

Action Points from the Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance (NCSPA) Retreat Issued after a retreat at Francines Place Hotel, Uyo, Akwa-Ibom on the 25th-27th July 2024

The Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance (NCSPA), instituted by the Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) convened a three-day retreat for its Board, National Coordinating Committee (NCC), and selected members at Uyo, Akwa-Ibom, from the 25th to 27th of July, 2024. This retreat aimed to strengthen the alliance's strategies and operational frameworks for protecting civic space in Nigeria.

The Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance (NCSPA) retreat was a significant step forward in consolidating efforts to protect Nigeria's Civic Space. Through strategic planning, collaborations, partnership and capacity building, NCSPA is poised to make substantial progress in advocating for democracy, human rights, and sustainable economic strengthening for NDEBUMOG's affiliates and women (Shadow Budget) groups. The retreat fostered a renewed commitment among participants to work collectively towards achieving the goals of NCSPA, by ensuring that civic space in Nigeria remains vibrant and protected

Among Presentations Delivered at the Retreat Were:

1. Introduction to Fair for All (F4A) - Power of Voices (PVP) Pathways: Nigeria within the Context of F4A's Global Community. Introduction of the F4A's initiative and its relevance to Nigeria, emphasizing global connections and shared goals.
2. Introduction to Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance: A comprehensive overview of NCSPA's mission, vision, and objectives was provided.
3. Democracy, Human Rights and Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance (NCSPA) NCC's Perspectives: The NCC highlighted their views on deepening democracy, good governance, transparency, accountability and human rights within the context of protecting the civic space in Nigeria.
4. Situational Dynamics and Challenges of Civic Space in Nigeria: Setting the Agenda for NCSPA: Key challenges facing civic space in Nigeria were discussed, setting the stage for NCSPA's strategic agenda.
5. Human Rights of Citizens and the Role of National Parliament: An exploration of the parliament's role in policy reforms that safeguard citizens' rights, monitoring government action to prevent encroachment into civic space, enquiries/protection against rights violation, protection of whistleblowers, promoting transparency in governance, and international cooperation. Engaging special committees (public petition, host communities, corporate social responsibility, human right etc.) and standing committees at the national parliament.

6. Nigeria Civic Space Alliance - Constructive Ways for Synergies with the Police and Other Security Agencies: Discussions on fostering collaborative relationships between NCSPA, the police, and other security agencies to protect civic space. The session harped on understanding the human right elements in the Police Act 2020 and modalities for engagements in protecting both rights and space of citizens.

7. Public Finance and Civic Space: Options for Democratic Alliance through Lobbying for Effective Funding of Nigeria's Human Rights Agencies - Strategies to secure adequate funding for Civic Space and Human Right protection were examined. Funding Strategies and Template for Sustainable Funding for Alliance - Practical approaches to securing sustainable funding for NCSPA were shared.

8. Developing Strategic Plan for NCSPA: Fundamental Factors and Circle for Each Plan. Insights into essential elements and processes for an effective implementation of a 7 year Strategic Plan for NCSPA (2024-2031).

9. Discussion on Why Coalitions and Alliances Fail in Nigeria: Overcoming the Challenges in NCSPA - Identification of common pitfalls in Nigeria's coalitions and strategies for overcoming these challenges. Also discussed were concrete Innovation for Synergies between Nigeria Civic Space Protection Alliance (NCSPA), Shadow Budget Groups (SBGs) and Other Actors in Human Rights Protection across Nigeria

10. Presentation of Draft NCSPA Strategic Plan: The draft strategic plan for NCSPA was presented and reviewed, including, the critical Role of Shadow Budget Groups for the Sustainability of NCSPA was also discussed.

Observations

The following were observations by participants during the 3-day Retreat

1. **Current State of Civic Space:** Notable challenges facing the civic space in Nigeria, including restrictive laws that shrinks the civic space, government repression and harassment of civil society actors, disinformation campaigns and manipulation of public opinion, shrinking funding, and insufficient cooperation from security agencies - participants shared mixed experiences with the police and other security agencies, highlighting the need for improved relationship and mutual understanding.

2. **Poor visibility of local actors, engagements, and participation:** Increased risks faced by activists, media actors, human rights defenders and civil society organizations (CSOs) has limited platforms for local actors to make valuable contributions that will amplify voices and strengthens the civic space.

3. **The necessity for a clear, comprehensive and SMART strategic plan:** NCSPA adopted a strategic plan that focuses to address challenges in protecting civic space,

as well as the importance of aligning NCSPA's strategic objectives with broader national and international frameworks.

4. **Funding Constraints:** participants identified gaps for sustainable funding for NCSPA and its activities, recognizing the need for innovative funding approaches and stronger financial strategies.

5. **Current legislative frameworks:** Participants identified gaps around the civic space, calling for proactive engagement approaches with the national parliament, review of existing policies and laws to safeguard the civic space

6. **Insufficient public awareness:** the importance of effective civic space, capacity of actors to engage with policymakers, with constructive strategies to educate and mobilize the public on the need to amplify voices under the FAIR for All – Power of Voices (PVP) Initiative.

Recommendations Adopted by Participants:

1. To develop and implement joint training programs on human rights and civic space protection, geared towards enhancing collaboration and partnership through regular forums for dialogue and collaboration between NCSPA, the police, and other security agencies to build trust and effective cooperation.

2. To Strengthen Legislative Frameworks through engagements with the national parliament towards advocating for the review of policies and laws that safeguard civic space and protection of human rights, as well as monitor challenges and legislations that threatens civic space.

3. Adoption of Sustainable Funding Strategies for NCSPA at this retreat through diversified funding sources by exploring partnerships with international donors, private sector entities, and crowdfunding initiatives for local actors. This brought stimulated the need to develop a robust funding strategy for NSCPA.

4. Commit to implement continuous in-house capacity-building programs for NCSPA members, focusing on sustainability planning, advocacy and fundraising. Facilitate exchange programs, learning visits and study tours to cross-fertilize ideas from successful civic space protection initiatives in other countries.

5. Launch sub-national and nationwide public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the importance of civic space and their rights, utilizing various media platforms, including social media, radio, and community outreaches to reach diverse audiences.

6. Draft strategic plan for NCSPA was reviewed, refined, and adopted with the consensus of all participants; to ensure effective implementation of the adopted strategic plan, NCSPA's- NCC agreed to set up a dedicated desk at NDEBUMOG's headquarters to follow up progress; develop a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of NCSPA's activities and necessary modifications and adjustments, where necessary.

7. Foster innovation and synergies by encouraging collaborative projects and programs between NCSPA, Shadow Budget Groups (SBGs), and other human rights actors, leveraging the strengths and expertise of different stakeholders to enhance civic space protection efforts across Nigeria.

Conclusion:

The retreat concluded with a renewed commitment for members to work collaboratively among all stakeholders towards protecting and expanding civic space and democratic freedom in Nigeria. Participants expressed their profound appreciation to Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) for organizing the retreat for Board, National Coordinating Committee and members of the alliance.

These action points were adopted at the end of the retreat on the 27th day of July, 2024, at Francine's Place Hotel, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Board Chair, NCSPA

Members of National Coordinating Committee, NCSPA

NDEBUMOG Shadow Budget Groups