



Pillar 6.

INFLUENCING AND ADVOCACY

THE SHEHU MUSA YAR'ADUA FOUNDATION

Using political power and visuals to advocate for climate action

- **Country:** Nigeria
- **Number of staff:** 14
- **Year of incorporation:** 1998
- **Type:** Family foundation
- **Endowment:** No
- **More information:** yaraduafoundation.org

The Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation was established in 1998 by the friends, family and associates of Shehu Yar'Adua – a politician and military leader who fought for democracy in Nigeria after its independence in the 1960s and through the decades that followed. Sentenced to prison by the military in 1995, Shehu Yar'Adua died in captivity in 1997. The Foundation was created to honour his legacy by promoting national unity, good governance and social justice in Nigeria.

The Foundation's vision for Nigeria is to be a country united across ethnic and religious divides and committed to justice and democracy. The country is still grappling with the wounds from decades of war, colonialism and dictatorship that exacerbates division and hinders national cohesion. The Shehu Yar'Adua's family has always been very politically active in Nigeria. They strive to use their political access to benefit the public interest and remain non-partisan while navigating the small network of the Nigerian political elite. The Foundation's board of trustees carries weight among high-level national political figures, which creates access and leverage to attract and convene partner events and meetings. However, this also comes with considerable responsibility to navigate the Nigerian civic space.

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“We are a bridge between the private and the public sector in Nigeria. Because of who we are and who we have on our board, we are able to speak truth to power and create a safe space for human rights defenders.”

– POLLY ALAKIJA, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE SHEHU MUSA YAR’ADUA FOUNDATION

In order to responsibly leverage their assets and deliver impact in the country, the Foundation decided to divide its work into three pillars: Governance and Accountability, Gender Justice and Climate Advocacy.

The governance pillar is the core of the Foundation’s work, with a focus on supporting initiatives that create civic space and promote human rights values and anti-corruption practices. Climate and gender have progressively become transversal topics across all of the Foundation’s work. While gender justice thinking has become fully embedded, climate change thinking is still being integrated into the Foundation’s approach to its work. “There is a general lack of understanding, from kids to business leaders, about climate change. They are not getting the differences between environmental action and tackling the causes of climate change.” – Polly Alakija, Director General of The Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Foundation

In the context of navigating politically sensitive themes, the Foundation started to experiment with approaches and tools beyond their convening capacity. The Foundation commissioned knowledge products and soon realised that online videos could be a very useful tool for advocacy in Nigeria.

Experimenting with climate advocacy through videos

Yar’Adua Foundation started its online advocacy work with video vignettes and flashcards that aimed to inspire collective protection of the civic space and to increase awareness about the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) platform and its work. The Foundation’s YouTube channel features videos about different topics, from governance and accountability to collective action and civic space, which have received over 120 000 views. Through this online advocacy strategy, the Foundation has also begun to engage with the topic of climate justice, which intersects with its critical anti-corruption and good governance work.

An estimated 25% of Nigeria’s population lives in an exposed coastal region – a hub of economic activity – making the country highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. These vulnerabilities are only exacerbated when examining the country’s population growth rate and oil dependency. Despite these realities,

there is little stakeholder engagement around climate change. The government has been struggling to improve climate change resilience and natural resource management. Poor governance directly jeopardises the collective climate readiness of vulnerable communities. However, climate change is still not a priority issue for the Nigerian government or the private sector, and decision-makers don't seem to understand the technical language.

Yar'Adua Foundation's Climate Advocacy Programme, still largely funded by international donors, is investing in platforms for engagement and improved decision-making around the issue. Its main focus is to raise awareness by producing and distributing documentaries. Although it is an expensive advocacy strategy, documentaries have proven to be an important tool to create awareness, both nationally and internationally, and to get the attention of those in positions of power. *Swallow: Food Security in Nigeria's Changing Climate*¹ reached an estimated 25 million viewers, and *Nowhere to Run: Nigeria's Climate and Environmental Crisis*² was broadcast on 37 local TV stations across Nigeria. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, who previously served as Minister of Environment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, described *Nowhere to Run* as "heartbreaking, but ultimately hopeful".

From videos to climate advocacy on the ground

Yar'Adua Foundation believes that it is fundamental to engage frontline communities in designing fit-for-purpose climate interventions and it is using its convening power to connect different stakeholders around the topic. The more that the Foundation engages in climate awareness, the more it realises that investing in developing capacity and resilience at the grassroots level must be prioritised. Mainstreaming the climate vocabulary is one of the Foundation's approaches to bridging this gap. It has been educating secondary schools and local media on this issue and has also reached out to key Nigerian philanthropists who are not yet aligned with the climate agenda.

The Foundation intends to amplify climate justice voices from communities in the coming years. The Niger Delta, for example, despite being an unsafe zone for various reasons, including crime, energy and food insecurity, is home to more than 350 grassroots and community organisations that recently shared their knowledge in a Manifesto for Social Ecological Justice³. Yar'Adua Foundation is partnering to increase its support

¹ *Swallow: Food Security in Nigeria's Changing Climate*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lduy5ff0NQ>

² *Nowhere to Run: Nigeria's Climate and Environmental Crisis (Pidgin Translation)*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLgKBOCFq18>

³ "Niger Delta Manifesto for Socio Ecological Justice," Health of Mother Earth Foundation, <https://homef.org/resources/books/>

for these frontline organisations.

In the short term, the Foundation plans to launch a documentary focused on communities in the Niger Delta. Currently, in the research phase of film production, the Foundation has been engaging with vulnerable populations and is collecting data on the ground, to better understand how these communities perceive climate justice while having their territories impacted by economic extraction activities. This data will also be used to inform the next phase of the Foundation's climate advocacy strategy, which will focus on climate justice, beyond climate science and food security.

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“In the green transition, the West keeps forgetting the situation we are dealing with here: exploited communities and the full amplitude of the oil and gas sector. The Niger Delta is a great example of energy policies going wrong. Our concern with green deals and agreements is that we are caught on the back foot all the time here, and it is all too easy to sign off an agreement that replaces one form of exploitation with another.”

– POLLY ALAKIJA, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE SHEHU MUSA YAR'ADUA FOUNDATION

The next level of Yar'Adua Foundation's engagement on climate will focus on its operational climate footprint. The Foundation aims to retrofit its central building to become more climate-friendly. Their infrastructure is currently not energy-efficient and is still dependent on diesel, even though solar energy has become an accessible local solution. The Foundation also wants to use this space in a more engaging way to connect young people with all these causes through cultural activities. The average age in Nigeria is 20, and youth need a safe space to create challenging artwork and showcase it to people in power. Imagine Nigeria⁴ is a key reference for this vision.

The green transition is at the centre of this narrative that engages citizens, policymakers and stakeholders in national conversations. Fostering an inclusive and prosperous Nigeria and inspiring future generations is a big part of the challenge, and The Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation wants to meaningfully contribute to this journey.

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⁴ Imagine Nigeria - A project on the future of Nigeria, <https://imagineigeria.ng/>