

Dear Readers,

What happens when local changemakers are given room to dream and equipped with the tools to build?

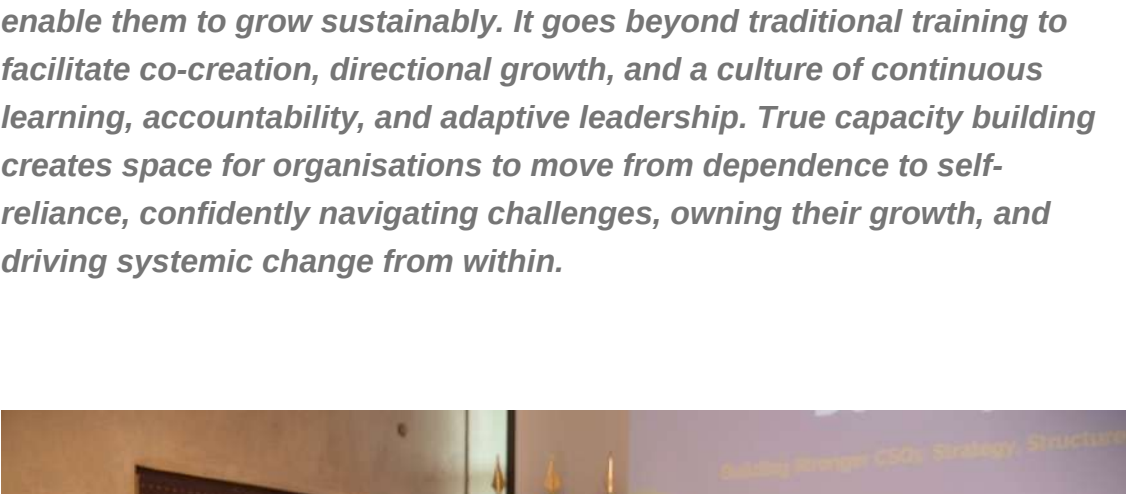
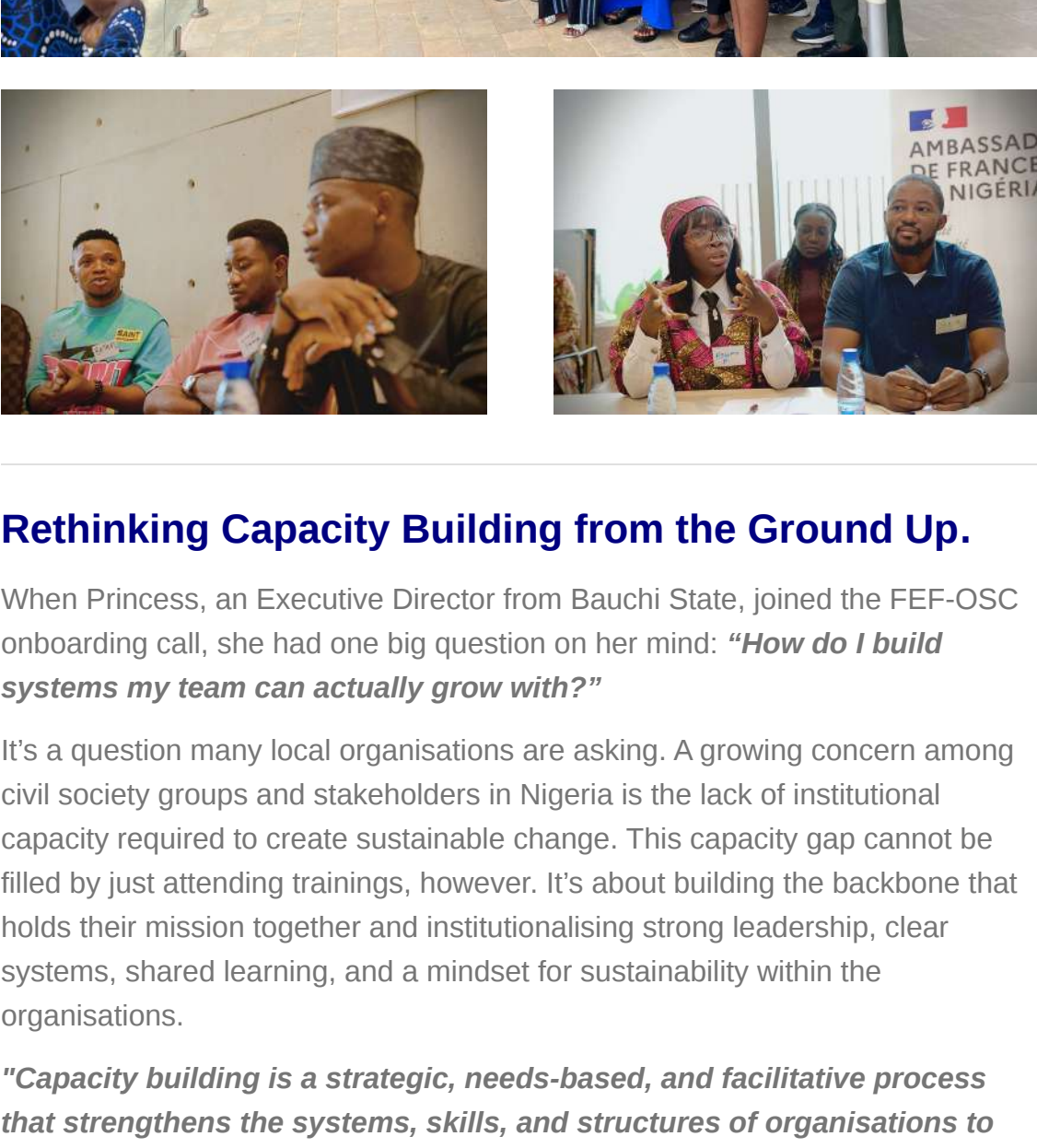
That's the spirit behind the 2025 French Embassy Fund for Civil Society Organisations (FEF-OSC).

The Embassy of France in Nigeria has officially launched the FEF-OSC 2025, an ambitious initiative reaffirming France's commitment to grassroots-driven, sustainable development across Nigeria. Now in its sixth year, the Fund is empowering locally led organisations to tackle some of the country's most pressing challenges—gender inequality, economic vulnerability, and community resilience.

19 civil society organisations (CSOs) have been selected and are implementing high-impact projects across diverse Nigerian communities. Beyond this however, the Fund focuses on long-term institutional strengthening of the CSOs.

To achieve this, the programme embeds a robust capacity-building component being implemented in collaboration with the Cognito Project-POD Consulting Consortium. Through tailored workshops, coaching, and peer exchange platforms, CSOs will gain essential tools for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial accountability, and impact storytelling.

At its core, this initiative is about people—the women, men, and youth whose lives are being transformed by the bold and compassionate projects led by local CSOs. Their lived experiences, and the tangible impact of these initiatives in each community, are the true measures of success. They reflect real progress and sustainable change across Nigeria's diverse regions.

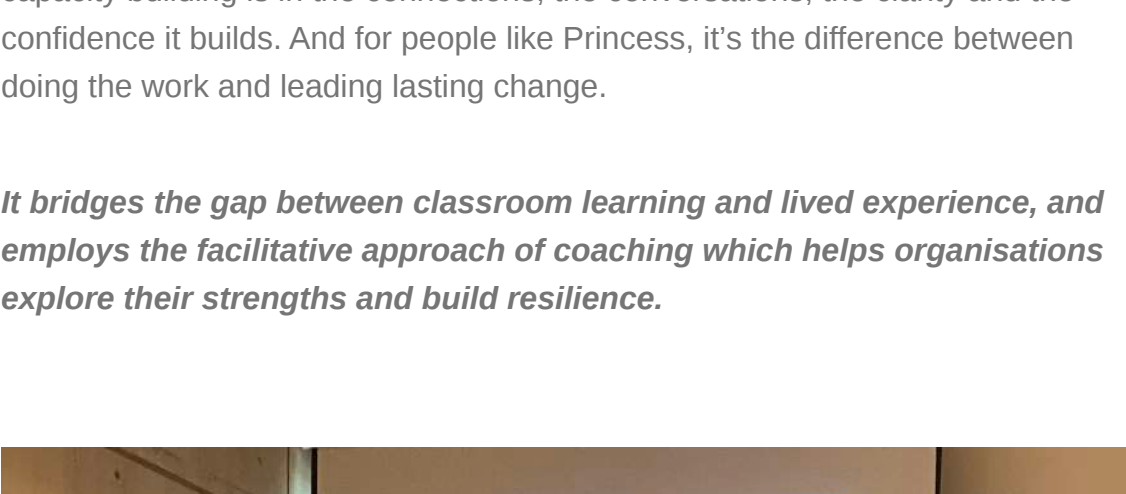
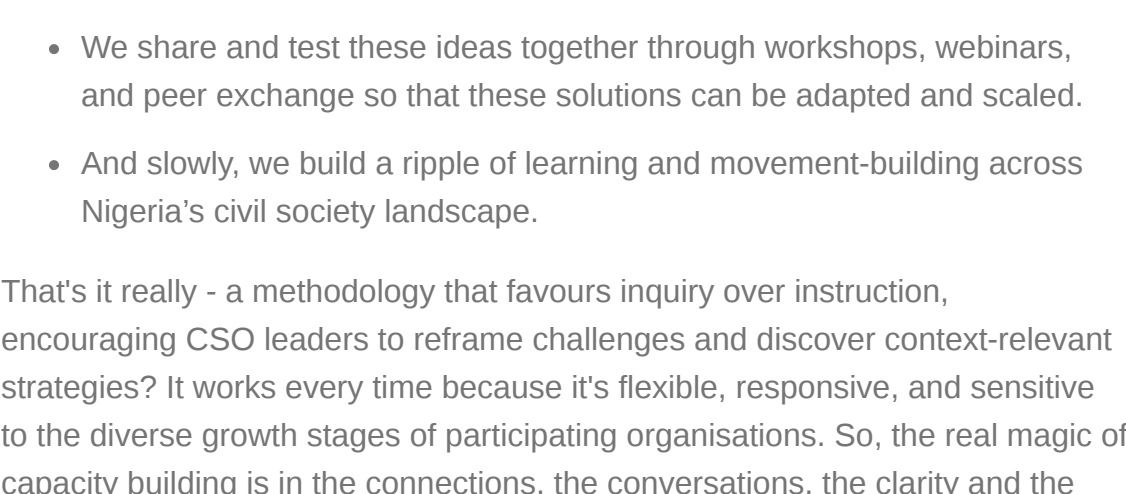
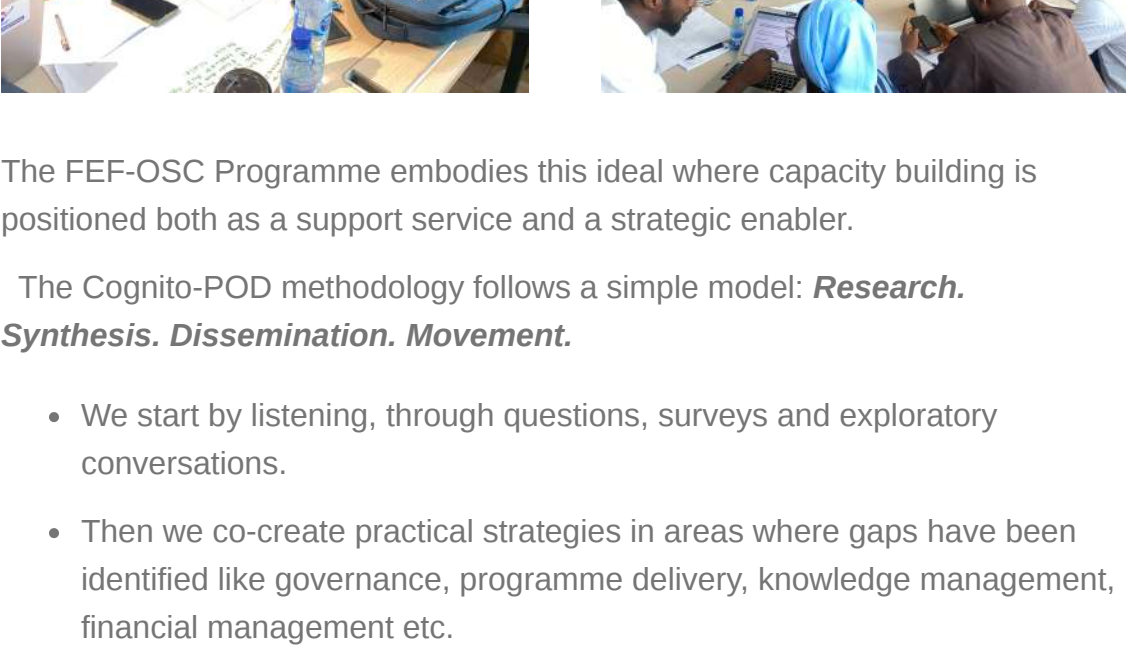


Rethinking Capacity Building from the Ground Up.

When Princess, an Executive Director from Bauchi State, joined the FEF-OSC onboarding call, she had one big question on her mind: *"How do I build systems my team can actually grow with?"*

It's a question many local organisations are asking. A growing concern among civil society groups and stakeholders in Nigeria is the lack of institutional capacity required to create sustainable change. This capacity gap cannot be filled by just attending trainings; however, it's about building the backbone that holds their mission together and institutionalising strong leadership, clear systems, shared learning, and a mindset for sustainability within the organisations.

"Capacity building is a strategic, needs-based, and facilitative process that strengthens the systems, skills, and structures of organisations to enable them to grow sustainably. It goes beyond traditional training to facilitate co-creation, directional growth, and a culture of continuous learning, accountability, and adaptive leadership. True capacity building creates space for organisations to move from dependence to self-reliance, confidently navigating challenges, owning their growth, and driving systemic change from within."



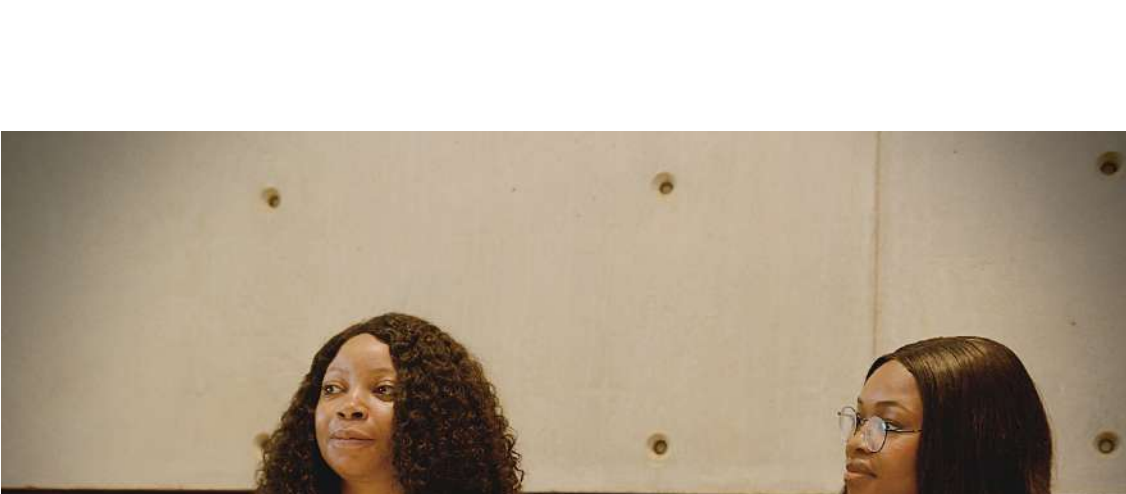
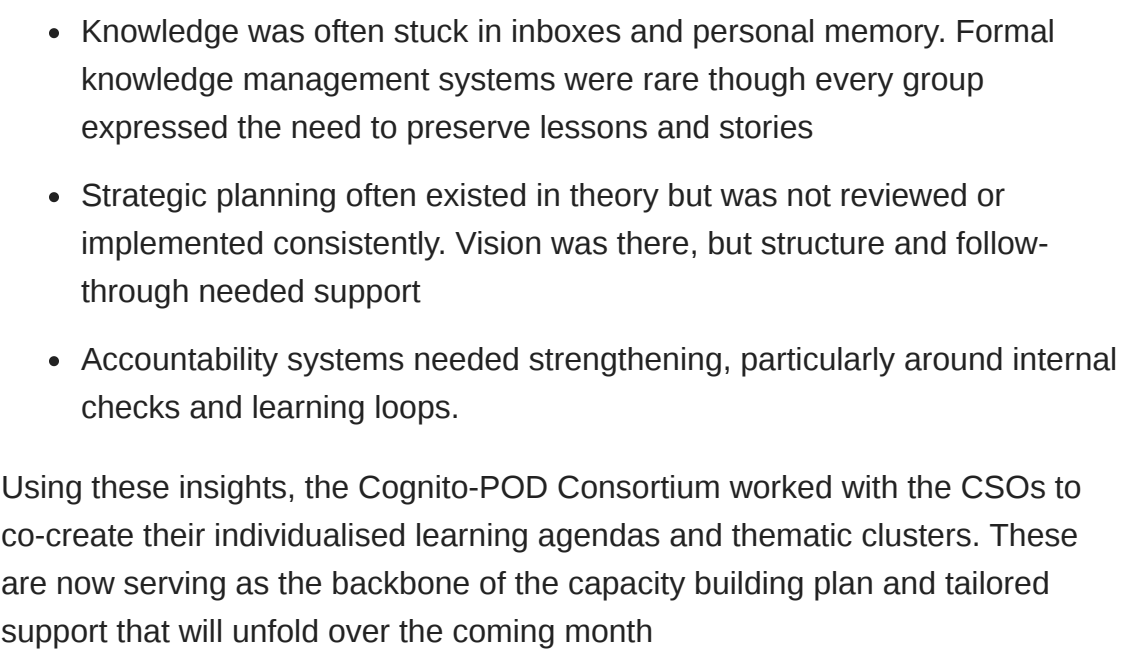
The FEF-OSC Programme embodies this ideal where capacity building is positioned both as a support service and a strategic enabler.

The Cognito-POD methodology follows a simple model: **Research. Synthesis. Dissemination. Movement.**

- We start by listening, through questions, surveys and exploratory conversations.
- Then we co-create practical strategies in areas where gaps have been identified like governance, programme delivery, knowledge management, financial management etc.
- We share and test these ideas together through workshops, webinars, and peer exchange so that these solutions can be adapted and scaled.
- And slowly, we build a ripple of learning and movement-building across Nigeria's civil society landscape.

That's it really - a methodology that favours inquiry over instruction, encouraging CSO leaders to refine challenges and discover context-relevant strategies? It works every time because it's flexible, responsive, and sensitive to the diverse growth stages of participating organisations. So, the real magic of capacity building is in the connections, the conversations, the clarity and the confidence it builds. And for people like Princess, it's the difference between doing the work and leading lasting change.

It bridges the gap between classroom learning and lived experience, and employs the facilitative approach of coaching which helps organisations explore their strengths and build resilience.



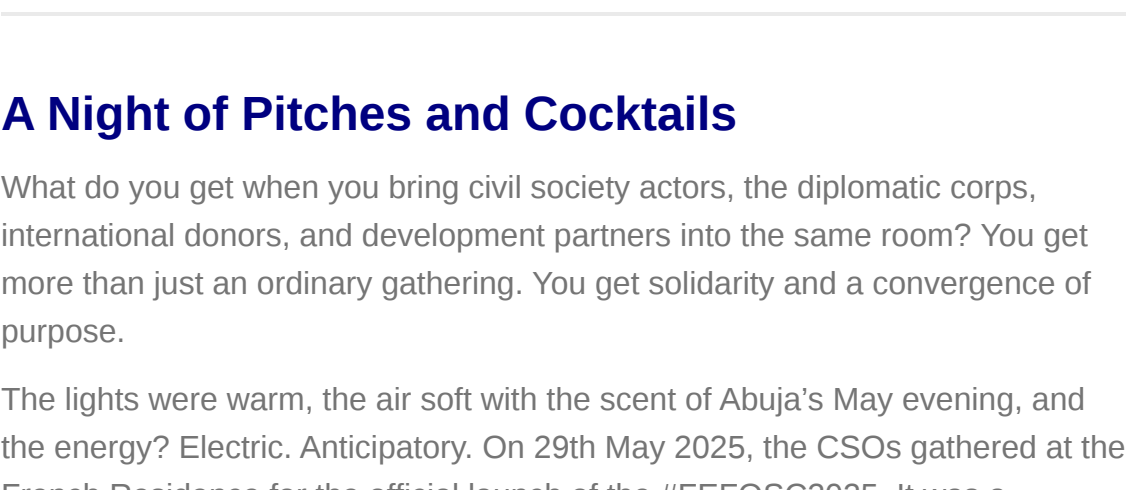
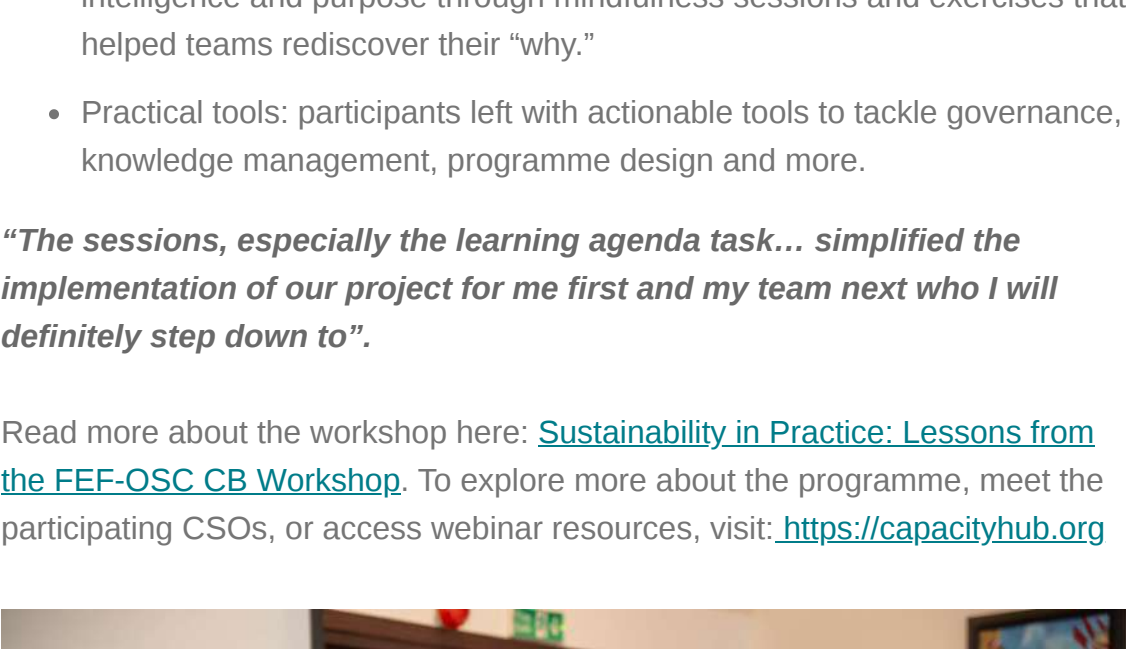
Mapping the Terrain: Key Insights from the Needs Assessment

Before you know where to go, you need to understand where you are. That's why the FEF-OSC journey began with listening through surveys and one-on-one calls. The results were revealing.

What we found:

- Many CSOs had passionate leadership but no documented succession plans or clear internal structures. Leaders were stretched, wearing multiple hats without clear role definitions.
- Knowledge was often stuck in inboxes and personal memory. Formal knowledge management systems were rare though every group expressed the need to preserve lessons and stories
- Strategic planning often existed in theory but was not reviewed or implemented consistently. Vision was there, but structure and follow-through needed support.
- Accountability systems needed strengthening, particularly around internal checks and learning loops.

Using these insights, the Cognito-POD Consortium worked with the CSOs to co-create their individualised learning agendas and thematic clusters. These are now serving as the backbone of the capacity building plan and tailored support that will unfold over the coming month



Growing Together: The In-Person Capacity Building Workshop #1

On the second afternoon of the FEF-OSC 3-Day Capacity Building Workshop in Abuja, Sarah stood before the other CSOs having emerged 1st position following several rapid fire "pitch-dating" sessions. She grinned as she received glowing feedback about her pitch. It was the first time she'd explained her organisation's mission so clearly and received feedback on it. She smiled some more as the room broke into applause.

It was a small moment but one that captured the spirit of the entire 3-day experience of learning, connecting, building confidence and having fun while doing it.

From 28-30 May 2025, the FEF-OSC community gathered in Abuja for the first time. For many of the 19 CSOs, this meeting was more of connection, affirmation and alignment than it was a workshop.

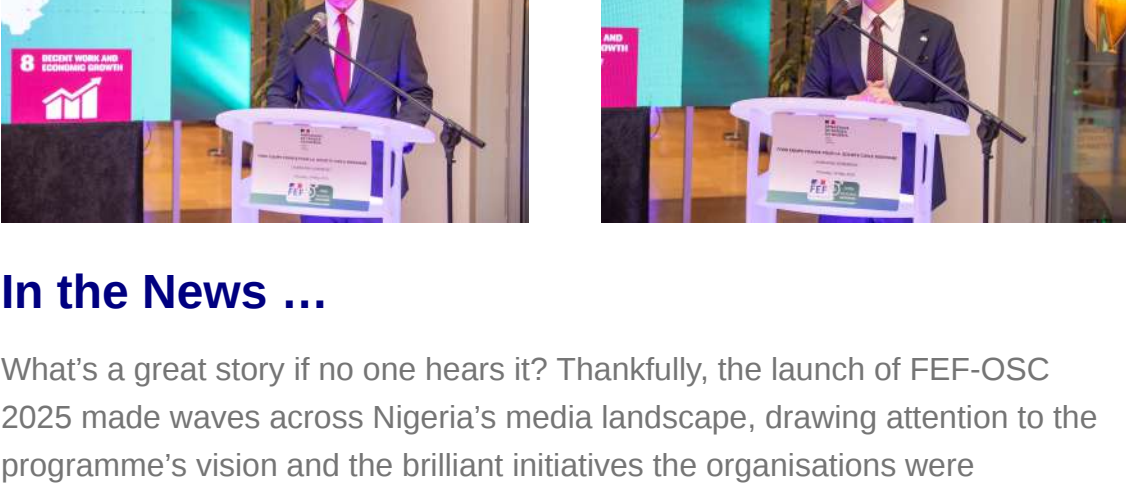
Hosted by the Cognito-POD team, the sessions blended hands-on strategy development with personal growth, cross-sector networking, and co-creation. Over three intensive days, leaders explored their learning agendas, clarified organisational goals, and discovered unexpected allies.

Highlights:

- Speed-Pitching: Fast paced pitch-dating exercises helped participants craft stronger impact stories.
- A creative collaboration session that paired up organisations from different learnings to imagine bold, joint solutions. It showed just how much stronger civil society can be when silos are dismantled and they worked together
- Beyond technical skills, the workshop also created space for emotional intelligence and purpose through mindfulness sessions and exercises that helped teams rediscover their "why."
- Practical tools: participants left with actionable tools to tackle governance, knowledge management, programme design and more.

"The sessions, especially the learning agenda task... simplified the implementation of our project for me first and my team next who I will definitely step down to."

Read more about the workshop here: [Sustainability in Practice: Lessons from the FEF-OSC CB Workshop](#). To explore more about the programme, meet the participating CSOs, or access webinar resources, visit: <https://capachyhub.org>

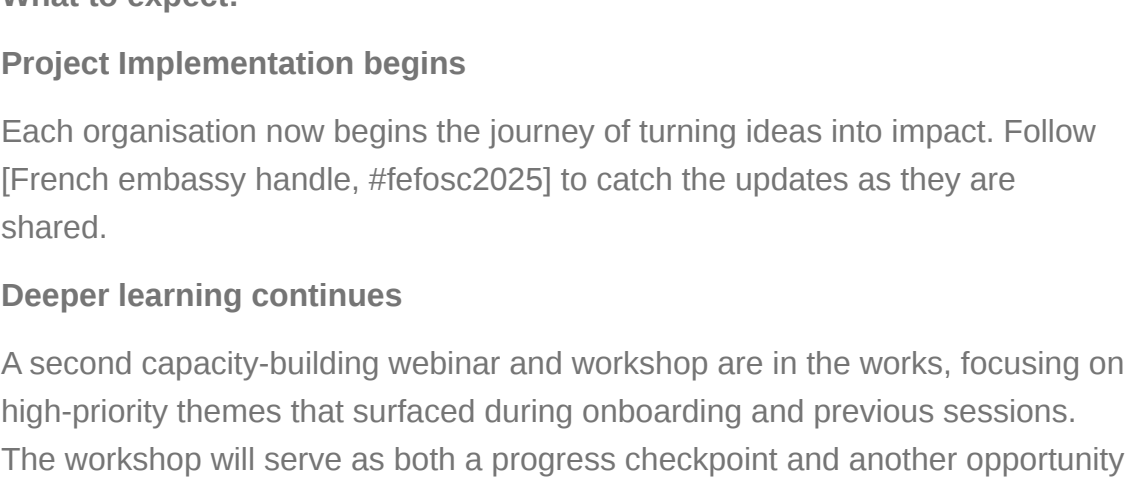
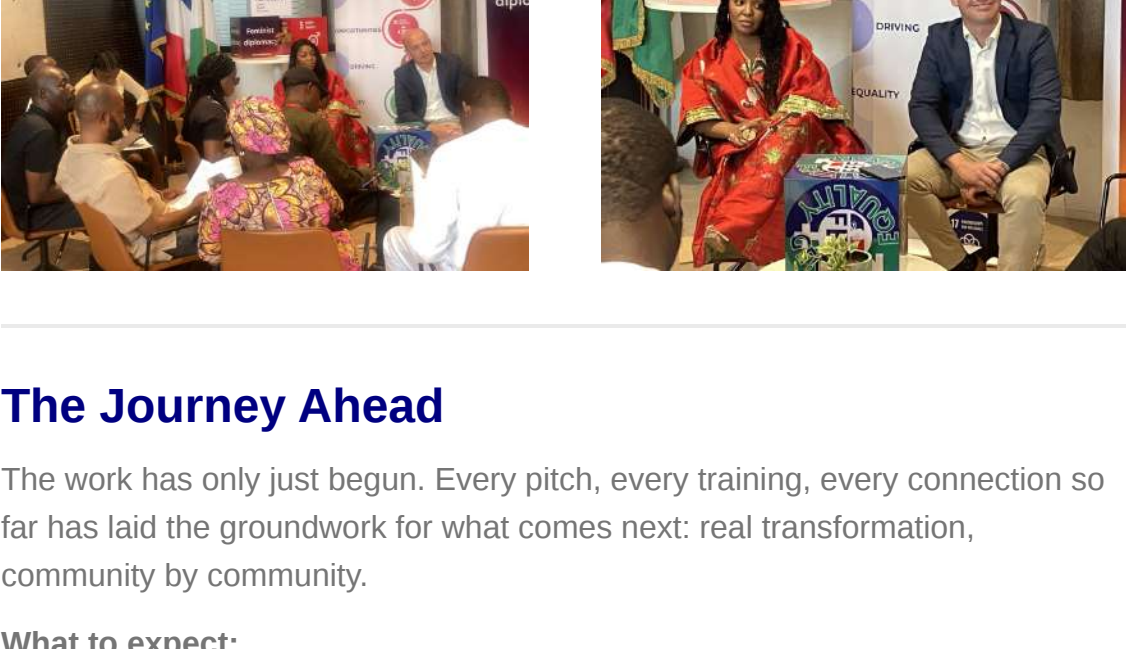


A Night of Pitches and Cocktails

What do you get when you bring civil society actors, the diplomatic corps, international donors, and development partners into the same room? You get more than just an ordinary gathering. You get solidarity and a convergence of purpose.

The lights were warm, the air soft with the scent of the May's evening, and the energy? Electric. Anticipatory. On 29th May 2025, the CSOs gathered at the French Residence for the official launch of the FEF-OSC2025. It was a delightful evening that brought together changemakers, stakeholders, and allies from across Nigeria's development community.

The CSO representatives were particularly excited. This was their night. Earlier that day, they'd honed their messages in a spirited "pitch-dating" session—reworking and rehearsing their impact stories. By evening, they were ready. With their rattles set, they shared compelling pitches that spoke of strategy, resilience, and the empowerment of those closest to the need.



His Excellency Marc Fontbauster, Ambassador of France to Nigeria, captured the spirit of the evening.

"I am inspired by your determination, your creativity, your commitment... and I am impressed by the transformative impacts you envision for your communities."

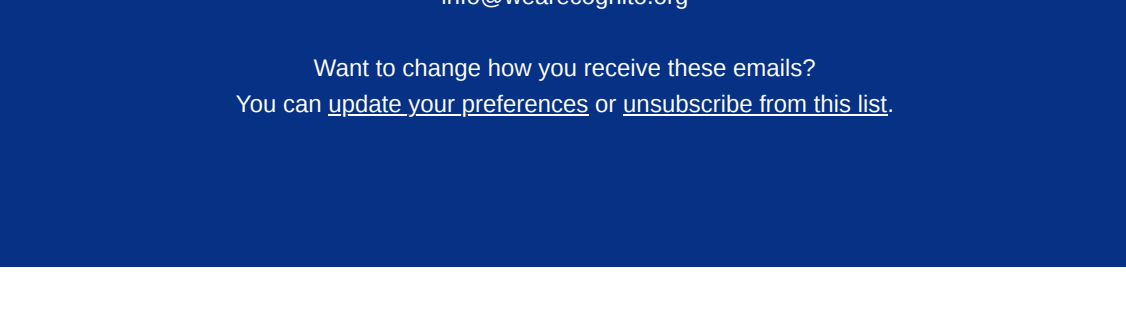
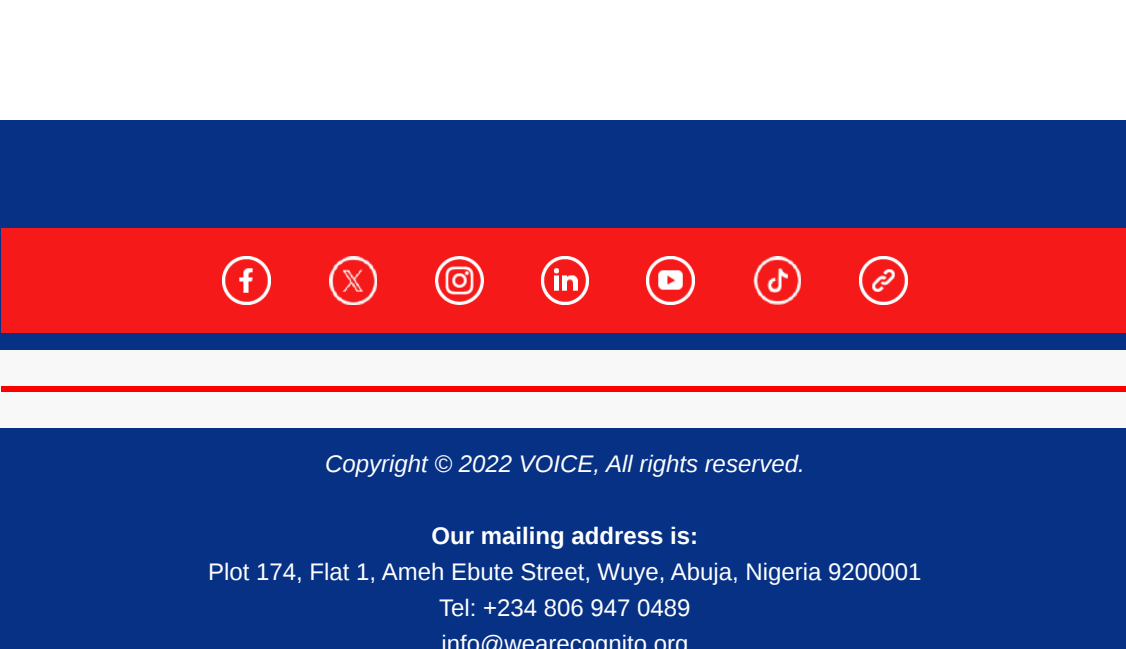
He affirmed the programme's broader mission: to strengthen Nigerian CSOs, amplify local voices, and reflect France's feminist diplomacy in action.

Spoken word artist Hidayya Mahmoud Muhammad delivered verses that stirred the soul and anchored a reflective atmosphere throughout the evening. Her voice rose into the night.

*"... Tonight is the wound stretching itself into prayer.
Tonight is me, tonight is you.
Tonight is us coming together to remind the earth who taught it how to yield...
Tonight is what happens when people remember
that to raise a girl is to lift the sky.
Tonight is what the French call *solidaire*..."*

As the evening progressed, guests mingled over drinks and curated canapés, buzzing over ideas, partnerships, and new possibilities. From diplomats to development partners, the night felt less like an event and more like a movement gathering momentum.

It was indeed a night to remember.



In the News ...

What's a great story if no one hears it? Thankfully, the launch of FEF-OSC 2025 made waves across Nigeria's media landscape, drawing attention to the programme's vision and the brilliant initiatives the organisations were implementing.

At a pre-launch press briefing, representatives from the French Embassy and the Cognito-POD Consortium shared the heart of the programme: its commitment to gender equality, youth engagement, and resilient community solutions. The message resonated and the cameras rolled.

Catch the highlights here: [ARISE TV Report](#)mp4. etc

Follow the conversation online: #FEFOSC2025 Explore reactions, reels and real-time updates from CSOs on the ground

Learn more at [www.capachyhub.org](https://capachyhub.org)

The Journey Ahead

The work has only just begun. Every pitch, every training, every connection so far has laid the groundwork for what comes next: real transformation, community by community.

What to expect:

Project implementation begins

Each organisation now begins the journey of turning ideas into impact. Follow [French embassy handle, @fetosc2025] to catch the updates as they are shared.

Deeper learning continues

A second capacity-building webinar and workshop are in the works, focusing on high-priority themes that surfaced during onboarding and previous sessions. The workshop will serve as both a progress checkpoint and another opportunity for peer exchange.

Access to the Capacity Hub

The journey is supported online too. At <https://capachyhub.org> CSOs will find tools, templates, session materials, and a growing library of success stories and peer insights.

Thank you for taking the time to explore this inaugural edition of the FEF-OSC Newsletter. We hope it offers you a meaningful glimpse into our journey so far and a spark of excitement for what lies ahead.

If you have reflections, ideas, or questions, we warmly invite you to connect with us. This, after all, a community we're building together.

Let's stay connected. And, as always, let's keep building stronger organisations for greater impact.

Until next time.

The Cognito-POD Consortium
(Capacity Building Partner, FEF-OSC 2025)

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