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Introduction

The MacArthur Foundation's Big Bet On Nigeria program supports Nigerian-led efforts to reduce corruption by strengthening accountability, transparency, and participation. In line with the Foundation's Just Imperative, On Nigeria seeks to apply a gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) lens to those efforts.¹ This learning brief builds on [Learning Brief: GESI \(2021\)](#) to explore how On Nigeria 2.0 grantees have integrated GESI considerations into their programming, and to what effect.

Specifically, this learning brief investigates Learning Question 2.2 from On Nigeria's Evaluation and Learning (EL) Framework and Learning Priority 2 (see box).² The evidence in this brief suggests that—consistent with the findings in *Learning Brief: GESI (2021)*—many On Nigeria grantees remain committed to increasing diversity and inclusion in their organizations and further integrating GESI considerations into their programming, despite facing a variety of challenges. Their GESI-related efforts appear to

Learning Question:

2.2 *What strategies are priority grantees using to identify, engage, and support historically disadvantaged communities? What evidence is there on the effectiveness of those strategies? What does the evidence indicate regarding variation of effectiveness across ethnic, sociocultural, and geographical boundaries?*

Learning Priority:

2 *How do grantees come together to address other topics, beyond anticorruption, in the broader accountability ecosystem?*

¹ According to MacArthur Foundation's GESI statement from 2023, "...those at particular risk [to corruption] include women and girls; youth and elderly persons; persons with disabilities; and refugees and internally displaced persons." Following this, this learning brief attempted to focus on those at particular risk, especially in the participant survey, while balancing the ethics and risks of reaching refugees and displaced people and youth.

² In December 2022 and early 2023, the Program Team and EL Partner identified three Learning Priorities to explore throughout the duration of On Nigeria. These priorities complement the EL Framework's Learning Questions.

have contributed to modest improvement in the extent to which historically disadvantaged groups participate in and shape the accountability ecosystem in Nigeria, but more is needed to sustain and consolidate emerging gains.

Sample & Methods

The evidence in this brief is drawn from three interconnected data streams: (1) a document review, (2) key informant interviews, and (3) a survey of On Nigeria programming participants. The underlying methodology is summarized below.

Preliminary Document Review

EnCompass began by reviewing grantee proposals and annual reports from TheLoop, and other GESI-related documents provided by the Technical Assistance (TA) Partners. EnCompass then sorted all On Nigeria grantees into one of three categories, based on the extent of their GESI-related policies and practices, as presented in the reviewed documents:

1. No GESI integration
2. Some GESI integration
3. Clear and Robust GESI integration³

Key Informant Interviews

From each cohort, EnCompass purposively selected one grantee in each GESI category⁴ to participate in key informant interviews (KIIs), and successfully completed 13 KIIs. After the KIIs, EnCompass then recategorized each interviewed grantee, based on the information they provided, to more accurately reflect the extent of their GESI integration (Exhibit 1). In most cases (7 of 13), KII data suggested that grantees had more robust GESI practices than had been apparent in the initial document review. Only one grantee was recategorized to a lower GESI rating after the KIIs.

Exhibit 1. GESI categorization overview

Step 1. Preliminary document review by cohort and number of documents reviewed

	Criminal Justice	Behavior Change	Joinbodi	Media and Journalism	Cross-Cutting	Total
No. of Grantees	14	18	25	20	7	84
No. of Documents Reviewed	25	33	62	29	9	158

³ The criteria for each category are found in Annex 1.

⁴ There are two exceptions to this rule: (1) The Criminal Justice cohort did not have any grantees categorized under Clear and Robust GESI integration at the Preliminary Document Review stage, so two grantees were sampled from the Some GESI integration category; (2) The Cross-Cutting group of grantees is considerably smaller than other cohorts, so only two grantees from this group were included in the interview sample.

Step 2. GESI categorization based on preliminary document review

Category	No. of Criminal Justice Grantees (No. Interviewed)	No. of Behavior Change Grantees (No. Interviewed)	No. of Joinbodi Grantees (No. Interviewed)	No. of Media and Journalism Grantees (No. Interviewed)	No. of Cross-Cutting Grantees (No. Interviewed)	Total (No. Interviewed)
No GESI Integration	4 (1)	9 (1)	4 (1)	4 (0)	3 (1)	24 (4)
Some GESI Integration	10 (2)	8 (1)	14 (1)	7 (1)	3 (1)	42 (6)
Clear/Robust GESI Integration	0 (0)	1 (1)	7 (1)	9 (1)	1 (0)	18 (3)
Total (No. Interviewed)	14 (3)	18 (3)	25 (3)	20 (2)	9 (2)	84 (13)

Step 3. GESI categorization, updated to incorporate KII data

KII	Document Review Category	KII Category
1	No GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
2	Some GESI	Some GESI
3	No GESI	Some GESI
4	Clear/Robust GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
5	Clear/Robust GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
6	Clear/Robust GESI	Some GESI
7	No GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
8	Some GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
9	Some GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
10	Some GESI	Clear/Robust GESI
11	Some GESI	Some GESI
12	No GESI	Some GESI
13	Some GESI	Some GESI

Programming Participant Survey

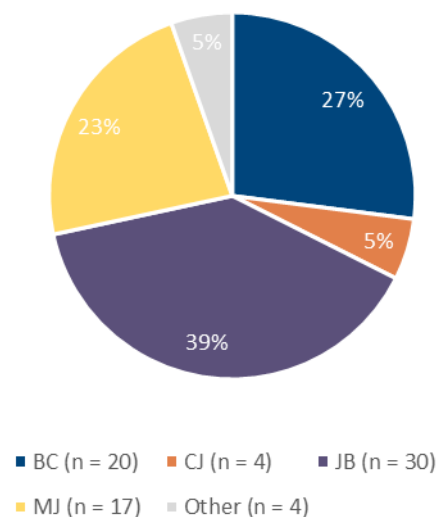
EnCompass also requested that all On Nigeria grantees share the contact information of people who had participated in their programs, distributed a survey to program participants from the 37 grantees that responded, and received 75 complete responses. Forty-five percent of survey respondents were female, 55 percent were male, and 15 percent identified as a person with a disability (Exhibit 3). Behavior Change, Joinbodi, and Media and Journalism programming participants were most represented in the survey, in that order, and Criminal Justice participants were less represented (**Error! Reference source not found.**)⁵

⁵ Note: Survey respondents were asked to identify which grantee they thought had invited them to participate.

Exhibit 3. Survey respondent demographics⁶

	n	%
Gender		
Female	24	45
Male	41	55
Disability Status		
Identifies as disabled	11	15
Does not identify as disabled	63	84
Age		
18–24	3	4
25–34	16	21
35–44	30	40
45–54	17	23
55–64	8	11
65+	1	1
Ethnicity		
Other	22	29
Yoruba	19	25
Hausa	13	17
Igbo	10	13
Ijaw	5	7
Efik	3	4
Kanuri	2	3
Fulani	1	1

Exhibit 2. Percent of survey respondents, by cohort



Findings

The findings below are organized around three lines of inquiry: integration of GESI considerations, emerging GESI successes, and facilitating and limiting factors regarding GESI. Given the limitations of the preliminary document review, findings are drawn primarily from KIIs and survey data.

In 2024, how do grantees integrate GESI considerations in their work?

Finding 1: Though the specifics vary, all grantees reported that their organizations target and/or engage one or more historically disadvantaged group—with women, people with disabilities, and youth being named most frequently. The most common engagement strategies were proactive involvement of target groups in program design (10 grantees) and making accommodations to promote accessibility (13 grantees).

All grantees interviewed seek to support at least one historically disadvantaged group in their work, and all report that women are a focus. Twelve seek to advance the rights of people with disabilities, and nine target youth. Four grantees (one from each cohort) mentioned working with particular

⁶ Note: Survey respondents were asked to identify which grantee they thought had invited them to participate.

tribes/ethnic groups, three named the elderly, and two cited populations in Northern Nigeria. Other grantees mentioned rural populations (one) and prisoners (one) as target groups.

The specific sectors and geographies on which grantees focus shape the decisions they make about who to target, and how to do so. For example, all grantees in the Criminal Justice cohort focus on women but only one works with youth, because youth are rarely among the highly qualified professionals (government officials, judges and judicial actors, and staff from anticorruption agencies and ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) these grantees typically target.

“We have a monitoring and evaluation template we normally use to reach out to target groups and beneficiaries, which gives us feedback, you know, in terms of influencing the program, even not just in program design, but also progress being made in the program.” —Criminal Justice Grantee, KII

Regardless of the specific groups grantees focus on, they consistently reported leveraging two engagement strategies: (1) inclusive program design processes and (2) accommodations to ensure program accessibility (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Strategies for including and accomodating historically disadvantaged groups

Inclusive Design Approaches

Ten grantees (one from Joinbodi, two from Behavior Change, and all grantees from the Criminal Justice, Media and Journalism, and Cross-Cutting cohorts) explained that they leverage a range of strategies to ensure that historically disadvantaged groups influence program design. These strategies include, engaging communities to identify needs and gaps of target audiences (six grantees), leveraging local networks to elevate community voices (three grantees), and holding special events to solicit input. Many grantees also conduct co-creation sessions, through which they engage target groups in proactively designing and even implementing their programs.

Accommodations for Accessibility

All grantees reported making accommodations, with the specifics varying by target group and context. For example, seven grantees make physical accommodations for people with mobility challenges. Six provide interpreters for those with hearing impairments, five translate materials into local languages, and two cover travel and lodging for caregivers and/or dependents. Eleven of the grantees use such accommodations to include historically disadvantaged groups in activities such as stakeholder and steering committee meetings, discussions on governance issues, workshops and training courses, town halls, and media reach, and survey respondents represented participants in these types of activities.

Survey data support these observations: 87 percent of survey respondents reported feeling included in all aspects of the activities in which they participated, with many explaining that the programming was both welcoming and accessible. Some also noted that they relished the opportunity to engage in open discussions, in which they could share their views and ask questions of other participants.

Finding 2: A majority of On Nigeria grantees reported carrying out activities to improve the inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups in the broader accountability ecosystem. These include capacity-building, raising awareness of political and economic rights, and advocating for the rights and representation of excluded groups.

In addition to working to intentionally engage historically disadvantaged groups in their programming, grantees also conduct a number of activities to broaden and deepen the role of such groups in the accountability ecosystem. Specifically, many grantees develop programming that seeks to address the norms or barriers that often prevent historically disadvantaged groups from participating in social accountability work (see blue box), for example, by advocating for a Disability Act in Kaduna State, and seeking to help women feel comfortable expressing themselves in town halls.

“Some of them [women] do not want to speak. Some of them are not quite participatory and I could refer to this during one of our capacity-building workshops, during the International Women’s Day.” —Joinbodi Grantee, KII

The most frequently mentioned barriers to inclusion include: absence of inclusive policies in public spaces and government institutions, prevalence of stereotypes in many cultures, and women and youth’s systemic lack of capacity to engage in the accountability ecosystem.

More generally, grantees and survey respondents noted that workshops, training courses, town halls, and media work are essential elements of their efforts to support engagement in the accountability ecosystem. Grantees leverage these activities to build the capacity of women and youth to understand and take advantage of their economic and political rights; disseminate messaging on governance issues related to historically disadvantaged groups to build awareness; and advocate for or support the implementation of policies and government commitments to women and the elderly.

“One problem we envisaged in designing the concept was people have resigned to fate so to speak, especially in the north, under the guise of respecting elders, people will just say, ‘Well, it is the will of God. This is how Allah willed it,’ and so on and so forth. So we reckoned that, that was in a way fueling the impunity on the part of politicians because they know that no matter what they do there is this docility. People will hardly come out to ask questions let alone to protest and so on and so forth.” — Media and Journalism Grantee, KII

Other, less frequently covered topics that some grantees mentioned included open government, the effects of corruption, skills related to entrepreneurship and technology, proposal writing, and general empowerment.

Finding 3: Not all grantees have *internal* GESI policies. Five of the 13 grantees interviewed reported having such policies in place, three of which reported developing them collaboratively. Four grantees proactively integrate GESI principles into their recruitment practices, and five invest in GESI-related capacity-building for staff.

Five grantees mentioned having an internal policy related to GESI. According to interviewees, these policies serve as tools to help guide staff to ensure GESI considerations inform all internal and external components of their work and serve as implicit accountability mechanisms. Some grantees noted that internal policies are developed collaboratively, with opportunities for staff input (and in one case, a formal role for an internal GESI working group), to ensure they are consistently understood and applied throughout the organization. Two grantees, both from the Joinbodi cohort, mentioned that their organizations conducted internal GESI analyses to identify internal gaps and opportunities for GESI integration.

“If I am talking about the process, honestly, we do not have any written document that we can look at as a policy to that, but we always focus and do it in practice. That is how we impact this issue of GESI into our program, in practice. We have not been able to develop a kind of policy on this GESI of a thing but what we normally do, we know the nature of our work.” —Behavior Change Grantee, KII

Four grantees have employed strategies related to GESI in recruitment and employee retention. Three of these, plus another that did not mention having a GESI-focused recruitment strategy, reported that internal staff represent historically disadvantaged groups. Some grantees reported using internal capacity-building opportunities to strengthen equity in their organizations. For example, three mentioned that they hold training and internal brown-bag sessions for staff to improve their knowledge and skills related to GESI.

What GESI-related success are emerging?

Finding 4: Many grantees from all cohorts are successfully improving the extent to which historically disadvantaged groups are participating in On Nigeria programming.

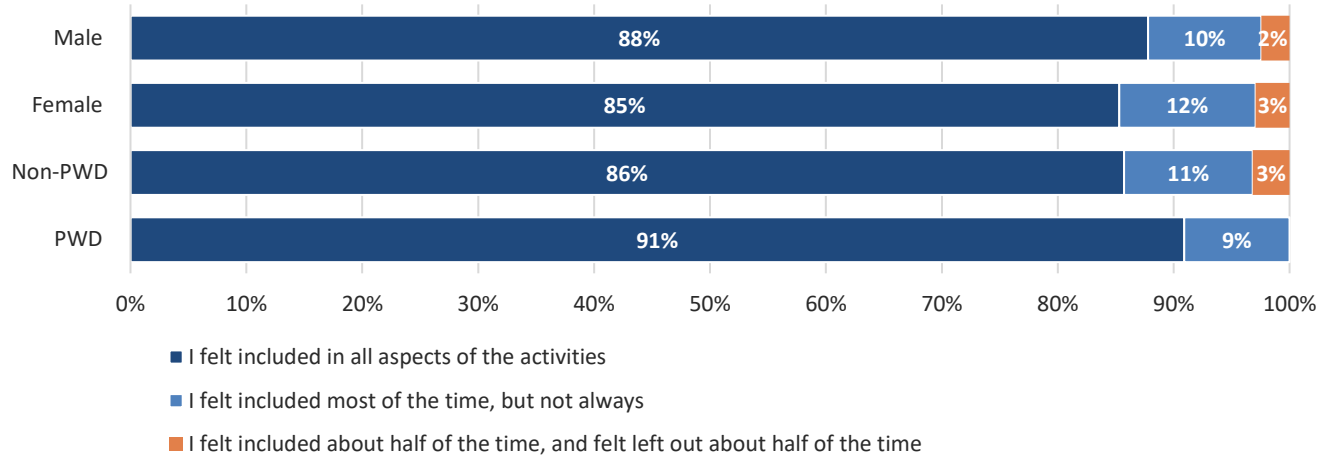
Grantees representing all the cohorts pointed to successes in increasing the participation of people from historically disadvantaged groups, notably women and persons with disabilities, in their programming. Five of 13 grantees reported successfully training, building the skills of, or otherwise empowering women and other historically disadvantaged groups. Three grantees explained that the number of women meaningfully participating in their work has grown, with one noting that they worked with women’s groups to achieve a goal of 30 percent female participation (including women with disabilities) in program activities.

“We have conducted various peace-building activities at the community level, where at the beginning women were not participating at all. However, we have seen an increase in the participation of women in the decision-making process, and leadership roles at the community level.” —Cross-Cutting Grantee, KII

Respondents to the participant survey echoed these sentiments. Participants noted that they felt able to share their views, and no respondents indicated that they felt left out of activities most of or the entire time (Exhibit 5). When asked what they learned in the programming, most mentioned GESI topics, journalism, Nigerian law, how to monitor government activities, and storytelling.

Exhibit 5. Rates of participant inclusion in grantee programming*

In general, which of the following choices best describes how included you felt in the activities you participated in?



*"PWD" refers to "Persons with disabilities"

Finding 5: Both grantees and activity participants reported that On Nigeria has contributed to positive developments that affect historically disadvantaged groups. These include increased engagement with state governments on GESI-related issues, and improvements in political participation and advocacy for and by historically disadvantaged groups.

About half the grantees (six) reported that their programming is advancing outcomes relevant to historically disadvantaged groups. For example:

- A Joinbodi grantee collaborated with women’s groups, youth groups, and persons with disabilities to ensure that Open Government Partnership (OGP) state action plans (in Delta State in particular) included deliberate commitments reflecting the priorities of these groups.
- A Media and Journalism grantee hosted a town hall, after which the Prohibition of Discrimination Against People Living with Disability Law was signed in Kebbi State.
- A Criminal Justice grantee reported that more women and other disadvantaged people have begun showing up to testify as witnesses following the grantee’s work to protect witnesses and whistleblowers.

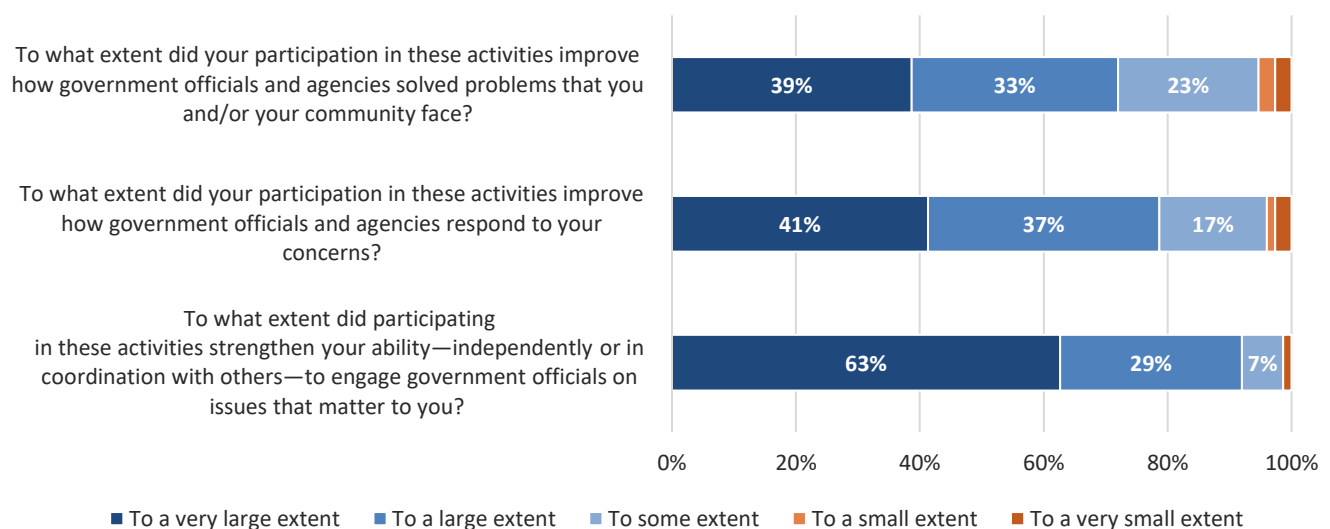
Another improvement was noted in women participating in decision-making processes and taking up leadership roles, with one CJ grantee that works with police reporting an increase in female police

*“And so the commitments will have commitments for women, commitments specifically for youth, and for the excluded group. For us, success is that 26 states have deepened governance and that their commitment is that we take care of the needs of all citizens in these 25 states.” —
Joinbodi Grantee, KII*

officers, including those in leadership roles. Other grantees offered examples of members of historically disadvantaged groups using what they had learned in grantee programming to take action, describing female teachers implementing an anticorruption curriculum in schools, women and youth producing media articles, and women proactively identifying conflicts and building peace and security in their communities.

Activity participants concur with these observations. For example, 92 percent of survey respondents reported that participating in On Nigeria activities strengthened their ability (independently or in coordination with others) to engage government officials on issues that matter to them, with 78 percent noting improvements in government responsiveness, and 72 percent highlighting improvements in how government officials and agencies addressed problems that they and/or their community face (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Participant perspectives on progress toward desired outcomes



Factors that facilitate and challenge GESI integration

Finding 6: Integrating GESI considerations into programming is challenging and often requires additional resources.

Stereotypes and stigma continue to challenge grantees’ efforts to integrate GESI into programming. These factors can make it difficult to reach and support the participation of some groups. For example, several grantees noted that, due to fear or due to men speaking over them, women were sometimes unable to speak up in mixed-gender meetings. One grantee mentioned that stigma regarding mental health challenges makes it difficult to support individuals, including women, in dealing with stress and trauma.

Accessibility remains an issue. Two grantees noted that many venues in Nigeria remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, especially outside of major cities like Abuja. Survey respondents also highlighted this concern, and reported having encouraged some grantees to improve the accessibility and inclusion of their activities. Respondents specifically suggested expanding training courses to more states, including men, youth, and persons with disabilities in activities, and making in-person training more accessible.

A few grantees mentioned that additional resources are needed to strengthen their own GESI programming and support partners' GESI integration work. They noted that resource constraints limit their ability to conduct internal capacity-building on the subject, advocate for GESI with partners and other stakeholders, and in one case, to translate their messaging into local languages.

“So, we would appreciate any additional materials or resources or even training for the organization . . . staff, and if the resources are available to also include our partners, that would be a welcome idea. Because if something is repeated over and over again, it helps in internalization of the knowledge and making it a culture, a way of life of the people.” — Criminal Justice Grantee, KII

Finding 7: Grantees use several approaches—the deployment of internal and external feedback mechanisms, strategic engagement of partners, and proactive leadership—to overcome obstacles, strengthen meaningful engagement, and improve outcomes for historically disadvantaged groups.

Grantees highlighted several approaches that are particularly important to the success of their GESI work. These include the following.

Collecting and Using Feedback

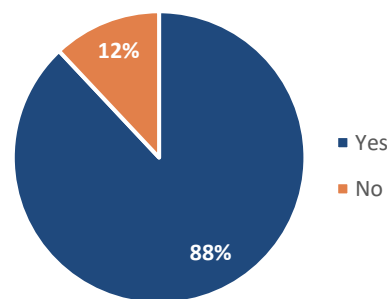
Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents reported they had been contacted by grantee organizations to discuss their experience and what the organizations could do better in the future (**Error! Reference source not found.**). KII participants confirmed the importance of soliciting and using feedback, as well as stakeholder engagement, in the design and implementation of their programming.

Creating Feedback Loops between Historically Disadvantaged Groups and Others

Grantees emphasized the utility of making space for historically disadvantaged groups to provide feedback directly to other ecosystem actors. For example, one grantee discussed their success in conducting town halls by having women and persons with disabilities present and empowered to speak to policymakers, because it is best for policymakers to hear about firsthand experiences directly from those who are affected. Others mentioned providing room for women to speak and be heard in safe spaces.

Exhibit 7. Feedback mechanisms

After participating in any of these activities, did anyone from the organization reach out to ask about your experience and what they could do better in the future?



Strategic Engagement

Grantees also strategically engage others in their work with historically disadvantaged groups in ways that make a difference to their programming, and to the outcomes they seek to achieve. They do so in various ways. For example:

- Five of the grantees interviewed pointed out that obtaining buy-in from gatekeepers and leaders among their target audience enables them to more successfully integrate GESI considerations into their work.
- One grantee works with religious leaders in conservative communities to successfully reach women who would otherwise be inaccessible in those communities.
- Two grantees create buy-in for their programming through employing diverse staff to engage historically disadvantaged groups, with one grantee noting that having someone at the organization from the disabled community can help with both outreach and understanding the needs of the community.
- Other grantees have fostered relationships with their partners over time or use their own work as an example for their partners of the benefits of incorporating GESI.

An MJ grantee also noted that the inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups in programming has added value to their organization's overall goal, sharing that women and youth they have trained contribute back to the program by using the knowledge they gain.

Proactive Leadership

More than half of the grantees noted that commitment from leadership such as board members, founders, directors general, and other senior management is important for promoting GESI, both within their organizations and in programming. They noted that leadership commitment reinforces GESI as a value and influences staff at every level, especially when leaders require program alignment with GESI policies ensuring that these aspects are integrated into all programs. Some grantees have incorporated GESI into organization-wide policies or designated a gender desk or officer to guide their programming. One grantee described how attending a fellow cohort member's event inspired the organization to create its own gender policy to inform its own programming.

"I think that the leadership support that we got at our organization in terms of the commitment of everyone within the organization to promote GESI as a core value within the organization is an enabler. Our policies and strategies explicitly support gender equality, and then social inclusion."—Cross-Cutting Grantee. KII

Finding 8: Many grantees do not yet have or make use of tools to deepen their GESI integration work, and several requested additional support for incorporating GESI into their programming and ways of working.

Grantees acknowledged that their GESI integration efforts—both in their programming, and internally—are a work in progress. For example, knowledge and understanding of the TA Partner’s GESI Integration Tool remains patchy, at best. Some grantees were completely unaware of this tool, while others conflated it with monitoring and evaluation frameworks that had been provided by the TA Partner. Only four grantees, two of whom had attended a TA Partner-led training, reported that they have used the GESI Integration Tool. Two grantees recommended improvements to the tool, including consulting with local organizations and being sensitive to the local context.

“ . . . if at all, any GESI document is being developed, I just recommend that the input of some of these local organizations should be thought of because they know the environment very well and of course they have some good advice to offer while developing the framework. I think their input is very important and critical.” —Behavior Change Grantee, KII

Three grantees in the Clear/Robust GESI category mentioned that they would benefit from other support to further integrate GESI into their work. They specifically requested training to help better institutionalize GESI internally and better share GESI concepts and skills with partners, as well as financing to translate online articles into local languages and share GESI messaging and advocacy with state-level partners to build additional buy-in for incorporating GESI aspects of the work.

Although all 13 grantees reported having systems for measuring the success of their GESI work, only five—representing all cohorts except Media and Journalism—collect GESI-relevant data using surveys, indicators, and other methods. Of these five, only one is part of the group of grantees that have internal GESI policies (see Finding 3).

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Consistent with the evidence from the 2021 GESI Learning Brief, On Nigeria grantees still demonstrate commitment to engaging a variety of historically disadvantaged groups in their work, and most leverage several strategies to do so.

In 2021, 58 percent of On Nigeria grantees emphasized that further integrating GESI considerations into their work was a priority, and many reported that they had already sought to engage historically disadvantaged groups in their On Nigeria programming. They did so in a variety of ways, including seeking to make their programming accessible to such groups, but admitted that lingering challenges regarding accessibility and social norms posed serious challenges for their engagement efforts. In the years since, grantees’ commitment to engaging historically disadvantaged groups, and improving the inclusion of previously excluded communities in the accountability ecosystem, has remained strong.

This clear commitment is borne out in a variety of ways, from some grantees’ efforts to strengthen their own internal GESI policies and practices, to the consistent targeting and deployment of different strategies to boost the participation of such groups in On Nigeria programming. Still, more is needed further broaden and deepen engagement of historically disadvantaged groups in the accountability ecosystem.

Conclusion 2: On Nigeria programming is contributing to emerging changes in the accountability ecosystem that matter for historically disadvantaged groups, but these changes are not yet widespread. Grantees and ecosystem actors have more to do to sustain, consolidate, and scale their GESI work in the future.

In 2021, grantees expressed interest in more support to better understand and incorporate GESI into their programming, while also making efforts to strategically engage partners and communities in their programming as well as integrate GESI considerations into program design. The evidence in this brief suggests that at least some grantees have improved their application of GESI approaches and are leveraging an emerging range of practices to overcome persistent obstacles that affect the engagement and well-being of historically disadvantaged groups in the accountability ecosystem.

In line with the Foundation's commitment to the Just Imperative, emerging evidence documented in this brief suggests that grantees' application of GESI approaches is both boosting the inclusiveness of their work, and contributing to improvements in the extent to which historically disadvantaged groups are engaged in the broader accountability ecosystem. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities have been the most visible beneficiaries of these efforts. Women, for example, are leveraging accountability mechanisms to make their voices heard and, in some places, government officials are responding to and addressing the concerns of the disadvantaged.

These emerging gains, however, are mostly quite localized. To make further progress, accountability ecosystem actors need to build up their GESI skills and practices—support is just as relevant now as it was three years ago, and knowledge of what has been done (e.g., the TA Partner's GESI Integration Tool) is still quite limited. Fostering collaboration within the cohort model and beyond could provide a platform for bespoke skill sharing and further advancing collective commitment to and practices around GESI in ways that make sense in local contexts throughout the country.

