Strengthening Collaborations for Greater Impact

Strategic Cohort Investments
for Increased Impact

MacArthur Foundation

PARTNERS UNITED

Introduction

This case study explores the MacArthur Foundation's anticorruption investment through the On-Nigeria program which has shown how the implementation of a novel and strategic cohort approach to grantmaking enabled collaborations that have led to impact. This new approach to grantmaking and the learnings have informed the strategy for the next phase of the On Nigeria Program.

This case study also looks at how a redesigned civic tech platform can help improve and maintain existing and future partnerships, even if they are not funded by an On-Nigeria direct grant. This interactive platform has been redesigned to serve as a knowledge sharing hub, offering real-time updates on ongoing projects and the profiles of organizations, including the resources built during their work.

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Background and Context

Nigeria has a long history of government inefficiency, which coincides with a long history of advocacy to address those inefficiencies. While corrupt activities can be traced back to the military era, when Nigerians were subjected to abusive, dictatorial, and anti-advocacy rule[1], this era also saw the formation of the first local civil society organizations and professional bodies in Nigeria, such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), and the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), all of which were vocal, banded together, and took a public stand against how state affairs were handled.[2]

Despite the fact that "civil society" did not grow into organized bodies until the end of military rule in 1999, these agitations show that Nigerians have a long tradition and culture of activism. As the battle for democracy gained momentum, foreign funding started to trickle in, and these local organizations were able to have a huge impact on Nigeria's successful transition from military rule to democracy.

In more recent times, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) function as intermediaries between the citizens and the government, amplifying public voices and taking governance closer to local communities. As a result, more CSOs are being established at the state, sub-national, and community levels to facilitate in bringing governance closer to the people.

Because of this growing civic space, more donor agencies and philanthropies have stepped in to support CSO advocacy efforts at all levels. However, because CSOs were founded at a faster rate than philanthropic funding could support, the civil society ecosystem splintered, and previously united partners began to see themselves as competitors for donor funding, which is needed to sustain ongoing interventions.

1 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/africa_network/CIVIL_SOCIETY_AND_DEMOCRATIC.pdf
2 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272171809_CIVIL_SOCIETY_DEMOCRATIC_GOVERNANCE_AND_DEVELOPMENT_IN_NIGERIA_1999-2012
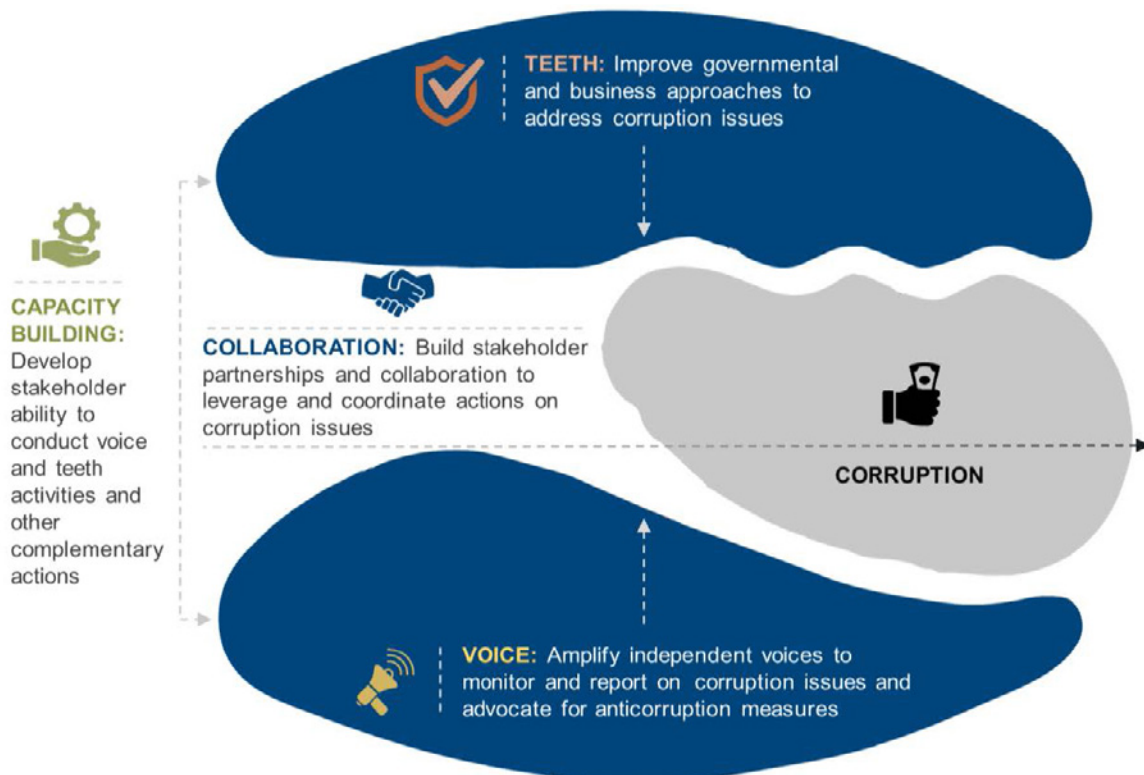
With Nigeria's population growing at an alarming rate and corruption stealing from the abundant resources available, people's needs and priorities are not being met, resulting in an increase in the number of marginalized communities. Because of the government's continuous inefficiencies, a more unified civic space is more important than ever for ensuring accountable governance.

Recognizing these challenges, the MacArthur Foundation, through it's On Nigeria Program, introduced a cohort-based approach in 2015 to counter this competition by improving grantee capacity and promoting collaboration with other accountability actors. This consistent practice of partnerships both within and outside the Foundation's grantee community can result in a less fractured civic space that advances anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria, leading to all round improved governance.

On Nigeria Theory of Change
(Voice and Teeth)

TEETH: Improve governmental and business approaches to address corruption issues

CAPACITY BUILDING: Develop stakeholder ability to conduct voice and teeth activities and other complementary actions

COLLABORATION: Build stakeholder partnerships and collaboration to leverage and coordinate actions on corruption issues

CORRUPTION

VOICE: Amplify independent voices to monitor and report on corruption issues and advocate for anticorruption measures

This case study discovered that the Foundation's Cohort strategy promoted cooperation and collaborations even in the absence of direct Foundation support. Collaboration, on the other hand, is always a messy process that must be incentivized to occur by finding points of convergence with other stakeholders in order to achieve the desired effect. To accomplish this, digital and technological solutions will help link the ecosystem on a systems level, leading to the creation of a strong unified network.

The Partners United Platform

The Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation created the Partners United Against Corruption (PUAC) platform to serve as a repository for grantees' ongoing work and in 2020, Reboot was commissioned to assist with the transition of the Partners United Against Corruption (PUAC) platform from a repository to an interactive knowledge exchange platform.

A user research study was conducted by Reboot and the Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation (SMYF) to better understand how members of the accountability ecosystem perceived, collected, and used information and knowledge bits. We polled one hundred (100) civic partners and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty (20) people in the ecosystem. The research findings informed the re-design and development of what is now the **Partners United Platform.**

Key Findings Informing Redesign

Partners relied on their existing relationships to obtain the information they required.

Partners were more concerned with the visibility and use of their project data.
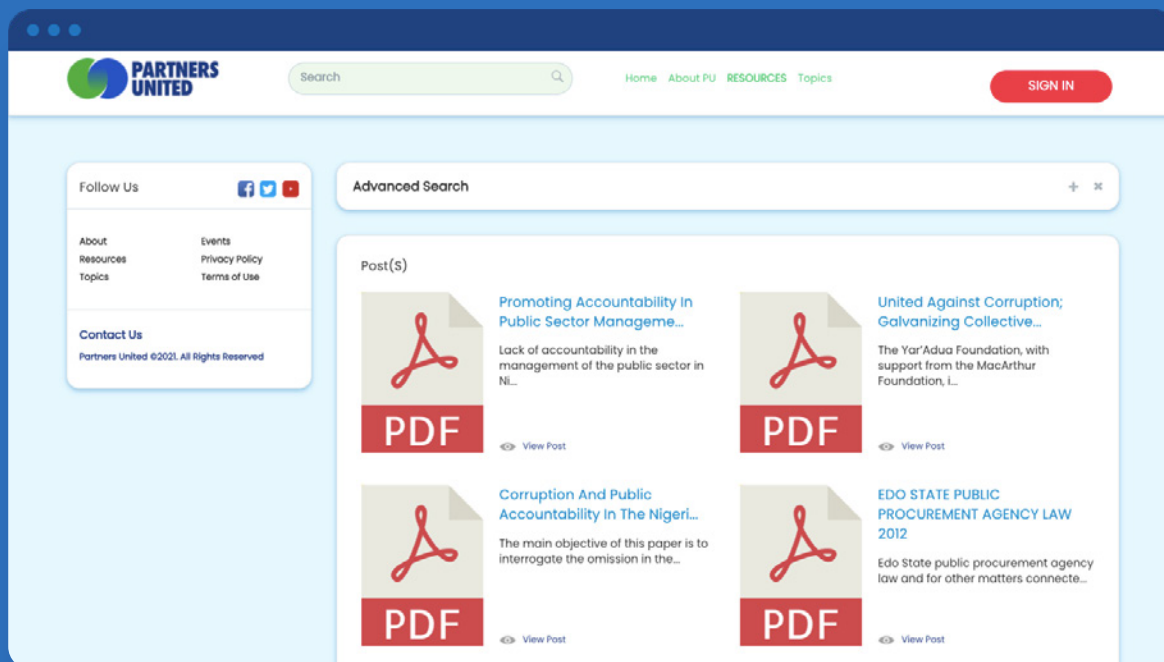
Partners want to easily connect with other organizations and learn about their work.

Key Features

Finding 1

When looking for information, partners frequently rely on existing relation-ships or an online search. This frequently creates delays for partners who need real-time information, as they are forced to wait until the information is found or delivered to them. To fix this, an easy-to-use search console on the Partners United Site has been included in the platform redesign.

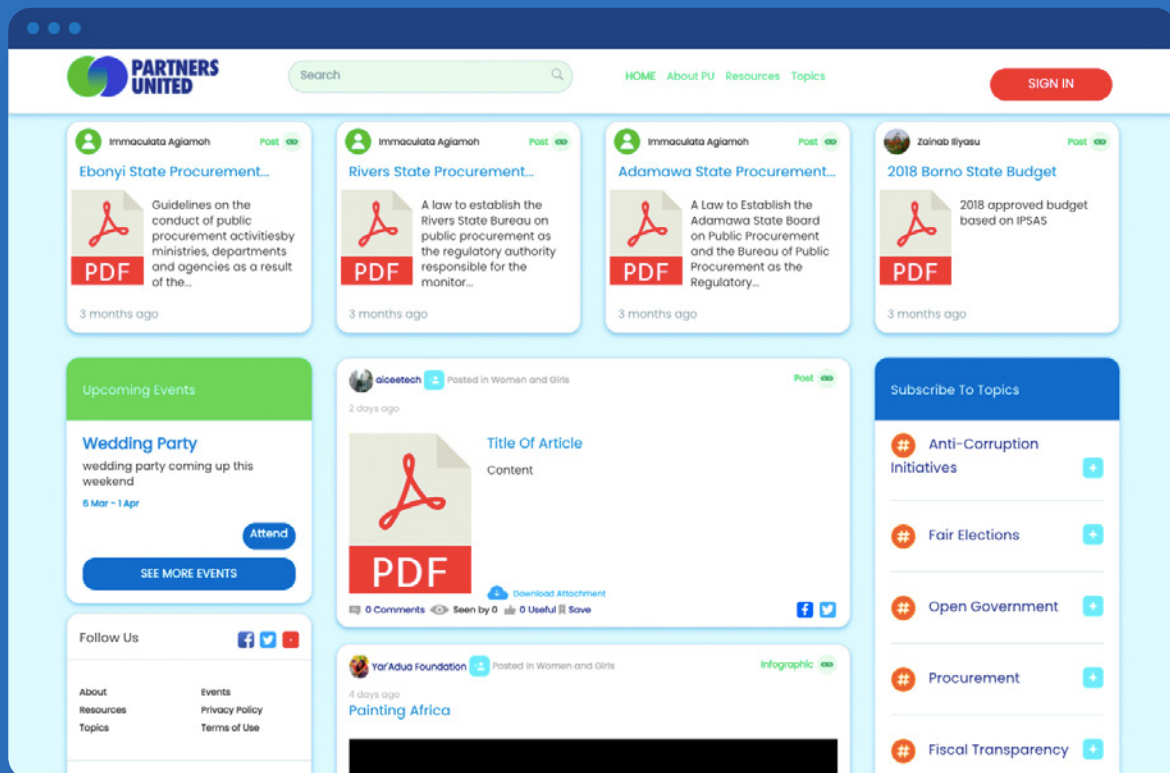## All Information on One Page

What it does:

This feature acts as the platform's information center, storing all content submitted to the platform in different formats. Full-text searches make finding content easy, and search parameters may include any combination of subjects, information tools, post styles, or content details such as comments. All content searches are fast, and results appear immediately.

Finding 2

Partners are willing to participate on a forum that increases traffic to and exposure for their content. Partners emphasized how important it was for them that others saw and interacted with their work. A shared forum, such as Partners United, will help them gain more attention for their work. Viewers will engage with the content by "liking," "sharing" it on social media, and commenting on it.
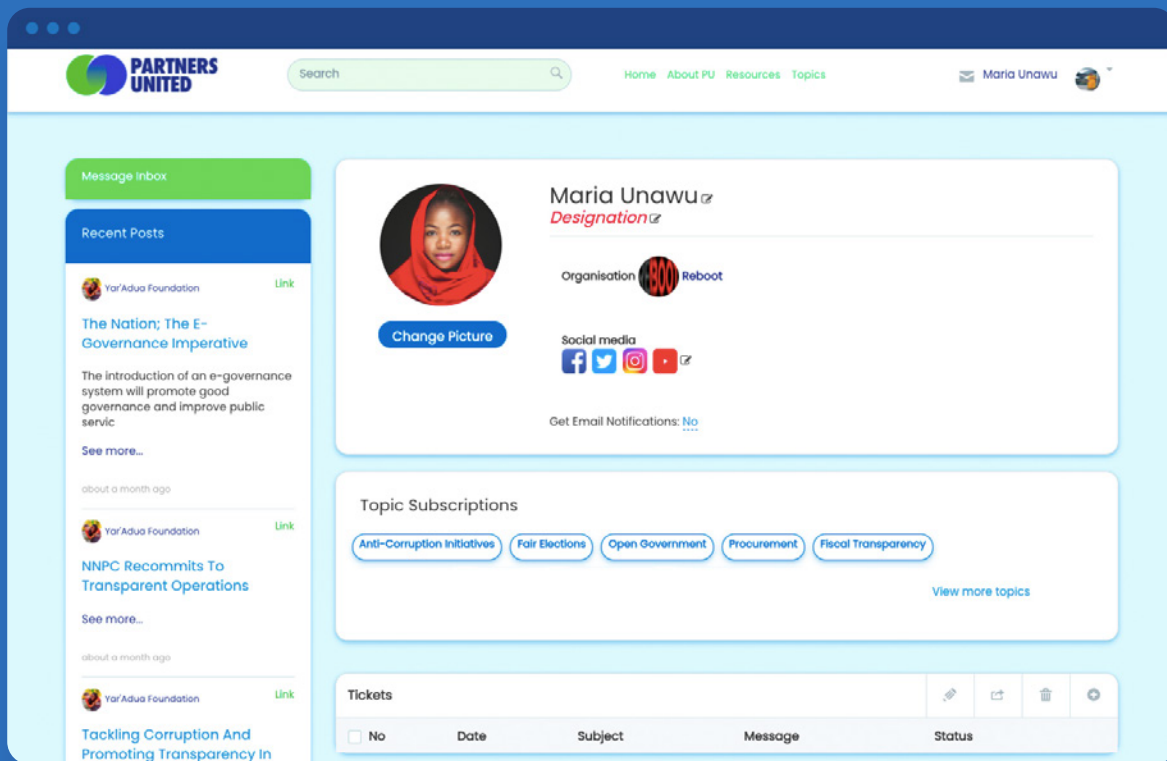
The Knowledge Snapshot

What it does:

This page handles information that is stored on other pages. The About Us, Knowledge Resources, and Sign-in buttons are now located on the menu button, making it easier to access all trending posts, active partners, and upcoming events, as well as be identified as a content development hub. Live feed, trending content, upcoming events, and so on are examples of these functions and widgets.

Finding 3

Partners want to be able to find quick information on other organizations of interest to them. Partners reported that it was difficult to find resources to help them communicate with and learn about other organizations, or that they did not know where to look to find more information on organizations with similar interests.

A Full Profile View

What it does:

All of the user's contact information is available on the user profile page, allowing for interaction both on and off the site. This feature allows partners to personalize their experience by tailoring their feeds to reveal the details and other tools that are most useful to them. A user will be able to receive daily updates on different topics, partners, and individuals of interest to them, as well as connect on the live stream.

Overall, this interactive platform has the potential to bring all stakeholders together in one location and to extend grantees' work beyond the MacArthur Foundation's On Nigeria program, introducing them to a larger group of collaborators as well as the donor community. There have been impacts that have occurred but have not gained momentum as a result of active partnerships so far; the platform will help to increase awareness and get more partners on board to extend that impact

Cases of Collaboration and Impact

There have been a number of successful collaborations between partners since the start of the On Nigeria program and the introduction of the cohort strategy. Given that partners are usually resistant to collaborating, the fact that they want to join forces is a major accomplishment in and of itself. Some of these collaborations directly contributed to increased traction and impact as a result of their collaboration.

This segment highlights a few fruitful partnerships as well as potential for the Partners United network to have a greater impact. Partners United, in particular, will aid in the spread of partnerships and the formation of communities of practice.

Collaborating to Build a Pipeline of Investigative Journalists

Collaborators:
Bayero University Kano (BUK), Premium Times, and Daily Trust

Bayero University, Kano (BUK), a University in Nigeria, collaborated with media houses within their "Media and Journalism" cohort, with the aim of equipping its lecturers with the investigative journalism skills required to effectively teach the next generation of journalists in Nigeria.

💡 Opportunity

BUK has been championing the development of a new national curriculum for Mass Communications students that effectively incorporates investigative journalism. BUK lecturers, however, did not have the training in investigative journalism to effectively teach their students the practical aspects.

⚙ Process

BUK leadership reached out to counterparts at reputable media houses, including media partners in their On Nigeria cohort. After a series of meetings, they reached an agreement for lecturers from BUK to intern with two media houses within their cohort, Premium Times and Daily Trust. The lecturers gained valuable practical knowledge in investigative journalism from industry leaders.

✔ Impact

After the internship, the lecturers were able to incorporate real-life examples of investigative journalism into their classes, reaching over 1500 students from Level 100 to the Ph.D. level.

» Looking Ahead

As the curriculum is rolled out, there is a need to effectively spread this model to other Universities' Mass Communications departments and media houses, with a focus on linking students with internships within media houses to get the practical experience they need.

The training materials and process learnings can be shared and stored on the Partners United platform to make it easier for others to find and replicate. In addition, the platform can bring more awareness to collaborations between academia and media and help them scale more effectively.

Media and Civil Society Collaborating to Hold an Elected Official Accountable

Collaborators:

International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), Socio-Economic Rights And Accountability Project (SERAP)

ICIR, a media organization, collaborated with SERAP, a CSO advocacy organization, to spread public awareness of an uncompleted government water project and get the elected official in charge to complete it.

💡 Opportunity

ICIR supported a mainstream journalist to carry out an investigation into an abandoned water project in his community. SERAP through the published investigative report spotlighted the gross corruption and misuse of public funds and advocated for the completion of the project.

⚙ Process

As part of its periodic training of journalists to do investigative reports, ICIR facilitated a journalist in Osun state to conduct a four-month investigation into an abandoned water project. The published 2-part investigative report[3] exposed that the Osun State Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives had misappropriated N1.8 billion meant for the project. After the publication of the report, SERAP collaborated with ICIR to do further analysis and present the case to Nigeria's Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), with an ultimatum to call the public official to order and complete the project.[4]

✓ Impact

ICPC invited the Deputy Speaker for questioning, and he agreed to complete the project. The project infrastructure (reservoir) has been complet-

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[3] https://www.icirnigeria.org/exposed-nigerias-deputy-speaker-in-n1-7bn-water-contract-scam/

[4] https://www.icirnigeria.org/serap-gives-14-day-ultimatum-to-ccb-icpc-to-investigate-deputy-speaker-over-n1-7b-water-project-scam/

ed, but there is still no water.

» Looking Ahead

To get positive impact as seen in this case study, there's a need for more timely and sustained collaboration between media, civil society and anti-corruption agencies to hold corrupt officials to account.

The Partners United platform can highlight the progress achieved through this collaboration and what needs to be done to see the story to an even more impactful conclusion. In addition, the platform can be used as an effective tool to raise awareness around corruption activities and get other media houses and civil societies to either get involved or use the same approach for their initiatives.

CSOs Collaborating to Promote Integrity in Public Service

Collaborators:

Accountability Lab and Progressive Impact Organization for Community Development (PRIMORG)

Accountability Lab Nigeria, the local chapter of a global CSO, collaborated with PRIMORG, a Nigerian CSO with broad citizen reach through its media platforms, to expand the awareness of their Integrity Icon program and strengthen the reputation of honest public servants that have shunned corruption.

Opportunity

Accountability Lab's "Integrity Icon" program seeks to tackle corruption by "naming and faming" honest government officials. However, they were limited in the number of media platforms at their disposal to reach across Nigeria to build followership for the program and build the reputation of honest public servants.

⚙ Process

Accountability Lab and PRIMORG met as grantees on the On Nigeria program, and PRIMORG invited Accountability Lab as a guest speaker on their Public Dialogue Radio Program. Accountability Lab followed up with PRIMORG to discuss collaboration around their Integrity Icon program, and they eventually signed an agreement that enables Accountability Lab to leverage PRIMORG's media platforms to host the 2020 government officials selected as Integrity Icons to share their compelling personal journeys standing up for integrity in a systemically corrupt environment with a wider audience.

✓ Impact

Through this collaboration, Accountability Lab has built a wider and more engaged followership and expanded its reputation and interest in the Integrity Icons program. By leveraging PRIMORG's radio platforms, Integrity Icons appeared on two leading radio stations, KissFM and Raypower, and reached an estimated 2 million listeners.

›› Looking Ahead

Accountability Lab seeks to expand the influence of the Integrity Icons program by facilitating more dialogue highlighting cases of honesty in government. There is a need for Accountability Lab to partner with more organizations with the broad citizen reach they need to reach Nigeria's diverse audiences at the regional and local level.

The Partners United platform can help to further "fame" the integrity Icons and help expand the influence of the program including the benefits of highlighting honest individuals. In addition, more civil society organizations leverage each other's media platforms to reach more people, build a stronger followership for their initiatives, and accountable governance more generally; this is especially important for national programs that seek to reach across Nigeria's diverse cultural regions.

Civil Society Collaborating with Government Strengthen the Administration of Criminal Justice

Collaborators:

Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN) and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)

FIDA and PWAN are legal advocacy organizations, both members of the MacArthur Foundation's Criminal Justice Cohort. They work to ensure the effective implementation of Nigeria's Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), including its adoption in all Nigerian states. These two organizations worked with the Plateau State government to ensure the domestication of the law as well as the establishment of structures to ensure its effective implementation.

Opportunity

The Attorney General of Plateau State had set up a committee to harmonise two criminal justice bills that had been submitted to him for onward passage to the state's house of assembly. In appreciation of their previous efforts, FIDA and PWAN were invited by the House of Assembly to participate in its own process of deliberating on the bill before it was passed.

Process

FIDA and PWAN collaborated to assist the House of Assembly Committee deliberating on the adoption of the legislation. Both PWAN and FIDA revised the bill, identified areas for change, and met with members of the House of Assembly's Justice Committee to discuss the legislation's content.

Impact

Plateau state passed the Administration of Criminal Justice Law in 2018, and both organizations provided technical and other resource support for the development and inauguration of the Justice Sector Reform Team, which will oversee the law's implementation in the state.

❯❯ Looking Ahead

For the six states yet to adopt and domesticate the law, the learnings from this process could enable for a speedier uptake and eventual passage of the law in these respective states. There is a need to emphasize the advantages of working with organizations that have a strong understanding of judicial processes and are able to assist states to produce an effective bill and set up the necessary mechanisms for effective implementation.

The learnings from this collaboration, as well as other collaborations among criminal justice cohort partners, can be shared on the Partners United website as an example of an effective collaboration process for others to learn from in order to maximize the impact of their work.

Strengthening Collaborations for Greater Impact

Learnings

The On Nigeria support towards collaboration provides a rich evidence base for learnings. This study analyzed the cases above, as well as the findings from the research informing the design of the Partners United platform to surface four key learnings that partners can incorporate into their own collaborations to increase the likelihood of success:

1 **Collaboration objectives need to be clearly defined at the start.** In the case of partners that did not have a specific set of goals for collaboration, the goals or impact anticipated were often not established or monitored, often resulting in less impact. Furthermore, a less defined relationship meant that tasks were not well defined, which translated to whether or not impact was monitored. In the case of well-established collaborations, such as the criminal justice collaboration highlighted in this report, partners' roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, allowing impact measures to be easily tracked and reported.

2 **Fostering collaboration remains a strategic approach to increasing impact.** The accountability ecosystem consists of many actors doing several great things, however, these great things are done in silos. The MacArthur Foundation's **cohorts approach is strategic** in that it takes a systems lens to the issues around the thematic areas they focus on, in this case corruption, and identifies key players within that system and provides support for their ongoing work. While partners may see themselves more as competitors than collaborators, at least at first, the cohort approach facilitates a shift in thinking towards partners working for a common goal. This approach leads to organic collaborations as impact is eventually a collective success story.

3 **Incentives for collaboration are not limited to finances.** Another learning is that a **little incentive can go a long way** for fostering collaborations and organizational partnerships. Organizations typically look out for a clear alignment of visions

and goals, an opportunity to save on finances, and opportunities to deepen impact of ongoing work. This was demonstrated by organizations that first collaborated because they were encouraged to do so in their MacArthur cohort, but later sought out collaboration with partners on issues not covered by their current On Nigeria funding.

4   **Systemic collaboration still depends on individuals.** In the end, collaboration between partner organizations all too often depends on specific personalities and relationships within the ecosystem. Organizations with leaders that see their mission as inherently requiring collective action, and see personal and organizational benefits to contributing to a stronger ecosystem, tend to be those that build strategic collaboration into their projects. These leaders foster a culture of collaboration in their organizations, and cultivates a collaborative mindset amongst it's staff that makes it easier for them to achieve their ambitious goals.

Recommendations

Looking ahead, the MacArthur Foundation has a unique position within Nigeria's accountability landscape. The Foundation has gained significant experience of what works and what hasn't in the first phase, and knows the organizations in the ecosystem arguably better than any other single organization in the accountability ecosystem. This position is useful for facilitating strategic collaboration over the course of the next phase, as well as fostering efforts that will facilitate collaboration beyond the On Nigeria program. The Foundation can do this by strategically:

1. **Involving grantees in developing On Nigeria's collaboration approach, and**

2. **Fostering information and knowledge exchange for Nigeria's accountability ecosystem.**

1. Involving Grantees in Developing On Nigeria's Collaboration Approach

The cohort approach implemented by the MacArthur Foundation has a track record of showing how supporting targeted groups of accountability partners while enabling them to work together can be beneficial to creating more granular impact and fighting both retail and grand corruption. This collaborative process can help to enhance how partners work and interact with each other, seeing each other as pursuers of the same goals and interests and not as competitors.

Recommendation:

Engage grantees in co-designing a cohort collaboration framework.

The MacArthur Foundation can co-design a cohort collaboration framework with grantees that can be used to help strengthen collaborations in a way that ensures that advocacy efforts are seen to a logical conclusion and that the impact of their collective work is effectively tracked from start to finish.

2. Fostering Information and Knowledge Exchange for Nigeria's Accountability Ecosystem

Sharing information and knowledge is a critical part of collaboration that the Foundation can uniquely support, starting with On Nigeria partners. This is especially important as Nigeria's ecosystem becomes more crowded, to open up opportunities for partners to complement each other and make it easier for new organizations to develop and more citizen-driven movements to gain traction. The Partners United platform is a unique tool, and with the right support from On Nigeria partners, it can become an enduring space for facilitating collaboration beyond MacArthur support.

Recommendation:
Support the Partners United platform to meet the needs of On Nigeria partners

The Partners United platform has been thoughtfully designed, and the Foundation can support it most effectively by ensuring that it's ongoing development is centered on meeting the needs and ambitions of it's users, namely On Nigeria partners. Areas to consider focusing on include:

- Building On Nigeria partner buy-in and usage of the platform.

- Iterating the platform as a service to the community, based on robust monitoring and user feedback.

- Building capacity for collaboration as well as skills for knowledge production and exchange.

- Ensuring a sustainable model that fosters community participation is in place before On Nigeria ends.