

Collective Action for Adolescent Girls Initiative (CAAGI)

Improving the choices for adolescent girls



CAAGI is working with religious and traditional leaders to influence societal and individual behaviours and attitudes so that girls like Aisha, a 20-year-old mother of two can have improved choices and opportunities available to them.

CAAGI at a glance

Goal:

To improve choices and opportunities for adolescent girls to live productive, meaningful lives in Northern Nigeria.

Strategy:

Engaging and empowering faith and traditional actors to bring about a shift in inequitable social practices that reinforce gender inequalities.

Specific issues:

Early marriage, lack of access to education and economic empowerment

Funder:

Christian Aid

Partners:

Gender Awareness Trust and Development and Peace Initiative

What?

Collective Action for Adolescent Girls Initiative (CAAGI) is a Christian Aid funded programme that aims to improve significantly the choices and opportunities available for adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria to live productive and meaningful lives.

It seeks to change individual and societal behaviours, attitudes and perceptions that hamper the opportunities of girls, using the strong influence of religion through religious leaders as enablers to facilitate this change. It is focused on addressing practices around early marriage, lack of access to education and economic empowerment for adolescent girls.

Where?

Kaduna state, Nigeria: 12 communities in 3 Local Government Areas (LGAs)

Who?

The primary beneficiaries of this project are adolescent girls in the target communities, however, the project involves an expanded group of stakeholders being brought together to take collective action for the girl child. The stakeholders involved are religious leaders of the two majorly practiced religion in Nigeria – Islam and Christianity. They are the primary stakeholder group. Other stakeholders involved are parents of adolescent girls and traditional leaders.

How?

The project recognises that faith leaders are strong opinion leaders in the society and can influence positive attitude and behavioural changes within the society. It rests on the theory that norms are influenced by dependent behaviours of individuals, meaning that if social influencers

change their behaviours around an issue without any backlash, more people are likely to think the new behaviour is acceptable, and will have the confidence to take up the new behaviour. Therefore, it seeks to achieve its aim by supporting faith actors and faith based institutions at community, state and national levels as appropriate to take action around major issues (education, early marriage and economic empowerment) affecting adolescent girls in the context of Northern Nigeria, thereby facilitating behaviour change.

The project's outcome is seen in behavioural changes in faith actors, men, women and boys, around AG issues of education, marriage age and economic empowerment as well as shift in cultural practices that re-enforce gender discrimination/inequality.

When?

2 years: April 2016 – March 2018

Why?

Religion and culture play a significant role in shaping the accepted norms of societies in Northern Nigeria. These are deeply entrenched in the society as the main source of inspiration as people rely on scriptural guidance, which also influences the day-to-day decisions parents and society make, including about what choices are available to girls. Therefore, although adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria have dreams and aspirations, cultural and religious pressures often limit them.

The influence of faith actors in Northern Nigeria is unique and huge. They have credibility as a trusted authority within their communities and are well positioned to be a catalyst for change, and therefore are highly placed to help adolescent girls live productive and meaningful lives.

Why Kaduna?

Kaduna State is the third most populous state in Nigeria with a population of about 6million people. Historically, Kaduna State is perceived as the heart of Northern Nigeria: the most influential political and religious

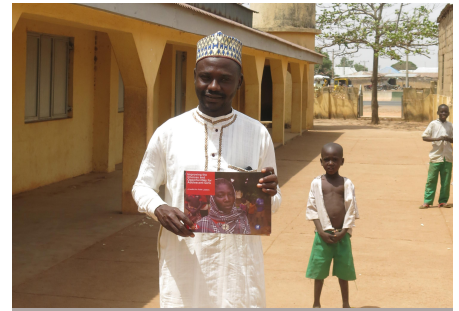
leaders have strong roots in this state. It is also currently the provincial and regional headquarters of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Catholic, Anglican and JNI (Muslim counterpart to CAN) congregations. The state has 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) split into three senatorial districts. The narrative guiding this project from insights into the Political Economy of Northern Nigeria is that whatever systems and beliefs adopted in Kaduna are easily replicated across most parts of Northern Nigeria.

Sustainability mechanisms

The project is deliberately using the approach of working with the faith actors and faith-based institutions because they are extremely powerful when it comes to change in norms and values of their communities and they are permanent structures in the community. Their support and ownership of the project will enhance project sustainability.

Another sustainability plan is the employment of an innovative community approach called Gender Empowerment and Development Organizing Resource (GEADOR Circles). The circles' members are community based that serve as community resource to solving community problems. The GEADOR circles also serve as safe spaces for the adolescent girls to be informed and become mentors to other girls in the communities. In each community, GEADOR Circles of young men, young women, men and women is established, with a membership of at least 15 persons each per circle. The religious actors targeted and GEADOR groups are all permanent structures and will outlive this pilot project, whereby the gains and anticipated changes for better life opportunities for adolescent girls become sustainable over time.

A Faith Actors Dialogue Forum has been formed in the state, and this consists of Muslim and Christian actors who are working collectively to drive the change at the state and community levels. To aid the work of faith leaders, a toolkit has been developed as a key resource in building their capacity to influence change using scriptural backings.



The willingness of faith leaders to influence change is key to the success of the project, and a toolkit has been developed as a resource to help them with this.

Christian Aid recognizes that there are programs in Nigeria containing components on working with religious and traditional leaders, but this project centers on engaging and empowering faith actors to bring about a change/ shift in inequitable social/cultural norms/practices that reinforce these gender inequalities, thereby creating a positive environment for the adolescent girls to thrive.

This project is applying a "Do No Harm" principle by avoiding confrontational strategies, and instead is instigating natural conversations through the safe spaces set up by the GEADOR circles and equally allow religious actors discuss these issues freely amongst their peers, holding each other to account.

The project is championed by faith leaders and interfaith groups including the Kaduna State chapters of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam, Women Interfaith Council (WIC), Federation of Muslim Women Association Nigeria (FOWMAN), Women Wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN), Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) and Global Peace Foundation, alongside women and men in the state.

Find out more:
www.collectiveactionforgirls.wordpress.com