

Case Study – July 2022

# Third Party Monitoring of National Social Investment Programs in Nigeria – An Uncommon Opening from Above

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## Notes on Support

Support for ARC comes from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. ARC's work is also made possible by institutional support from the School of International Service, American University.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their support and contributions while researching this case study. Adeduntan Adewale (ActionAid Nigeria) for assisting to set up all the interviews and providing additional information on the politics surrounding the implementation of TPM; staff of ActionAid Nigeria for their insights into the organization and implementation of TPM; Maryam Uwais for the in-depth interview on TPM and implementation of the N-SIP; and all the CSOs leaders interviewed during the case study.

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# Acronyms

AAS	<i>Adivasi Adhikar Samiti</i>
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
EU	European Union
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
SHRC	State Health Resources Center

## Introduction

In 2018, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria seized a rare opportunity provided by government to monitor the implementation of the government's National Social Investment Programs (N-SIP). The opening from above for third-party monitoring (TPM) of the N-SIP was created by Maryam Uwais, the Special Adviser to the President on Social Investments, who was the head of National Social Investment Office (NSIO). Prior to her appointment as a Special Adviser, she had experience working in civil society, which motivated her to rely on CSOs to promote transparency and accountability in the implementation of N-SIP. When she was appointed the head of the NSIO, she invited ActionAid Nigeria to assist her in coordinating the activities of the CSOs to monitor the social investment programs. Most importantly, she was interested in having an independent assessment of the N-SIP to ascertain whether the interventions really touched the lives of citizens as intended.

The opening from the above and the collective action from below by CSOs that it facilitated is described as a sandwich strategy. The sandwich strategy describes efforts by a state actor to enable bottom-up collective action in order to jointly pressure public sector actors for greater accountability and institutional change. The sandwich strategy relies on the mutually reinforcing interaction between pro-reform actors in both state and society, not just initiatives from one or the other arena. What it means to "enable" collective action varies greatly by context and is dependent on the nature of the political regime as well as the contours of civil society and the particular sector. However, evidence for an "enabling environment" refers to tangible actions by state actors that reduce the costs and risks often inherent in collective action. This case examines the opportunity created for CSOs by Maryam Uwais to monitor the social investment programs. The case details factors that motivated the state actor to create the opening, actions taken by the social actors, government's response to the collective action, outcomes of the collective action, and backlash that followed the collective action.

During his 2015 campaign for the presidency, then-candidate Muhammadu Buhari promised to initiate and implement pro-poor programs to lift millions of Nigerians out of poverty. Following his election, the federal government launched the N-SIP portfolio of programs in 2016 to deliver socio-economic support to disadvantaged Nigerians across the country at a cost of approximately one billion dollars per year (Akintola 2022). Since 1990, the Nigerian federal government has made over twenty-six attempts to implement social protection programs. All these initiatives were plagued with various challenges because there was no comprehensive and synchronized policy in place for social protection. This resulted in poor implementation, overlapping of roles, and was coupled with ineffective monitoring, evaluation, and accountability (NSIO 2018).

N-SIP has four clusters:

- i. Job Creation and Youth Employment (N-Power): an employability and enhancement program aimed at imbuing the learn-work-entrepreneurship culture in youth aged eighteen–thirty-five that provides a monthly stipend of N30,000 (approx. U.S. \$85 at the time of the program launch in 2016) to those engaged;
- ii. National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP): intended to provide one nutritious, balanced meal each school day to 5.5 million pupils in classes one to three in public primary schools;
- iii. National Cash Transfer Program (NCTP): provides targeted monthly cash transfers of N5,000 (approx. U.S. \$15 at the time of the program launch in 2016) to poor and vulnerable households, with the ultimate aim of graduating them out of poverty; and
- iv. Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program (GEEP): aims to provide micro lending to 1.66 million businesses at the bottom of the financial pyramid run by traders, women's cooperatives, market women, enterprising youth, farmers, and agricultural workers (NSIO 2018).

Strategic objectives of N-SIP are to:

- Increase the number of poor and vulnerable households with access to income/livelihood by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shocks;
- Reduce inequalities and wide disparities;
- Increase access to education and health services, as well as empower vulnerable sectors thereby improving the quality-of-life index;
- Reduce the rate of youth unemployment, linking interested volunteers to address existing gaps;
- Eradicate malnutrition in school-aged children by establishing a sustainable school feeding program;
- Provide affordable credit for micro, small, and medium enterprises, thereby increasing business revenue and facilitating market linkages;
- Stimulate productivity and growth, especially in rural communities;
- Bring into visibility those who have never before been registered on any platform by capturing identities as required by law, for proper planning; and
- Promote access to financial services and increase the rate of financial inclusion (NSIO 2018).

TPM focused on three of the four social investment programs: HGSFP, N-Power, and GEEP, for the period May to November 2018 (N-SIP Third-Party Monitoring Report” 2019). Overall, the TPM covered twenty-one out of thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, with one CSO per state responsible for up to six community-based organizations (CBOs) in that state to carry out the monitoring. The process identified 2,170,166 beneficiaries across 277 local government areas in twenty-one states where data collation was complete. In most states, the monitoring covered seventy percent of local government areas, but in some larger states, like Kano, only twenty percent of local government areas were covered (N-SIP Third-Party Monitoring Report” 2019).

TPM was just one strand of the monitoring process adopted by the NSIO. There were also: independent monitors (citizens from each local government area); program monitors from each cluster; and security agents from the Directorate of State Security, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. The independent monitors program was launched in 2018 with three thousand monitors recruited across the nation covering all 774 local governments who reported their findings to the NSIO every month. The NSIO triangulated reports from all the monitoring strands to give a holistic picture of what happened on the field, as well as to fill information gaps.

The remainder of the case study describes the different steps in the sandwich strategy process as it relates to TPM of the N-SIP: triggers, the opening from the state, the collective action in response, roadblocks, and outcomes. This case study is based on extensive literature review on the TPM, including the final report of the TPM submitted by ActionAid Nigeria, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants by the author. In all, seventeen people were interviewed over a period of twelve weeks. Key informants included staff from ActionAid Nigeria, technical staff from the NSIO, leaders of CSOs, and journalists who investigated the implementation of some of the social investment programs. Table 1 lists those interviewed and gives a number used to reference interviews in the text. Newspaper articles and other publications provided additional information.

## Triggers for State Action

When government launched the N-SIP in 2016, misinformation and complaints about the program abounded. Some people believed that the N-SIP was a hoax, that no child was fed in the school feeding program, and that it was rather an avenue for siphoning money from the government purse. Traditional and social media reported different negative stories about the program. According to an ActionAid Nigeria staff member:

There were so much complains and misunderstanding about the program. People felt they were not part of the selection process, that it was faulty, and you need to be part of a political party before you can benefit from the programs. So, there was need to involve CSOs and CBOs in monitoring the programs and create awareness on what the programs are all about and how people can benefit from them.<sup>1</sup>

The trigger for the sandwich strategy was the appointment of Maryam Uwais as the Special Adviser to the President on N-SIP and the head of the NSIO, the technical office that managed the social investment programs. In this role, she reported directly to Vice President Osinbajo. As part of her responsibilities, she managed the implementation of the programs and coordinated the relationships between and with various stakeholders working on the N-SIP. For instance, she coordinated the activities of cluster heads supervising each program under N-SIP. She had enormous administrative and political influence over the programs, and she threw her support behind the TPM.

Because of her background in civil society, she believed that working with CSOs would bring credibility to government programs. Without her buy-in and support, it would have been difficult if not impossible for the CSOs to conduct the TPM. Explaining her motive for supporting the CSOs to monitor the N-SIP, she said, "I was so worried and concerned about the fact that the beneficiaries could get short-changed or extortion could happen, and we needed to continuously work on improving emerging concerns about the programs."<sup>2</sup> She explained that poor people are vulnerable and do not have access to the media or other forms of communication channels, and so can easily be exploited. She further stated:

It is critical for us that are working with vulnerable people to know how we are actually impacting the people, and if there is any disruption in the process, we need to be able to address them and nip them in the bud as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup>

Maryam Uwais' desire to make the program a success stemmed from her personal history pursuing people-oriented programs. She had worked with the vice president, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, when he was Lagos State Attorney General to decongest Lagos prisons by taking up the cases of many prisoners locked up indefinitely on minor charges. Through these kinds of activities, over the years she built up considerable political capital.

## Opening from Above

The Special Adviser to the President said the idea of TPM was birthed when the former country director of ActionAid Nigeria paid a courtesy visit to her office. According to her, ActionAid Nigeria asked how they could support her in her new role as the head of N-SIP. They proposed to hold a national conference on social protection, but she stated that what she really needed was support monitoring the social investment programs. "What have we achieved with all the conferences we had held in the past?"<sup>4</sup> she asked. Instead, the critical tangible action she took to enable collective action was to request that CSOs monitor the N-SIP. According to her:

I told them, support us with the conglomerate of CSO actors who will focus on monitoring the SIP and give us feedback so that we can continuously improve on what we are doing. We are aware that Nigeria is vast, and my responsibility at the federal [level] is limited to coordination. And because every state is autonomous in the Federation, we really have no control of what happened at the other end.<sup>5</sup>

There was genuine concern that federal government programs would not be executed faithfully at the state level because each state is autonomous and, in some cases, the state governors belonged to different political party than that of the president, so there was need for pressure from below to ensure they followed through with their obligations to the N-SIP. The Special Adviser to the President explained that it would be difficult to get a program like the N-SIP right in a country as big as Nigeria, but that “we could work towards perfection.” In addition to her request for CSOs to assist with monitoring the N-SIP, she convinced the vice president (her immediate boss) to approve the idea of TPM by the CSOs. “My immediate principal, the vice president, was sold on the idea from the beginning. When I explained to him what we were planning to do with ActionAid Nigeria, he said, ‘Of course that’s good.’”<sup>6</sup> The vice president supported this initiative because he believed that CSOs monitoring of N-SIP would give more credibility to the programs. Maryam Uwais also ensured that CSOs had unrestricted access to information about each component of the programs, which was critical because many people (including the CSOs) did not understand how each program worked. Such information sharing builds trust between government and CSOs. Through these various forms of support, the Special Adviser to the President granted the CSOs the legitimacy required to conduct the TPM.

In addition to asking the CSOs to monitor the TPM, she reduced the cost of collective action by CSOs through the following actions:

- She supported ActionAid by covering the cost of advertisements placed in the national newspapers requesting for expressions of interest from CSOs across the country. This was a significant contribution given the prohibitive cost of such advertisements (N500,000 per page);<sup>7</sup>
- She granted CSOs access to the N-SIP state coordinators who led program implementation at the state level throughout the thirty-six states and Federal Capital Territory;
- She facilitated engagements between CSOs and the federal-level cluster heads of N-SIP programs;
- She funded the mobilization and transportation of CSOs deployed nationwide to conduct the TPM;
- She gave the CSOs unhindered access to conduct the TPM; and
- She convinced the N-SIP steering committee, comprised of seven cabinet ministers and chaired by the vice president, that TPM would not hurt government, but instead would enhance government credibility as well as promote transparency and accountability. To do this, she gave a presentation to the steering committee on the methodology of TPM and its benefits. Some of the ministers expressed concerns and unwillingness to approve such an exercise, but with the overwhelming support of the vice president, the steering committee approved the idea of TPM.

All these steps were important, particularly in a context where monitoring was viewed with suspicion. Government officials tend to not trust CSOs because they are frequently critical of government activities.

Among the factors that motivated Maryam Uwais to create this unprecedented opening for the CSOs include a desire to:

- Promote transparency and accountability in the implementation of N-SIP;
- Have an independent assessment of whether the social investment programs are touching the lives of people in the communities as promised;



- Use the CSOs to explain the implementation of the N-SIP to the people; and
- Strengthen the capacity of CSOs in monitoring government initiatives.

According to one of the civil society leaders “I think government wanted to open itself up ... government was also eager to get feedback from the CSOs to know whether the program is working or not.”<sup>8</sup> Another CSO leader observed that aside from promoting transparency and accountability in the implementation of N-SIP, “partnering with CSOs to monitor the SIP brings credibility to the programs.”<sup>9</sup> The Special Adviser attributed the adoption of the TPM effort to the leadership of the vice president. According to her, the vice president was very transparent in his approach since the beginning of the program:

It was the vice president’s idea that we set up a steering committee comprising key ministers to oversee the implementation of the program. And in the selection of ministers, when I did the list and presented it to him, he agreed and added one or two others to it. So, I really enjoyed his support.<sup>10</sup>

The broader NSIO team was also very willing to receive feedback on program implementation. “We were quite intentional that this program is going to be a learning program, where we will be open to feedback from the citizens on how to improve it.”<sup>11</sup> The NSIO team’s openness to public scrutiny and feedback in order to improve the implementation of the social investment programs was unusual among public servants. The positive leadership provided by Uwais as well as the fact that some of the NSIO staff shared her approach facilitated this openness. More broadly, the government believed that partnering with CSOs would help correct wrong perceptions about the N-SIP. The state actors saw the TPM as an opportunity to sensitize citizens, including CSOs, about the details and implementation strategies of various N-SIP programs. In addition, President Buhari had campaigned on the platform of transparency and accountability, therefore, his government was committed to tracking the resources deployed to the social investment programs as well as gauging their impact. Above all, the state actors were determined to do things differently.

The state action was enabled by other actors including donor agencies, CSOs, independent media, traditional rulers, and community leaders. For example, ActionAid Nigeria’s involvement gave the state actors some level of comfort and confidence to propose and support the idea of TPM. ActionAid Nigeria had distinguished itself as a credible organization by its policy of refusing government funding for its programs. The large number of CSOs that expressed interest in participating in the TPM (described below) also assured the NSIO about the importance of the monitoring effort and gave the government, and ActionAid Nigeria, confidence to proceed. Ford Foundation and the UK’s Department for International Development provided resources to support the deployment and logistics of monitors at the national and subnational levels. Specifically, the UK funded ActionAid through the PERL (Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn) program to train and coordinate other CSOs and constituency-based citizen groups to carry out the monitoring across the country. PERL also provided technical assistance to ActionAid to plan and design a cost-effective option for third party monitoring (“PERL Most Significant Change Case Study 2020/2021). The Gates Foundation supported the NSIO with six technical staff and the development of a monitoring app called “Track-With-Us” used by the monitors for data collection.

# Collective Action in Response to Opening from Above

The scale of the social action was both national and subnational. Involved CSOs wanted to improve service delivery and accountability. Because of the huge amount of funds committed to N-SIP by the government, social actors were interested in 'following the money' to ensure that these resources got to the target beneficiaries. In addition to CSOs, traditional rulers, community leaders, faith-based leaders, and journalists also participated in and/or supported the monitoring of the N-SIP. In response to the opening from above, CSOs quickly organized themselves and 'stepped' into the space created by the state actors. Through its various poverty prevention programs, ActionAid Nigeria had extensive experience in areas related to the N-SIP, including organizing CBOs to monitor various government intervention programs, particularly in the areas of education, health, poverty reduction, food and agriculture. ActionAid had shared interests with its partners at the state and community levels and used this leverage to recruit CSOs for the TPM.

ActionAid Nigeria immediately convened a CSO conference on social protection where a steering committee was formed to coordinate the implementation of TPM. About two thousand CSO representatives from all over the country attended the conference. "The fact that people came in such a huge number without expecting to be paid any transportation allowance, accommodation reimbursement, and feeding says a lot. They took care of themselves for the two days in Abuja. So, that level of response gave us the confidence and ownership from the beginning."<sup>12</sup> At the conference, those present decided that government should fund the CSOs to monitor the program, and ActionAid Nigeria would look for independent funding to coordinate the CSOs. Other national CSOs closely involved in the TPM included the Nigerian Union of Teachers, the Country Women's Association of Nigeria, the Small-Scale Women Farmers Organization of Nigeria, the National Association of Women Journalists, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All, and the National Association of Nigerian Traders. These organizations provided representatives to monitor the programs in different states; the leadership of some of these organizations also constituted the TPM's steering committee.

ActionAid Nigeria adopted a transparent approach in the recruitment of CSOs across the country to carry out monitoring of the N-SIP. With the financial support from the office of the vice president, ActionAid placed advertisements in newspapers asking for expressions of interest from CSOs to participate in the monitoring. "Over eight thousand CSOs applied to participate in the program nationwide when it was advertised."<sup>13</sup> Some of the criteria listed for participation included community outreach capacity, experience in monitoring and evaluation, strong organizational systems and structures, program management skills, and solid governance structure.

In the second stage of the recruitment process, ActionAid shortlisted two to three organizations from each state, assessed the capacity and capability of the shortlisted organizations, and based on the assessment, selected one CSO from each state. This CSO signed a memorandum of understanding with ActionAid, and then received training on how to conduct TPM. With the support of ActionAid Nigeria, each leading CSO identified six CBOs in the state with which to collaborate. These CBOs were required to be well grounded in the community and to have the capacity to support the monitoring process. ActionAid then trained the selected CBOs on TPM,

data collection tools, and methodology. At the end of the training, the coordinating CSO in each state introduced them to relevant government officials and other stakeholders.

Recruiting a sufficient number of qualified organizations proved difficult in some regions as the capacity of leading CSOs and CBOs was not even across the country. Some regions of the country had a large pool of qualified CSOs that applied to be part of the process, but in other regions, ActionAid Nigeria struggled to find qualified CSOs. As a result, the monitoring capabilities of organizations varied. In some instances, some CBOs could not effectively complete the monitoring forms. ActionAid Nigeria overcame this problem by continuous training of the monitors. Another challenge was that although the majority of the organizations that applied were very enthusiastic about the process, some of them were mainly there for the money.<sup>14</sup>

The independent media supported collective action. ActionAid Nigeria partnered with independent media houses that participated in monitoring the N-SIP across the six geopolitical zones of the country. The media houses deployed investigative journalists to the field to investigate and report on the program's implementation, challenges, and successes. The journalists conducted interviews with beneficiaries, community leaders, and government officials at the local level to confirm the authenticity of the programs and other claims by the government such as the amount being paid to beneficiaries of the N-Power program. They presented reports on each component of the N-SIP and produced a special documentary on each cluster of the program. Both radio and television stations aired the reports. According to one of the journalists, "people were very honest and open about the questions we asked them. There were no prior prep for camera and they didn't tell me who to speak to. The field visit was an eye opener, and it enriched our stories."<sup>15</sup> The journalist felt that the independent media helped recognize and amplify citizens' voices. "Initially many people did not understand what was going on with SIP, while some did not believe the programs were real. However, that perception changed because images from the videos and pictures from the field were very interesting and compelling."<sup>16</sup>

Traditional rulers and community leaders also enabled successful implementation of the TPM. CSOs initially approached community leaders, who then facilitated access to people in their communities, assisted in organizing people to meet with the CSOs, and supported the data gathering efforts of the CSOs. Engaging community and faith-based leaders by CSOs was a strategic move. These leaders had a vested interest in the programs because the beneficiaries were from their communities, and some of them had even been approached earlier by community members requesting participation in these programs. The TPM effort thus provided a good platform for community and faith-based leaders to speak on behalf of their people about how the N-SIP had impacted them and the community, as well as challenges they faced.

The NSIO had developed a draft monitoring and evaluation framework prior to the conceptualization of TPM, but later presented it to the involved CSOs for review and input. The Ministry of Planning led the review process and finalization of the framework in collaboration with the CSOs. Because of the extent of the N-SIP, the monitoring and evaluation framework included specific indicators for each program. For instance, the school feeding program had performance indicators like: "Is the food getting to the pupils? Are the cooks following the food timetable? What is the quality and quantity of the food served? How often are the aggregators supplying the eggs/protein? Are there delays in the supply chain? Are the cooks getting paid and when?" Similarly, in the N-Teach program, there were performance indicators that measured issues such as: "Are the participants coming to school regularly? Are they getting paid regularly? What is the rate of absenteeism? What is the quality of the teaching?"<sup>17</sup> Although there were multiple

indicators selected for monitoring, CSOs felt that the most important part of monitoring was to ensure improvement in service delivery.<sup>18</sup>

The TPM process adopted a bottom-up reporting approach agreed upon by the CSO steering committee and the N-SIP office. CBOs collected data from beneficiaries within communities and then submitted weekly reports to the state-level CSOs. The state coordinator then collated these reports from CBOs and submitted them to the Zonal Coordinator, who submitted a report to the steering committee. The steering committee and ActionAid Nigeria collated, edited, and validated the report before sharing it with government at a quarterly meeting. During the quarterly meeting, CSOs shared findings from the field across different clusters nationwide. Though the monitoring ended in November 2018, the CSOs continued to meet with NSIO until the final report was released in July 2019.

Explaining how the report validation process worked, a senior staff of the NSIO stated that:

The interesting thing is that the process makes us to call for accountability and demand for reliable results from the CSOs as well. We reviewed reports from the CSOs and ensured that it is comparable with other strands of monitoring... The same feedback that CSOs give us must be comparable with independent monitors, comparable with program monitors etc. So, we do a lot of triangulations in our results to know what transpired. We don't just take report from one strand of the monitoring and say this is exactly what it is, but we look at all strands, triangulate and say yes, this actually is the state of things. And it was helpful because it gives us a holistic picture of what is happening on the field.<sup>19</sup>

The first report showed gaps in implementation of the N-SIP programs and was met with mixed reactions from the government: "When we presented the report to the NSIO, we disagreed on several areas before we came out to address the media together."<sup>20</sup> But both government officials and CSOs ultimately observed that the quarterly meeting was a sharing and learning opportunity and not just a feedback session. "I think it is a learning and adapting opportunity because the cluster leads are able to educate the CSOs about their programs and the CSOs also share the feedback that clusters can use to improve the program."<sup>21</sup> So, what started initially as difficult and antagonistic meetings gradually developed into a monitoring, evaluation, and learning opportunity for the participants. After repeated interactions between state and social actors, they developed mutual respect and trust for each other through better understanding of the incentives and motivations of each actor. According to an NSIO staff member, TPM created an opportunity for government and CSOs to work together for the greater benefit of the people.<sup>22</sup>

Reports from TPM indicated that school pupils were fed, many vulnerable women were empowered, and many youths were productively engaged. Among major complaints from the field about the Home Grown School Feeding Program were low quality and insufficient quantity of food, a greater number of pupils to be fed than projected, low patronage and inclusion of farmers, and non-inclusion of stakeholders in the program design and monitoring. Regarding N-Power, beneficiaries complained about unpaid stipends, delays in payment, and inconsistent and inadequate income. TPM also revealed some absences and irregular reporting to primary assignments by participants, as well as non-function of some of the teaching materials. TPM of the GEEP program revealed poor awareness and knowledge of the program, a cumbersome loan application process, some abuse of the loan application process, and insufficient information provided on loan application and repayment (N-SIP Third-Party Monitoring Report" 2019).

## Roadblocks

TPM was a new phenomenon in Nigeria when it was introduced and garnered significant opposition. The major opposition came from the cabinet ministers who were members of the N-SIP steering committee. Specifically, they were concerned that they would not have control over the selection of the CSOs carrying out the TPM and argued that without this control, the reports might be damaging to the government. Such damage was of particular concern given upcoming presidential and governorship elections in 2019. The greatest opposition came from the ruling All Peoples' Congress party because they wanted party members to benefit from the programs. "They wanted visibility, they wanted to determine who gets what."<sup>23</sup> However, they retracted their opposition after the vice president convinced them that TPM would increase the credibility of the N-SIP and thereby enhance the federal government's image. In addition, the NSIO also hired a group of three thousand independent monitors in 2018, apparently to appease party loyalists who wanted to benefit in some way from the N-SIP monitoring program. The government paid these monitors a monthly stipend, and the NSIO incorporated their reports with those from the third-party monitors.

Another example of opposition from within the federal government came when the wife of the president, Aisha Buhari, complained about the implementation of the N-SIP. She described N-SIP as a façade and stated that the program was not working even in her home state of Adamawa. "I was expecting the social investment 500 billion naira funds to be utilized in a different method... Most of the northern states did not get the money. I don't know, my state didn't get the money. It worked out well in some states, but the methods should be used differently. In my state, one local government benefitted from it, out of twenty-two local governments" ("Aisha Buhari Criticises FG's Social Investment Programme" 2019). This allegation from the president's wife was an indication that there was internal squabbling about the implementation of N-SIP within the presidency and probably was also a veiled attack against Maryam Uwais.

When the media reported these allegations, however, CSOs refuted them. The CSOs issued a statement confirming the implementation of the N-SIP across the country, even though the program was not perfect. According to a senior staff member of ActionAid Nigeria, "this was a very challenging period for us as an organization because we don't want to be caught in the political web. At the same time, we owe it a duty to the public to put the records straight about the program and still remain apolitical."<sup>24</sup>

ActionAid's relationship with the NSIO helped support the N-SIP against this backlash. Following the comments from the president's wife, that the N-SIP was a failure, the head of the NSIO noted that ActionAid Nigeria:

Stood up to be counted when the going was tough, particularly when there were negative comments about the program. ActionAid Nigeria released a press statement about the program, and I was really encouraged. It was good to have people who will come out and say, it may not have been perfect, but we can say that the effort was genuine and there were successes that were achieved in certain places, even if not all. And like I said, it could never have been perfect, not in a country like ours. This thing called corruption is not only at the federal level, it goes down to the district heads... We saw all kinds of things

happening, but you really can't control them from here, but the point is that we need to send a signal that these are not acceptable.<sup>25</sup>

The structure/relationship between the federal government and state governments also inhibited the TPM effort. For example, in designing the school feeding program, federal and state governments agreed that the federal government would provide one meal a day for pupils in primary one through three, while state governments would feed pupils in primary four through six. Most state governments failed to honor their part of the agreement, primarily because they could not afford to do so. However, some state governors did not even bother trying to implement the program because they saw it as a federal government initiative not deserving of their prioritization.<sup>26</sup>

Other elements of the federal-state government relationship influenced the TPM, particularly in states where a different party from that of the president controlled the state. For instance, some state governors made aprons for the school-feeding cooks with the school feeding program logo on one side and their own slogan on the other side. When this happened, some of the ministers on the steering committee accused Maryam Uwais of 'handing over' the program to the governors by allowing the governors to claim the program as their own and use it to gain popularity.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to opposition, lack of funds also slowed down efforts of state and social actors. TPM was not budgeted for in the design of the N-SIP. "The challenge we had was sourcing for funding for the monitors... I was afraid because we are going to end up with monitors on the ground who didn't have any funding,"<sup>28</sup> As a result, the NSIO had to raise funds from donor agencies to support the deployment of monitors as well as pay their stipends. Government was unable to secure funds to enable CSOs to monitor the programs in all thirty-six states and 774 local government areas nationwide. Even where monitors were deployed, payment of stipends to the CSOs was sometimes delayed. According to one of the CSO leaders, "Payments to CSOs were delayed and this in turn affected their output. Sometimes there were back and forth regarding the payments. The fund available was not even enough to monitor in every [local government area] in the states. So, because the money wasn't enough, monitors work within specific areas."<sup>29</sup> The security challenges in some states, particularly in the Northeast, also hindered monitors' access to certain communities and cities. The varied capacity of CSOs and CBOs to actually carry out monitoring also challenged the monitoring process. As the Special Advisor explained:

We pushed them [CSOs] to give us specific information, we kept asking them — don't just tell us that in certain schools they are not giving them the protein that is on the menu, you have to tell us which school and in which state. We had a lot of engagements with them in order to enable us address emerging challenges. And it was taking place in real-time as the events were unfolding.<sup>30</sup>

## Outcomes

Government took various corrective measures on some of the critical incidents reported by the monitors, including malfeasance in the payment of funds to cooks and inadequate protein size in the school feeding program, as well as absenteeism of teachers in the N-Power program. For instance, the design of the school feeding program called for funds to be distributed directly to cooks, who would then purchase local foods to prepare meals for students, as well as pay themselves a small stipend. However, opportunistic middlemen infiltrated the program when it first started and not many people believed it was real. These middlemen filled out application forms on behalf of 'potential' cooks, including inputting their own bank account information. When the cooks were eventually selected, those who had completed the forms continued to act as middlemen, taking their own cut from the funds meant for the cooks, many of whom did not have their own bank accounts. In some cases, these malpractices were carried out with the connivance of bank officials. When the monitors reported such practices, government immediately carried out a verification exercise, and ensured that all cooks recruited under the program opened bank accounts in their personal names.<sup>31</sup> Some of the middlemen were arrested and prosecuted by security operatives.

All this information came through an investigation conducted by the Directorate of State Security. "Those who were involved in such malpractices were questioned and handed over to the [Economic and Financial Crimes Commission] for prosecution."<sup>32</sup> The director of the security agency approached the NSIO about helping with monitoring the program because he had benefitted from a school feeding program as a child.<sup>33</sup> He therefore offered to deploy his agents to attend N-SIP programs. These agents operated undercover to investigate most of the malpractice reported under the N-SIP and confirmed cases of corruption were reported to the NSIO. The NSIO in turn formally lodged complaints against the accused persons with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Other cases were transferred to the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission for quick trials.

Communities also complained to the monitors about the small size of protein given to pupils by the cooks. After receiving this complaint, the NSIO directed state coordinators to organize a meeting with the aggregators (the people supplying the proteins—fish, meat, and eggs—to the cooks). At the meeting, the state coordinators warned the aggregators to desist from such malpractices, or else they would delist them from the program. Afterwards, monitors found increased quantities of protein served. Monitors found under the N-Power program that many teachers were absent from their posts, but still collected money every month. To address this problem, government introduced a redundancy plan. Under this plan, N-SIP state coordinators worked with head teachers and beneficiary coordinators to take regular attendance. If a participant was absent from his/her place of assignment for three consecutive months, they stopped their payments.

While the government responded to some operational problems, some design problems such as those produced by the relationship between the state and the federal government remained unresolved. For instance, the NSIO was unable to address state governments' failure to fund the school feeding program for older grades. As a result, there was an outcry against the federal government for not feeding all the children, despite the fault lying with the states. Similarly, state governments were asked to provide utensils and plates for the pupils, but many states did not comply. As a result, videos emerged from some states of pupils eating from paper on the ground

or with their bare hands. In response, in 2018 the N-SIP added plates and utensils to their budget and distributed them to the states.<sup>34</sup>

The NSIO felt that TPM increased the visibility and credibility of the N-SIP as well as helped the government to identify leakages in the programs' implementation and thus improve the N-SIP overall. The NSIO also felt that TPM showed that government and CSOs can work together for a common good. According to a government official, "one positive outcome from the TPM is that Nigeria has demonstrated that it is possible for CSOs and the government to work collaboratively, in a positive mutually benefitting manner and both [government and CSOs] can be key partners in moving the nation forward."<sup>35</sup>

From the perspective of the social actors, "The monitoring was by no means perfect, but the process gave the people an opportunity to appreciate the government for its efforts and bring forth some of the challenges that need to be addressed."<sup>36</sup> Various partnering CSOs benefited from capacity building on monitoring and advocacy. TPM also helped the CSOs to deepen their engagements with CBOs and other grassroots organizations in their states.

TPM provided an opportunity for regular state-society interactions throughout the implementation of the program. TPM brought government closer to the citizens and citizens closer to the government. For instance, the state actors met with the CSO steering committee every quarter to review the feedback from the field and learned about what was and was not working. "The exercise facilitated access to relevant information and provided a platform for citizens to make valuable contributions by encouraging constructive engagement with the federal government of Nigeria on ways to ensure successful and sustainable implementation of the N-SIP" (N-SIP Third-Party Monitoring Report" 2019). During the meetings with community leaders and other stakeholders, people had opportunities to ask questions about the N-SIP ranging from the application process to program implementation. "Without TPM, most of the communities will not be aware of the program. TPM created a massive awareness for the SIP," observed one CSO leader.<sup>37</sup>

ActionAid Nigeria and its partners released the report of the TPM exercise in April 2019, after President Buhari had won a second term in office. It provided a state-by-state account of the TPM experience and outcomes, and recommended continued quarterly TPM of the N-SIP (N-SIP Third-Party Monitoring Report" 2019). The understanding between Maryam Uwais and ActionAid Nigeria was to continue with the TPM after the 2019 elections, but significant changes at the federal level prevented this from occurring. In particular, N-SIP's and TPM's dependence on the vice president, which was at first a benefit, ultimately turned into a somewhat of a liability. In October 2019, the president moved the N-SIP from the vice president's office to a newly created Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. Many people, including CSOs leaders, expressed concern that the move was politically motivated given the program had performed well under the leadership of the vice president. According to newspaper reports and commentaries, many perceived the move of the N-SIP from the vice president's office to the new ministry as a way to reduce the vice president's influence within the administration (Ajayi 2019).

This development affected ActionAid's ability to engage with the N-SIP<sup>38</sup> as the organization's relationship with the new ministry was not comparable to that with the NSIO under the office of the vice president. The relocation of the N-SIP does not, however, appear to have been motivated by the TPM. According to a senior staff member of ActionAid Nigeria, "Certainly, TPM was not targeted by [the federal government] because of the ActionAid report. However, TPM was a victim of political intrigues and power tussle. Moving N-SIP to where it is today was politically



ill-conceived without considering the unintended outcomes/fallouts they have on their hands today.”<sup>39</sup>

As a result of the N-SIP’s transfer to the new ministry, the program lost Maryam Uwais as its director. Politics may have been at play here as well, given Uwais’ uncompromising attitude to demands and requests for favors from politicians and government officials. According to her, politicians perceived her as unwilling to use her office in support of their needs.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the shift of the N-SIP to the new ministry, non-release of budgeted funds for the social investment programs damaged the program overall. The relationship built by the CSOs with the NSIO was also severed when the N-SIP was moved. As of the writing this case study (June 2022), there has not been any traction on recommendations from the TPM final report submitted to government.

## Conclusion

This case study provided detailed information about the implementation of TPM of the N-SIP program, as well as associated success stories, challenges, and responses from key stakeholders and beneficiaries. The TPM was an unusual action by state actors that opened a space from above for CSOs and CBOs to monitor a major federal social protection program. These organizations made significant contributions to the accountability of the program and their monitoring efforts improved service delivery in several of the N-SIP programs. Despite initial mutual distrust between government and citizens, they both developed mutual respect and understanding for each other.

The support from the head of the NSIO, backed by the vice president, gave legitimacy to the social actors. To enable the social actors, the head of the NSIO granted CSOs unrestricted access to information about the program implementation plan as well as to key staff, including cluster heads and state coordinators. This support and access changed the collective identity of the monitors and gave the program high visibility. Unfortunately, TPM disappeared when the N-SIP was moved from office of the vice president to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. The suspension of the TPM after just a brief period indicated that the mutual empowerment between reformers in the state and society was brief, weak, and vulnerable.

The federal government did not, however, completely abandon monitoring of the N-SIP. In February 2021, the federal government recruited five thousand independent monitors to continue to monitor the implementation of the N-SIP (Abubakar 2021). The number of independent monitors hired in 2021 exceeded the number hired in 2018 (three thousand) and was also greater than the number of monitors involved in the TPM effort. These independent monitors are citizens chosen by Members of the National Assembly from their various constituencies.<sup>41</sup> The independent monitors hired in 2021 are paid a monthly stipend of N30,000. The results of their monitoring efforts remain unclear.

Even though TPM was a new phenomenon when introduced in 2018, it was warmly embraced by state reformists and CSOs. Nevertheless, the initiatives garnered serious opposition from

government officials. Overall, TPM made significant contributions to the accountability of the N-SIP and the CSOs' monitoring efforts improved service delivery in several of the N-SIP programs. Despite initial mutual distrust between government and citizens, the implementation of TPM demonstrated that government and CSOs can work together for a common good, but that the windows for such synergy may exist for only short periods of time.

## Table 1. Interviews Conducted for TPM Case Study

#	Organization Type	Organization/Position	Date
1	CSO	Civil Society Network on HIV&AIDS in Nigeria / M&E Director	08/13/2020
2	CSO	GEEP Advocacy Platform (GAP) / Programme Officer	08/13/2020
3	CSO	Rose Croix Foundation / Coordinator	08/14/2020
4	Journalist	CORE TV NEWS / Reporter	08/14/2020
5	ActionAid Nigeria	M&E Officer	08/14/2020
6	NSIO	M&E Specialist	08/16/2020
7	NSIO	Special Adviser to the President on Social Investment	08/17/2020
8	CSO	Nigeria Union of Teachers / Executive Officer- Planning Research & Statistics	08/17/2020
9	CSO	Youth Adolescence Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC) / Member, Project Steering Committee	08/18/2020
10	CSO	Rural Women and Youth Development (RUWOYD) / CSO leader	08/19/2020
11	ActionAid Nigeria	Head of Programmes	08/19/2020
12	CSO	Global Centre for Human Empowerment & Entrepreneurship Development (GLOCHEED) / Director General	08/20/2020
13	ActionAid Nigeria	Director of Programmes	08/24/2020
14	Donor Agency	DFID-PERL Engaged Citizens' Program / National Team Leader	08/26/2020
15	CSO	Women of Mercy Foundation / CEO	08/26/2020
16	ActionAid Nigeria	Director	09/08/2020
17	ActionAid Nigeria	Social Mobilization Manager	09/12/2020 06/17/2021 11/19/2021

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# Notes

1 Interview #11.

2 Interview #7.

3 Interview #7.

4 Interview #7.

5 Interview #7.

6 Interview #7.

7 About US\$1,400 at the time. We cannot obtain the total cost of the adverts from either ActionAid Nigeria or NSIO because the N-SIP budget was managed by the Ministry of Budget and Planning. NSIO made it a deliberate policy not to handle money to avoid undue pressure for favor from politicians and highly influential people.

8 Interview #2.

9 Interview #9.

10 Interview #7.

11 Interview #6.

12 Interview #11.

13 Interview #13.

14 Interview #16.

15 Interview #4.

16 Interview #4.

17 Extracted from the programs' performance indicators developed by NSIO in collaboration with CSOs

18 Interview #5.

19 Interview #6.

20 Interview #16.

21 Interview #6.

22 Interview #6.

23 Interview #7.

24 Interview #16.

25 Interview #7.

- 26 Interview #6.
- 27 Interview #7.
- 28 Interview #7.
- 29 Interview #12.
- 30 Interview #7.
- 31 Interview #8.
- 32 Interview #7.
- 33 Interview #7.
- 34 Interview #7.
- 35 Interview #6.
- 36 Interview #13.
- 37 Interview #10.
- 38 Interview #17.
- 39 Interview #17.
- 40 Interview #7.
- 41 Meeting notes with CDD staff based in Abuja held on November 4, 2021.

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