

Power to change institutions



Our Voice to the People project is increasing the participation of women in decision making.

Introduction

Since 1999, there have been four peaceful transitions of power in Nigeria, and the 2015 elections were considered by many to be one of the freest and fairest in the country's history. However, Nigeria remains a growing democracy, marked by patronage politics, weak opposition and relatively low voter turnout and political awareness, with intractable poverty alongside vast natural resources. Most of Nigeria's wealth is held by a tiny economic and political elite, and power lies within both formal institutions and the informal structures of familial and ethno-religious patronage.

Rapid economic growth over the past decade has been matched by growing inequality, increasing poverty and rising unemployment. Nigeria's capacity to generate revenue to support pro-poor development has remained extremely limited. The country's tax revenues in 2007 and 2008 were 0.20% and 0.28% of GDP respectively – in contrast, South Africa's tax revenues for the same years were 28.87% and 27.93%.¹ Although this rose to 12% in 2014, the Nigerian government is still missing out on vital revenue that could help transform the lives of its citizens. There is an inequitable distribution of wealth and a seemingly widening gap between rich and poor in society, with a large proportion of people living below the poverty line. This has been attributed to the decay in the system and structures of governance and leadership, which encourages corruption.

Our governance work in Nigeria

Christian Aid's governance programme focuses on accountable governance, tax justice and social protection. We enable poor and marginalised people to raise their voices, and to know and claim their rights. We promote meaningful interaction between government and citizens, greater accountability and responsiveness, and peaceful coexistence within communities using an interfaith approach.

Christian Aid Nigeria's Voice to the People: Making governance work for the poor and marginalised (V2P) – a two-and-a-half year DFID-funded project in Anambra – has built upon Christian Aid's Power to the People project (implemented in the same state) that enabled marginalised and vulnerable people to hold local and state authorities to account.

With power analysis at its heart, the Voice to the People project is increasing both the representation and participation of marginalised groups in decision-making processes and government responsiveness to their demands, claims and priorities. Communities and civil society have established political and community platforms to engage duty bearers and to demand good governance as a right.

Among the reasons for Nigeria's limited ability to generate tax income are the lack of people employed by, and the poor systems and technology of, the revenue services.



Muslim and Christian leaders in Mando meet to discuss issues facing the community. The group formed after Christian Aid partner Interfaith Mediation Centre ran workshops on how to influence local government decision-making by speaking out with a unified voice.

Christian Aid is one of the three founding members of the Tax Justice Platform in Nigeria, which launched in August 2012 and has grown to more than 100 members of civil society organisations. It promotes a fair and progressive taxation system, and increased tax revenues to improve essential services, and it will be supporting campaigns against mispricing, tax avoidance and tax evasion.

The Tax Justice Platform is building formidable allies within government and policy circles, with a commitment to reform fiscal systems and tackle the non-payment of property and income taxes. The Federal Inland Revenue Services of Nigeria welcomed its launch and called on stakeholders to support government initiatives to stem tax leakages. The platform has been recognised as a key stakeholder in promoting the tax system and has been engaging with the revenue services on policy development.

Christian Aid has also supported the interfaith governance work of the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna State. Working with both Christian and Muslim communities, it has promoted inclusive citizenship and proactive engagement for development, by fostering budget transparency, citizen participation and independent oversight at local government level. Using approaches such as the community score card, the centre's work has prompted the delivery of numerous small-scale projects by government in response to community demands.

The way forward

Christian Aid's governance programme will continue to be built on these pillars.

- **Power analysis** – training all of our partners to undertake power analysis and mapping, and to give due consideration to informal as well as formal power structures, to ensure their advocacy strategies are well-informed.
- **Women's and girls' voice and leadership capacity** – focusing especially on building the capacity and creating safe spaces for women and adolescent girls to understand and express their rights, to participate and be represented in both formal and informal decision-making fora.
- **Interfaith identity** – bringing an intrinsically interfaith identity to our governance work in Kaduna and Plateau States, based on the belief that people working together for common goals builds mutual understanding, and that delivering responsive governance can allay grievances.
- **Coalition-building** – supporting and investing in the establishment, sustainability and solidarity of civil society (including faith-based) networks in a movement for change. We believe working in partnership amplifies the demands of rights holders.

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Find out more about the Voice to the People project at voicetothepeople.org

Endnotes

- 1 Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and Michael Maju Abu (PhD), *Baseline Study on Tax, Tax Gaps Analysis and Taxation in Nigeria, 2012.*