Press Statement

Follow The Money, BudgIT, Global Integrity Launch COVID Africa Tracking Website

In a bid to provide African citizens with access to evidence on COVID resources, leading social accountability initiatives, Follow The Money and BudgIT, with learning partners Global Integrity, have launched a comprehensive user-friendly COVID-19 Fund Africa website as part of the COVID-19 Transparency & Accountability Project (CTAP).

The COVID Africa Tracking website has flexible navigation and functionality that allows visitors to access all data on COVID in Africa, including intervention resources, funds allocations, palliative distributions, accurate number of cases, data on COVID funds, vaccine management and government's responsiveness.

"Our primary goal for designing the website is to improve citizens' use of data for advocacy and government engagement in a manner that promotes transparency, accountability and open governance," Follow The Money Founder, Hamzat Lawal, said.

The website currently displays information on $51.05B resources committed to COVID-19 across Africa, $5.08B In-Kind Donation as well as over 2,532 COVID Datasets across Africa. Published resources featured on the website analyse post-COVID economic environment and its impact on marginalized communities.

"In tracking government's level of responsiveness, we have shown, through data on the CTAP website, overarching issues such as discrepancies in palliatives and cash transfer distributions, substandard healthcare compounded by the pandemic, disintegration of COVID data, vague procurement processes and blatant corruption by government officials." BudgIT's Executive Director, Seun Onigbinde added.

The COVID tracking site also featured COVID analysis and research resources for seven focus countries: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Nigeria. It highlights COVID status in these countries and also features knowledge centres on human angle stories curated from citizens across the countries. Built with a focus on user's experience, the one-stop website (https://www.covidfund.africa/) has some of these attributes;

- **Live Updates** on COVID data on a daily basis from all over Africa.
- **Data Display** to provide face-level information on the total number of COVID fund allocation to Africa and COVID cases.
- **Resource Filters** which allows citizens to easily narrow down to the country or specific resource portfolio by clicking the African country they would like data on.
- **Research and Papers** on COVID tracking and government's responsiveness in Africa.
- **Rapid Response Functionality** allowing the site to be compatible with all browsers and mobile devices.

Under CTAP, the 3 CSOs seek to advocate and collaborate with governments in Africa to provide and institute proper accountability measures for all financial and material donations received. Since it kicked off 8 months ago, the project has inspired increased citizen engagement with issues of government's transparency and accountability and a zero-tolerance for corruption in some countries. A case in point is the termination of public officials in Liberia for the misappropriation of COVID funds.

Overarching insights;

1. Weak transparency and poor government accountability impede the implementation of standard policies. This is evident in the inability of social accountability activists to access accurate data of funds received and disbursed by their government to tackle the pandemic.

2. Citizens' apathy as a result of distrust in government. Citizen participation could have augmented the impact of certain relief packages such as the food packages which could have targeted the most vulnerable in society, including women, the disabled and the aged. Several sources at the local assembly level revealed to the CTAP team that the very poorest in their communities did not benefit from initiatives that were broadly distributed.

3. As a result of leveraging the media to amplify discoveries of misappropriations, embezzlements, and lack of preparedness by the government and institutions, there was an increased response to citizens' demands for accountability.

In view of these highlights, the CSOs urge citizens to utilise the new COVIDAfrica platform to access data that they need to engage with their governments.

"We believe this is also an opportunity for African governments to improve communication with citizens and adopt progressive governance mechanisms in advancing transparency and accountability and regaining citizens' trust", Onigbinde added.

Social Accountability CSOs in these countries are aligning in their mission to hold their respective governments to account, mobilize citizens for social change, counter fake news and misinformation while using digital tools to engage with government accountability issues.

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Top findings from 7 African Countries;

Liberia

1. The research conducted in Margibi County on the stimulus package for private schools' teachers revealed that only 15% of teachers in the private schools received their shares of the $1 million, while 85% of the participants did not receive their shares of the $1 million budgetary allocation for private schools' teachers in the 2020/2021 national budget.

2. The emergency standard operating procedure under sub-section seven (7) states that COVID-19 funds should be operated in dual currency and a separate bank account either at the central bank or commercial and will be managed under six (6) signatories from MOH & NPHIL Office. However, we observed that COVID-19 funds totaling USD750, 000 and a cash donation of USD246, 300 has been mixed up with the Ministry of Health's operation account at the Central Bank of Liberia.

Nigeria:

1. Conditions of primary healthcare centres have further deteriorated during the pandemic. In a recent research conducted by the CTAP team in fifteen states, a significant number of PHCs fall below the minimum PHC standard set by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), with their grossly dilapidated infrastructure, poor and inadequate staffing, and incapacity to administer vaccines.

2. Corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) that involved allocation of funds to combat COVID dated before COVID-19 happened.

Kenya

1. **Low absorption of COVID-19 funds:** As of December 2020, the Government of Kenya had mobilized Kshs 214 Billion ($ 2,332,600 Million) through loans, for COVID-19 related expenses, out of which Kshs 162 Billion ($1,765,800 Million) was disbursed to Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDA's) of County Governments. Out of the amount allocated to the County Governments, there was underutilization of funds, despite the urgency and needs brought about by the impact of the pandemic on citizens.

2. **Procurement Irregularities:** Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (KEMSA) were in violation of procurement procedures and processes as follows;

    a. **Utilization of unbudgeted funds-** KEMSA utilized money allocated for the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and KEMSA's Development expenditure budget for COVID-19 related expenditures.
    b. **Violation of procurement processes and methods**- The KEMSA board according to the special Auditor General report, indicates that they used a direct procurement method to procure goods worth Kshs 8.39 Billion ($ 914.5 Million), contrary to Section 69 (2) of the Public Procurement and Disposal Act (PPDA)of 2015.

Cameroon

1. The FCFA 180 billion (**US$335.24 million**) granted to the National Solidarity Fund and the additional contributions, donations and financial gifts received by the Government are clouded by a hail of corruption allegations, as the health sector struggles to keep workers motivated and secure, and to grant access to COVID 19 related services to the public.

2. The government has not carried out any formal audits and there are no open contracting platforms. Access to information remains a challenge. In terms of overarching transparency architecture in Cameroon, the existence and use of military ordinances and decrees in administering funds casts a cloud of opacity and works to suppress public opinion formation on accountability

Sierra Leone

1. The Ministry of Health and Sanitation officials expended Le5.22m ($475), allocated for COVID-19 response on the procurement of personal gadgets such as Apple airpods, JBL Bluetooth Speakers and Headsets.

2. During the Audit exercise, we observed that Le2.1bn ($191,414) was paid to an unidentified NaCOVERC Staff/Consultants. Further, procurement carried out by some MDAs were not only highly inflated, but also awarded to middlemen who know nothing about the goods and services.

Ghana

1. Irregularities in the procurement of antigen testing kits which cost $150 per kit, to be conducted at the Kotoka International Airport. The contract between the Ghana Airport Company and Frontier Health Service stipulated that an amount of $10 would be paid to the former with the latter taking $140. This constituted an uncannily lucrative deal for the testing company especially since the company was incorporated just days before the contract was awarded and had not registered with the PPA. Furthermore, some state agencies were bypassed in the awarding of the contract.

Malawi

1. Lack of preparedness by the Department of Disaster Management affairs in the way they disbursed funds without proper orientation of controlling officers. The Malawian experience seems to have a core problem of not just transparency and accountability but also prioritisation and management, despite the existence of the procedures in writing.

2. Despite allocation of huge sums of money through the Ministry of Education and District Councils, there was less to show as to what the funds have been used for. The Malawian CTAP research documented evidence that COVID-19 funds were "marred by incidences of abuse, maladministration, fraud and misplaced priorities.

About Follow The Money
Follow The Money is currently the largest social mobilization & accountability movement in Africa that has advocated, visualized and tracked over USD 15 million for social development across African grassroots communities, directly impacting over 4,000,000 lives. The home-grown Nigerian initiative has chapters in Kenya, The Gambia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and Malawi where citizens are holding their government to account for improved public service delivery and accountable spending of public funds.
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About BudgIT
BudgIT is a foremost civic-tech leading the advocacy for transparency and accountability in public finance across four African countries including Nigeria. BudgIT's innovation within the public circle demystifies government data, especially on public finance, by either presenting them in simple tweets, interactive formats or infographic displays. BudgIT works with willing institutions and stakeholders interested in deepening transparency, citizen engagement and capacity building. Hitherto, BudgIT has supported over 135 institutions in Nigeria, launched over 6 civic-tech products and reached over 20million Nigerians.
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Global Integrity
Global Integrity is a non-profit organization that works with government and civil society partners in countries and communities around the world, supporting their efforts to address complex challenges relating to corruption, the use of resources and the delivery of public services. We have a diverse and global team of 15 staff members in north and south America, Europe and Africa, with our main office at the Open Gov Hub in Washington D.C., which we co-founded in 2012.
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