

#FOLLOWCOVID19MONEY

POLICY BRIEF



...empowering marginalized communities





Background

The novel Coronavirus – COVID-19, which was first detected in China in late 2019 and has since been declared a pandemic threatens to become one of the most difficult health challenges faced by countries around the world in recent times. The full impact of COVID-19 is not yet known but, what is clear is the urgent need for strategic civic engagement particularly in highly populated countries like Nigeria, where public healthcare systems and reliable sanitary infrastructure capable of curtailing the heightened impact of COVID-19 remains abysmal.

In Nigeria, the pandemic has recorded over 108,900 and 1,400 deaths as at January 2021 - which has largely further revealed the mind-boggling level of corruption in Nigeria's public finance system — in addition to weak transparency and accountability structures in public institutions.

In view of the aforementioned, leading social accountability initiative, Follow the Money with support from OXFAM launched a large-scale campaign dubbed: #FollowCOVID19Money - a digital campaign to torchlight and scrutinise the utilization of emergency funds and donations against corruption and abuse in Africa. The campaign is used to aggregate, analyse data and demand transparency and accountability on COVID-19 funds and donations.

FollowTheMoney [FTM] has tracked over N96B (as at December, 2020) of funds donated to the Nigeria Federal and some State governments in the fight against COVID-19 and this data is collated in a live spreadsheet and our website accessible to members of the public at any time: <https://www.connecteddevelopment.org/followcovid-19-money>.

One-third of this N96B were donations from private individuals and corporations under the auspices of CACOVID. This group donated N30.1B billion (as of 30th June, 2020; see www.cacovid.org).



Like many other intervention funds (e.g Niger Delta Development Fund, North East Development Fund in Nigeria), COVID-19 intervention funds, sourced from private donations, government revenue, foreign aid and loans are highly susceptible to abuse and corruption. Follow The Money” (FTM), a pan-African social accountability movement, is challenging the status quo and arming citizens with data on public finances to enable them follow the money; to “confront” or engage (underperforming) leaders and extract stewardship and accountability on public spending on COVID-19.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Follow The Money advocated for the government’s Emergency Procurement Policies (EPP) to be updated and after intense advocacy, the Bureau of Public procurement and the Ministry of Finance updated their EPP.

Campaign Goals:

- Promote accountability and transparency by tracking COVID-19 intervention funds
- Advocate for equal access to health services for victims
- Ensure that the government takes precautionary measures to curb the spread of the virus in Nigeria

Identified Challenges:

- Weak political will of governments to subscribe and implement the commitments of the Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- Inaccessibility of government data and non-domestication of Freedom of Information Law at sub-national level
- Prevalence of fake news
- Improper coordination amongst government MDAs
- States' unwillingness to initiate transparency and accountability reforms and score high under the States' Fiscal, Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) World Bank programme.

The Open Treasury Portal [OTP]

The portal is a public finance accountability milestone - launched in December 2019 to address issues of transparency and accountability in government spending. It was mandatory for daily, monthly, quarterly and annual financial entries in the portal, yet there were scanty financial entries in the portal. Many payments showed vague descriptions of sums. In many segments, especially in the COVID-19 section, significant financial details are absent: the feature would simply state "page not found" or "Error".

This has posed a huge problem in tracking COVID-19 spending of the government/MDAs. The poor user-interface feature also makes the portal difficult to navigate. Perhaps, the bigger problem is that MDAs do not comply with the requirements of the Fiscal Transparency Policy by not publishing timely, detailed expenditures. This faults the public institutions's ability to demonstrate transparency and accountability to citizens.



Public Procurement

Procurement accounts for the largest share of grand corruption in the continent. On 5th May 2020, FTM led a coalition of anti-corruption organisations in Nigeria (in a webinar) with two Directors of the Bureau of Public Procurement in attendance and mounted pressure on authorities to open up procurement processes during this emergency by virtue of Sections 42 and 43 of the Public Procurement Act. It also served as an avenue to sensitize citizens on the nuances of emergency procurement as the law is replicated at the state level.

Surprisingly, in a twin response (within 24hours), the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) released the Guidelines on COVID-19 Procurements to ensure transparency and minimize corruption. While the guideline acknowledges the peculiar nature of the pandemic and the need for exigencies, it mandates the strict adherence to the principles of transparency and accountability, timely publishing procurement details on the National Open Contracting Portal (NOCOPO), and so forth. Also, the Independent Corrupt Practices And Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) published Guidelines for Presidential Task Force Management of COVID-19 Relief Funds. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning has released its guidelines on the management of COVID-19 funds and resolved to be more FOI compliant. So far, it has grossly failed to live up to its resolve.

Join CODE Webinar Series **on**

Public Procurement in Emergencies

In light of COVID-19

11:00am WAT | Zoom | 5th of May 2020

Follow The Money
#FollowCOVID19Money

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Open Government Partnership (OGP)

Despite signing up to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2016, Nigeria has failed to live up to this commitment. Kaduna, Kano, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu, Niger, Edo, Adamawa and Jigawa are States that signed up to be OGP compliant, committing to fiscal transparency, providing information, asset disclosures by public officials and citizen engagement; yet these States have been opaque in government processes.

To improve governance, States must not only sign a letter of intent on contained in <https://www.opengov-partnership.org/open-government-declaration>) but must abide by the laws of OGP.

Policy Recommendations & Asks

1. Need for states to enact a Freedom of Information Law pending the decision of the Supreme Court in *Martins Alo V. Ondo State Auditor-General, House of Assembly & Attorney-General (Supra)*
2. Government at all levels must endeavour to timely publish data (especially in the OTP, NO-COPO and other public finance data platforms), especially financial data as it is only with accurate information can trust be built and fake news extinguished.
3. Need for the Attorney-General of the Federation to improve on his oversight responsibility of ensuring adequate compliance to the Freedom of Information Act, as provided by Section 29 of the Act.
4. Need for a Digital Accountability and Transparency Act/Law (beyond a mere policy) which compels details of government cash flow, debt, revenue and expenditures to be published digitally and timeously; and also prescribes appropriate sanction against defaulting MDAs and their Chief Executives.
5. States should endeavour to subscribe, commit and implement the principles of the OGP and also endeavour to score more points in the annual performance review of the States Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) Programme of the World Bank which enhances transparency, accountability and inclusive development.

With a tremendous network of volunteers and a harmonized strategy and engagement process, the FTM movement is putting pressures on national, subnational and regional governments and agencies to transparently account for every kobo received for development interventions and emergency relief during this unfortunate global emergency that has led to hundreds and thousands of avoidable deaths.

In addition, FTM is standing in the gap to protect human rights and advance social justice and accountability for those living on the fringes of society, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. The pan-African movement is throwing in its mite to tame this recklessness and abuse of some governments who are averse to accountability. There is no gainsaying that the adoption and implementation of the standards set by the OGP, SFTAS and emergency procurement guidelines would enhance transparency and accountability at governments at all levels.



OUR COMMITMENT TO GRASSROOTS

▶ OUR VISION

We envision a world where all people – even in the most remote areas of the globe – can hold their government accountable

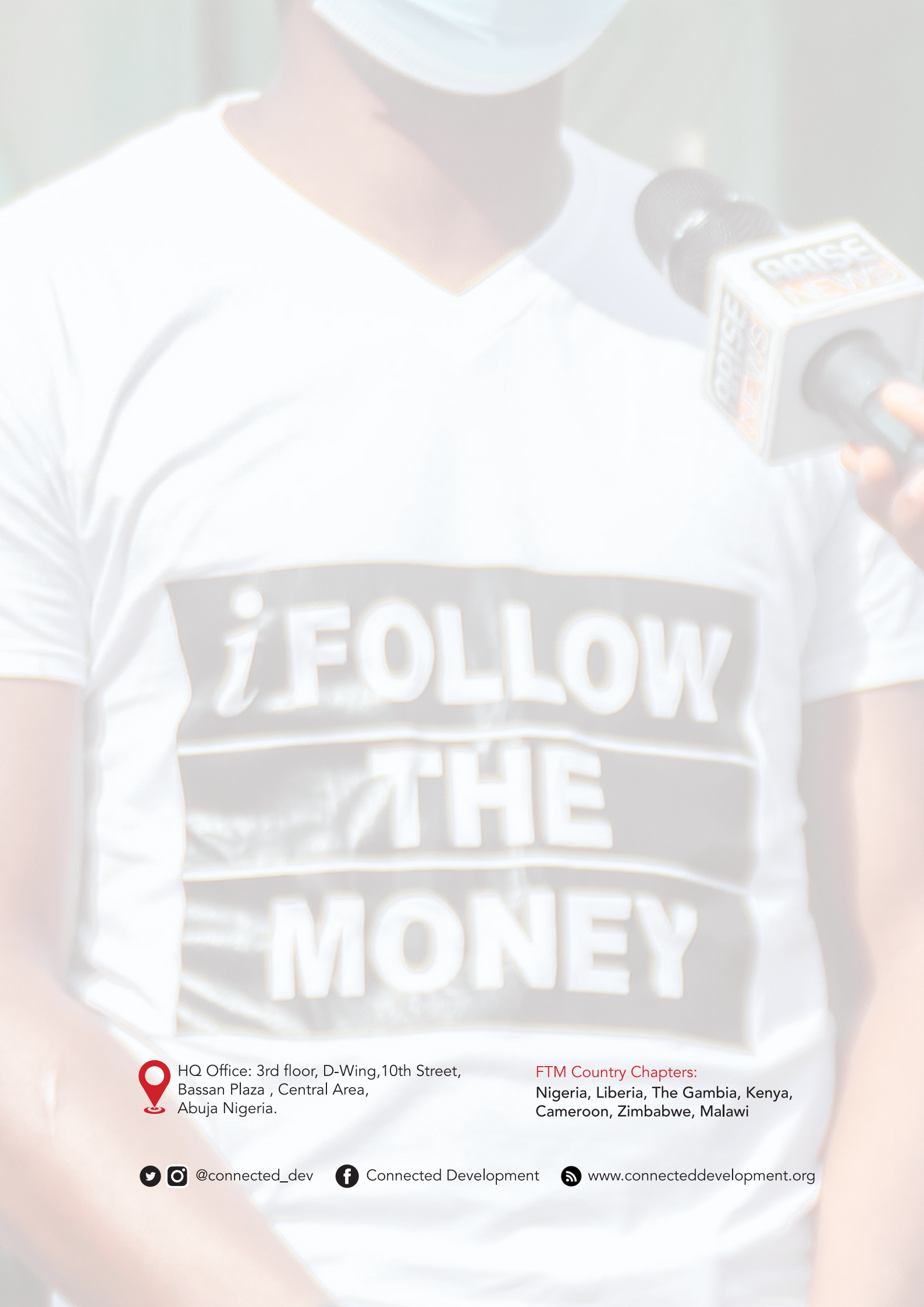
▶ OUR MISSION

To empower marginalized communities

▶ OUR OBJECTIVES

- Increase people's access to information through whatever technological means they choose.
- Increase and share innovative approaches to information exchange through experimentation, research, and technology.
- Develop innovative platforms for coverage of social, environmental and governance issues.
- Increase the adoption and implementation of international development laws and policies.

From activist to trainers, trainers to mobilizers, mobilizers to community builders. We see the need to make governments accountable, and we do it by engaging them with verifiable facts.



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FTM Country Chapters:

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