, as the impact was hardly felt. No deliberate attempt was made to ensure that the process was inclusive. The reactions to the pandemic reiterated the existing political divide as palliatives was politicised and could not reach those that need it. The ongoing discoveries being made by the #EndSARS hijackers, palliatives are now discovered in almost all the major cities of Nigeria where they are packed, confirming citizens' allegation that it was never distributed. This showed where the interest of the leader's lies as political rallies and activities continued amidst social distancing directive while churches, schools, markets were not allowed to operate till late.

Zooming In

Voices behind the picture

The promotion and protection of human rights of vulnerable **elderly** have not been effectively mainstreamed in the broad human rights discussions in Nigeria. The missing link is the appreciation of the intersecting challenges of ageism and the marginalisation of elderly persons. It is imperative to fully empower older persons like activists, advocates and campaigners to contribute as rightsholders and actors of change.

"Voice in Nigeria is supporting a policy move to criminalise elderly abuse in Enugu State. The policy is well received by the Governor, State Assembly and Chief Justice of the State." [Dewdrop Foundation and Centre for Gender Economics Africa](#)

President Buhari assented into law, the Not too Young to Run Act, 2018, recognising the right of **young** Nigerians to participate in political process -from 25 years of age. With this, many young people contested for different political positions, including a female Presidential contestant Eunice Atuejide of the National Interest Party (NIP). There is still a high rate of youth unemployment also as a result of a high rate of illiteracy which stems from poor quality of education. Furthermore, drug abuse, violence, political thuggery is on the rise as young people struggle to see how they fit in. The method of using art for social transformation is now gaining

momentum. These serve as incubators for entrepreneurship, finance etc, but are not yet visible in the creative industry. Therefore, young people have to struggle their way through private funding.

"The Street-Project Foundation builds a critical mass of young people in the industry and takes them through the journey that will empower them to speak with one voice." [Street project Foundation](#)

Minority voices of **indigenous people and ethnic minorities** are struggling to be heard - the fight for their representation and recognition in government continues. Often the right to their indigenous land is dismissed with compensation that amounts to little or nothing. Women and children are worse off, and at the receiving end in these communities. With the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act still in existence, **LGBTI people** face continued discrimination, abuse and violence, particularly by constituted authorities. Attempts to shut voices who want to show alliance discourage others to come up; some taking advantage of the community as a form of economic benefit without truly identifying with the movement. LBQ women are not exempted from other marginalisations facing women in Nigeria, thus complicating their situation even more. In 2019, President Muhamadu Buhari signed into law, the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018; after many years of advocacy and concerted efforts by the disability community. Its implementation, however, remains slow. Other policy actions that support the cause of **People with Disabilities** include National policy on sexual and reproductive Health Rights of Persons with Disabilities with an emphasis on women and girls with disabilities and the National Policy on Inclusive Education. However, they seem to be only on paper as levels of social exclusion of People with disabilities in Nigeria remain unchanged. There is an increase in the rate of **women facing exploitation, abuse and violence** with increasing cases of sexual abuse (rape) of the girl child. While the trend has grown in urban areas, it is also increasing in rural and peri-urban communities. Customary practices like female genital mutilation, spousal abuse, early/forced marriage etc. persist in different parts of Nigeria. Inclusion of women in political & economic decision making is yet to be achieved.

"There is an increased number of people speaking up against rape in social media, in Universities- but with no practical political action to follow-up." [I Go Talkooh!](#)

Their aspirations

Among the aspirations of **People with Disabilities** is that Government supported programmes should ensure that a specific percentage is earmarked and reserved for PWDs in rural communities; as well as the full implementation of the Disability Act, 2019 by the establishment of the Commission. Key significant aspiration among women is to have coordinated advocacy, collaboration and response to **end violence against women and girls**. The **LGBTI community** wants inclusion of the right language in addressing the LGBTQI community. The attitude of advocates towards the use of language, nomenclature and reference to religion needs to be reconsidered. On language recognition, **indigenous people and ethnic minorities** aspire to have the educational curriculum reviewed to include Nigerian cultural practices and heritage to ensure people learn about who Nigerians are. At the same time, there is the desire for empowerment to ethnic minorities on value addition of artefacts, branding, and market access to improve their economic livelihoods. Similarly, **young people** wish to use arts for social transformation. And to have laws and policies in place for young people transiting from university to sustainable entrepreneurship especially after the National Youth Service Corps. Continued engagement of **elderly persons** as productive members of society is what is desired by this group.

Zooming out

Fostering change

CSOs in Nigeria are impacting lives and changing the way citizens perceive issues. Voice may not claim credit for any changes recorded but instead we feel proud to be part of the movement that is prompting change in Nigeria. In addition to the emerging change, many other opportunities are opening up for Voice in Nigeria to consolidate its investment or explore different ways of doing things for a more impactful engagement. The extension phase will rely mostly on the feedback received during this context update. These developments informed five areas validated by CSOs and Voice rightsholders as focal areas in the coming years:

- Active Citizenship- civic responsibilities kept alive and kicking by holding government accountable for its expected deliverables towards rightsholders and speak up against obnoxious policies and practices;
- Online Voice movement in Nigeria where the rights of the five Voice rightsholder groups are articulated, canvassed, progressed and authorities challenged where necessary- i.e. Clear system to track violation of rights and ensure action is taken;
- Initiatives for accessible psycho-social, legal and medical support for survivors of sexual abuse and other forms of domestic violence and exploitation- three-pronged approach to GBV but (possibly) a consortium of three organisations dealing with the three areas respectively;
- Compliance with critical regulations- organisational development and support to rightsholder-led CSOs to ensure compliance with relevant regulations- that way avoid being caught up by law and remain relevant. This is a cross-cutting issue for all rightsholders groups supported by Voice;
- Deepen the work on the rights of elderly persons - more sensitisation on their rights, and on aging issues so that people can stop attacking them/alluding health challenges to evil spirit;

The forthcoming Calls for Proposals will be based on these priorities and issues -although other new ones may come up that require further attention.