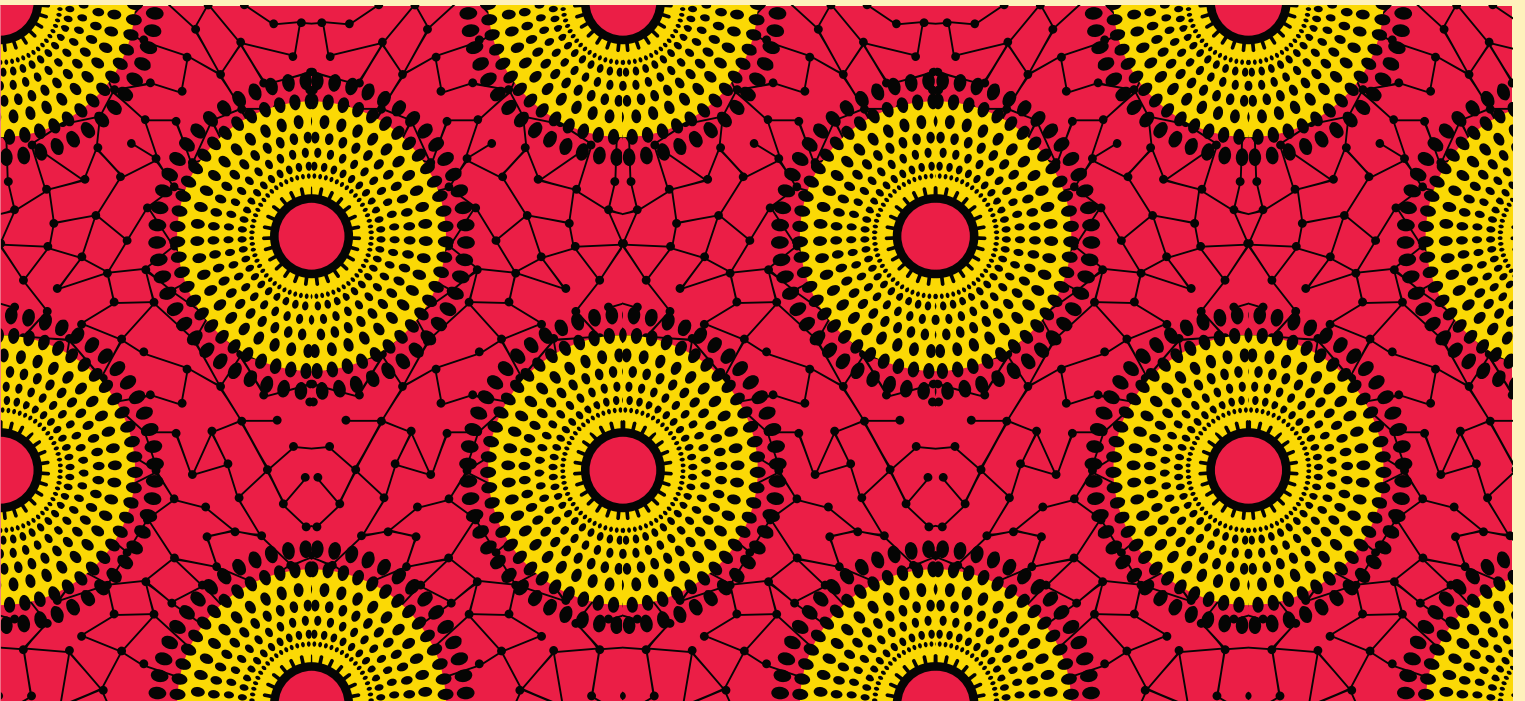





# Celebrating 65 Years of Partnership with West Africa



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A journey to social justice

Summary



The year 2025 marks the 65th anniversary of the Ford Foundation's presence in West Africa. From the opening of its Lagos office in 1960 to today, Ford has remained unwavering in its commitment to advancing social justice and strengthening democracy across the region. The path has never been straightforward, yet time and again, visionary leaders, pioneering institutions, and bold ideas have propelled West Africa forward. Ford has proudly accompanied its people towards a future rooted in the inherent dignity of every person.



## A Legacy of Partnership and Progress: 65 Years in West Africa



**Catherine ChiChi Aniagolu-Okoye explains how Ford's history informs its future.**

As we celebrate 65 years of uninterrupted work in West Africa, we reflect on a remarkable journey of partnership, adaptation, and shared purpose. From the very beginning, that journey has been guided by our deep commitment to social justice and equity across this dynamic and vibrant region.

Our legacy is rooted in a tradition of purposeful partnership, standing with reformers in government while nurturing a thriving, independent civil society. For nearly nine decades, the Ford Foundation's global mission has been to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, and advance human achievement. Along the way, we have learned a powerful truth: lasting change emerges when citizens raise their voices for accountability and when institutions are solid enough to weather turbulence and uncertainty.

**“ We will invest in those living, and working, closest to the problems. ”**

Over these 65 years, West Africa has confronted significant challenges. Each period of struggle has been a catalyst for progress and has inspired generations to shape the future.

Today, a fast-growing, digitally savvy generation demands that democracy delivers justice and opportunity. These young leaders, echoing the visionaries the Ford Foundation has long supported on the frontlines of social change, insist that equality must be made tangible. They seek to dismantle structural, cultural, and systemic barriers that disadvantage women, girls, and youth. They demand that every voice is heard, that every person has a seat at the table. They champion the fair stewardship of natural resources. Their call for justice is reshaping the region's vision of progress.

We will adapt our work to these changing realities. That means we must act with even greater ambition. Guided by the lessons of the past, we will invest in those living, and working, closest to the problems. We will stand in solidarity with the people of West Africa to help build a future that is truly equitable, inclusive and just for all.

**Dr. Catherine ChiChi Aniagolu-Okoye, Regional Director, Ford Foundation, West Africa**

# The Ford Foundation's Strategic Focus in West Africa



**Empowerment and rights:** Ford has supported communities organizing to secure accountability and groups that campaign for social justice.

Over 65 years, Ford's programming has focused on Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal. However, its regional programs have had impact throughout West Africa. Three pillars have anchored everything that Ford does and has done: individual leadership, resilient institutions, and bold, often high-risk ideas.

Through fellowships, it has nurtured visionary scholars, activists, and leaders, including individuals from marginalized backgrounds often overlooked by traditional programs. Ford builds long-term partnerships with civil society organizations, with a deep commitment to their institutional strengthening. It consistently supports ground-breaking research and bold experiments that challenge entrenched inequalities and open new pathways for social justice.

## Education and Research

By supporting universities, civil service training programs, and research institutions, Ford has helped drive the nation-building of newly independent countries, fostering local talent and generating policy research essential to the region's development.

## Human Rights, Democracy and Governance

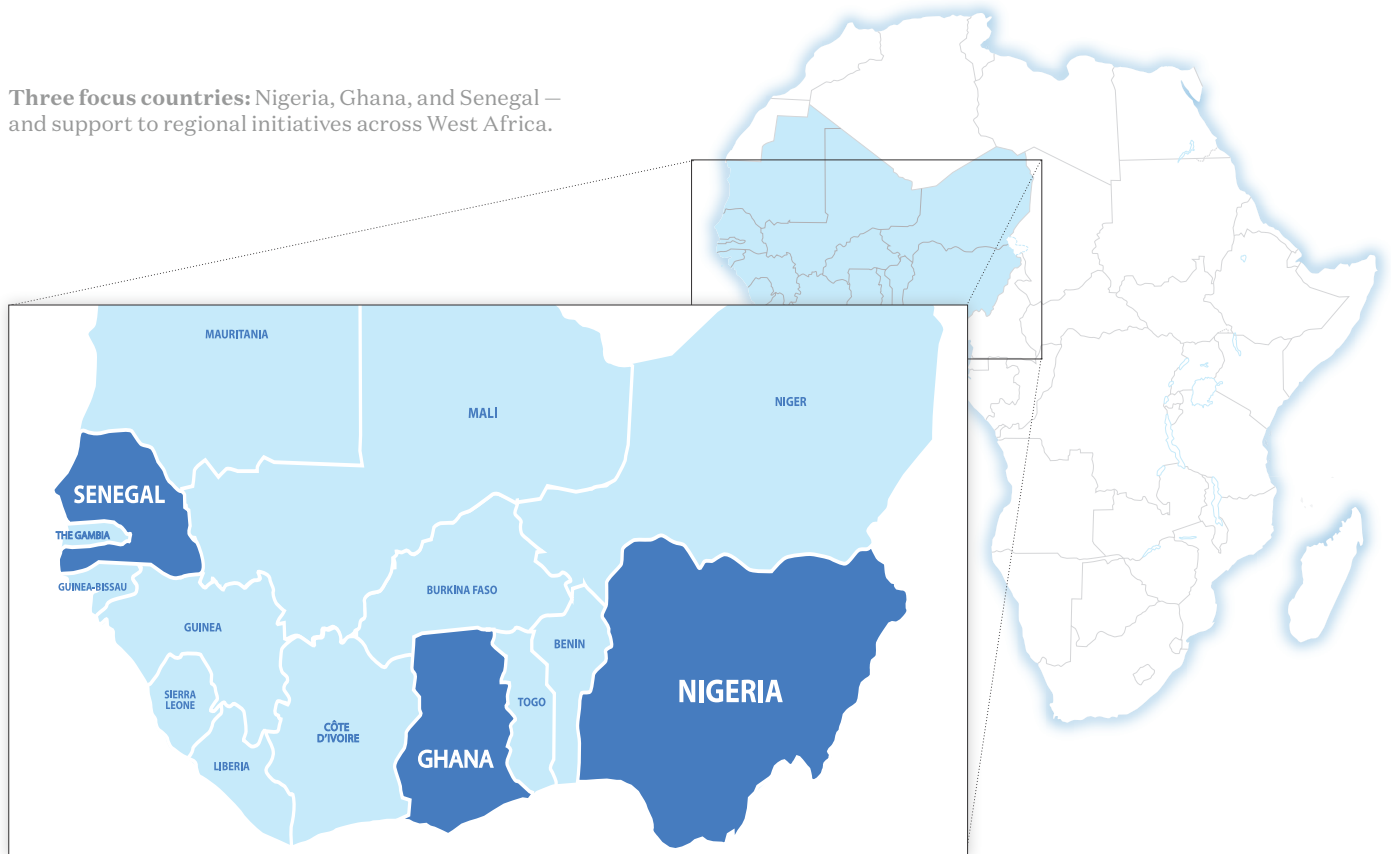
The foundation has supported a human rights field which has expanded from defending civil and political freedoms and advancing the rule of law to confronting the deeper inequalities that shape people's daily lives. It partners with organizations to monitor elections, strengthen independent media, and fight corruption.

Ford's partners press for access to education, health, and land—while demanding justice for communities affected by environmental destruction and displacement. The foundation has long stood for true democracy which offers space for women, young people, marginalized groups, and people with disabilities. It has fostered a culture of inclusion and participation of people in the decisions that shape their lives.

## Women's Rights and Gender Justice

Ford has supported women, girls, and feminist movements in advancing rights and addressing the root causes of discrimination and inequality. Its partners work across interconnected areas—from legal reform and strategic litigation to economic empowerment, equal participation, and leadership. They have challenged a culture of silence around sexual and reproductive health, female genital mutilation, and violence against women and girls, particularly in contexts where patriarchal and gerontocratic norms have denied women's agency and reinforced exclusion. Ford has partnered with groups who work sensitively with cultural gatekeepers and faith leaders to transform the social and cultural norms that sustain inequality.

**Three focus countries:** Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal – and support to regional initiatives across West Africa.



## Economic Development and Opportunities

Ford has successfully advanced agricultural research and experimentation to strengthen crop resilience and improve livelihoods. It ensures that grassroots perspectives inform policymaking, by supporting community development associations, including women's cooperatives. Ford has expanded the field of microfinance and propelled economic development by opening access for underserved populations, and nurturing entrepreneurs. It has also supported those who expose illicit financial flows and corruption practices that drain resources and prevent equitable growth.

## Natural Resources and Climate Justice

Ford wants communities to benefit from the region's natural wealth. It helps build the skills and confidence of grassroots organizations to represent and defend their members effectively. The foundation has supported women's and youth associations so that their concerns are heard, their participation in local development plans is genuine, and their voices reach a wider audience. It has also encouraged think tanks to produce evidence and advocate for transparent and fair management of natural resources, so that wealth lost through poor oversight can instead drive inclusive growth and create opportunities for future generations. Ford's partners are working with governments to develop just energy transition plans that make the shift to clean energy an opportunity to reduce inequality, empower communities, and uphold human rights—rather than reproducing old injustices in new forms.

## Culture, Arts, and Media

The Ford Foundation has helped museums to preserve the region's rich cultural heritage, deepen public understanding of history, and inspire future generations. It also works with creative industries such as film and theatre, which serve as powerful engines of economic opportunity and social change. These efforts nurture changemakers who use creativity not only to earn a living but also to question power, celebrate identity, and drive social transformation.



# 1960 – 1969

## Building Institutions as Pillars of Young Nations



**Independence Day 1960:** Nigeria's new Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, addresses the nation as Britain's last Governor-General looks on.

**The 1960s are a decade of hope and upheaval, as West African nations gain independence but face fragile state structures and scarce expertise.**

The Ford Foundation's response is to invest in individuals, ideas, and institutions: scholarships for a new generation of leaders, universities and research centers, experimental schools, and agricultural research. These early commitments support the groundwork for governance, education, and development in the turbulent decades that follow.

### 1960

#### Investing in Talent

##### Scholarships for a new generation of African leaders

In 1960, as independence spreads across West Africa, the Ford Foundation launches one of its earliest initiatives: scholarships for young Africans to study abroad. Hundreds of students gain access to leading universities, returning as administrators, academics, and policymakers. This investment in human capital is a cornerstone of Ford's early strategy—ensuring that newly independent countries can be led by their own highly trained professionals.

### 1961

#### Strengthening Administrations' Capacity

##### Professionalizing the new civil service

With colonial officials gone, newly independent Ghana and Nigeria urgently need to professionalize their civil services. In Ghana, Ford supports creation of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, which trains administrators to steer policy with local talent. In Nigeria, Ford funds the Institute of Administration at Ife—developed with the New York Institute of Public Administration—which emerges as the country's flagship center.

### 1962

#### Ibadan as a Learning Hub

##### Turning a colonial college into a Nigerian university

Ford makes a large commitment to the University of Ibadan, equipping laboratories, libraries, and faculty. Its most visible legacy is the Institute of African Studies, nurturing pioneering thinkers. In the first decade after independence, Ibadan emerges as a vibrant hub for African scholarship and national development planning, embodying the spirit of intellectual self-determination.

“ Perhaps the most iconic and transformative outcome of this partnership with Ford is the establishment of the Institute of African Studies ... a bold statement of intellectual independence and self-discovery ... by Africans, for Africans, and for the world. ”

— Dr. Kayode Adebowale, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan



**Intellectual independence:** The University of Ibadan was a focus of Ford's regional investment.

**National Library:** Ford funded its development as part of its strategy of building up Nigeria's key institutions.



**1963**

## Laying the Foundation for Knowledge

### Ford helps establish Nigeria's National Library

In the 1960s, the Ford Foundation provides crucial early support to build the National Library of Nigeria as an independent institution. Nigerians are trained in every aspect of library science with support from US advisors and technical staff. With a clear plan for knowledge transfer and sustainability, this lays the groundwork for a nationwide library system spanning most states.

**1964**

## Reimagining Secondary Education

### Curriculum caters for Nigerian, not colonial, needs

Ford supports creation of the Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Center in Lagos to design homegrown curricula. Championing relevance over rote learning, the center trains teachers, produces textbooks, and adapts science and math teaching for local realities. It marks a turning point from imported models to education systems that are rooted in local contexts.

**1965**

## Beyond Colonial Frames

### Language and knowledge reappropriated

In Senegal, Ford helps the University of Dakar to establish the Center for African Linguistics and to create a comprehensive West African atlas—advancing scholarship, preserving languages, and charting the region's future on its own terms.

**1966**

## Keeping Nations Functioning Amid Instability

### Training civil servants in turbulent times

Even as coups rock Ghana and Nigeria in 1966, Ford supports training centers in Kaduna, Enugu, and Accra that train hundreds of civil servants. By investing in people and institutions, Ford helps sustain capacity to govern even as states navigate periods of fragility. The centers become an essential backbone of public service resilience.

**1967**

## Birth of a World-class Agricultural Research Institute

### Agricultural research for Africa's future

Founded with Ford and Rockefeller support in 1967, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) becomes Africa's first international agricultural research center. Its scientists develop higher-yielding varieties of cassava, maize, and yam, train African agronomists, and partner with farmers, trialing innovations on their land. IITA quickly turns Ibadan into a hub of agricultural innovation—demonstrating how science can combat hunger and build resilience.

**1968**

## An Experiment in Comprehensive Education

### Aiyetoro school is model for a young nation

With Ford's support, Aiyetoro Comprehensive High School pioneers a new model of learning that blends academic subjects with agriculture, the arts, and practical skills. As a living laboratory for innovation, it shows how African schools can make education more relevant to local realities.

**1969**

## Pioneering Public Health Policy

### First population policy and national family planning program

In 1969, Ghana becomes the first West African country to adopt an official population policy and national family planning program. Grants and experts seconded by Ford underpin this bold step, training health workers and establishing clinics. It is a delicate, groundbreaking effort, linking health, demographics, and development at a time when population growth is a pressing concern.



**Great optimism:** Hopes were high, but challenges ahead were great.

# 1970 – 1979

## Nurturing Knowledge Through Difficult Times



**Maintain learning:** Rebuilding education was vital after the destruction of Nigeria's civil war and a focus for Ford support.

**The 1970s bring both promise and strain for West Africa. Civil wars, coups, and economic shocks test fragile states, while universities and research centers struggle under austerity.**

The Ford Foundation responds with bold experiments—supporting African research networks, sustaining higher education, investing in agricultural science, and promoting mother-tongue education.

### 1970

#### Rebuilding Education After War

**Vocational training for national recovery**

After the civil war, the University of Nsukka's technical workshops lie in ruins. With Ford's support, equipment is restored, and teachers are retrained. The rebuilt program trains vocational instructors who will, in turn, prepare thousands of skilled technicians.

### 1971

#### Enlarged Support in Francophone West Africa

**Opening of the Abidjan Office**

The Ford Foundation expands its commitment by opening an office in Abidjan, extending support to Francophone countries beyond Senegal. The *Centre Ivoirien de Recherche Économique et Sociale* (CIRES) is a notable example, benefiting from support that advances training and research in agricultural economics.

### 1972

#### Investing in Human Capital

**Hundreds of African fellowships launched**

From 1972 onwards, the foundation's Training Awards Program becomes one of the largest channels for African fellowships, supporting more than 400 Nigerians—alongside many others from across the continent—by the decade's end. Many fellows pursue advanced studies at institutions such as the University of Ibadan and IITA, reflecting Ford's broader effort to expand higher education capacity within the continent and root training within African universities.

“**Ford's support was pivotal: it fostered opportunities for higher learning, scholarly publishing, and leadership development that became building blocks for African intellectual life.**”

— Dr. Godwin Murunga, Executive Secretary of CODESRIA



**Optimizing agriculture:** Improving farming knowhow and sharing that knowledge was a priority, given increasing populations in West Africa.



**1973**

### Research by Africans, for Africa

#### Creating a continental home for African social science

With Ford's support, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) takes shape, giving African scholars a stronger voice in global debates on the continent's future. Early support for workshops and databanks fuels CODESRIA's growth, and it soon emerges as Africa's leading research network.

**1974**

### Catalyzing Research in Education

#### Evidence-based policy fostered in West and Central Africa

A modest grant for planning social science research in education in West Africa becomes a catalyst for transforming educational research across the region. By convening educators and researchers from West and Central Africa, this fosters a regional training program that champions evidence-based education policy. Later, in 1989, some participants formalize this initiative into the Educational Research Network for West & Central Africa, a groundbreaking organization devoted to advancing educational research in the region.

**1975**

### Keeping Labs Alive

#### Emergency support provided during austerity

As Ghana's economy collapses, science labs at the University of Cape Coast face closure. Ford's emergency grant in 1975 keeps them open, preserving research capacity and enabling students to complete their training. This is a lifeline for higher education under military rule.

**1976**

### Seeding Agricultural Knowhow

#### Training for economists and rural sociologists

Ford strengthens Ahmadou Bello University's Faculty of Agriculture and Institute for Agricultural Research. The grant expands graduate training in agricultural economics and rural policy, making the university a regional hub for both Anglophone and Francophone students.

**1977**

### Learning Through Local Languages

#### Mother tongue education takes root

Ford supports the ambitious Yoruba Six-Year Project to create textbooks and teaching materials in local languages. This marks a turning point: recognizing that children learn best in their mother tongue and showing that language is central to education and development.

**1978**

### Shaping Regional Institutions

#### Studies, training, and exchanges for integration

When West African leaders launch the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, the Ford Foundation helps to lay the groundwork. Its support for Nigerian universities and the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research produces studies on trade, customs, and migration that shape early debates and feed into the landmark 1979 free movement protocol. Meanwhile, Ford's backing of CODESRIA and the Association of African Universities nurtures scholars and networks that give regional cooperation and dialogue real depth and influence.

**1979**

### Recognizing Women's Role in Farming

#### Early research begins on gender and food security

Ford funds studies at the University of Ife on women farmers' productivity, labor, and post-harvest technologies. This marks an important early recognition of women's vital roles in agriculture and rural innovation. It pioneers work which informs later debates on food security and gender equality.



**IITA scientist:** The institute's global stature helped it turn into a continental research hub.

# 1980 – 1989

## Building from the Ground Up



**Kano marketplace:** Austerity led to poverty, declining incomes and rising food prices.

**The 1980s are marked by economic collapse, political repression, and deepening poverty across West Africa. In this turbulent context, community-driven development begins to emerge.**

The Ford Foundation remains engaged—supporting grassroots initiatives while also sustaining universities and research centers—helping to anchor both local participation and higher education during a decade of adversity.

### 1980

#### Amplifying African Voices

##### ‘Okike’: Achebe’s gift to African literature

Founded by Chinua Achebe in 1971 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, *Okike* becomes one of Africa’s pioneering literary journals—a forum for art, fiction, poetry, and fresh writing from across the continent. With Ford’s support, it serves as a vital platform during repressive times, championing independent African voices.

### 1981

#### South–South Learning for Rural Development

##### Peer learning between Ghanaians and Tanzanians

The Ford Foundation funds exchange visits for Ghanaians to Tanzania where they discuss rural development challenges, fostering South–South cooperation amid economic hardship and political upheaval in Ghana. Peer conversations bring fresh perspectives and practical lessons to bear on the country’s urgent quest for rural resilience.

### 1982

#### Preserving Cultural Heritage

##### Initiative builds bridges between museums

Launched in 1982 with Ford Foundation support, the West African Museums Project (WAMP) drives efforts to safeguard the region’s cultural heritage and revitalize struggling museums. It brings together anglophone, francophone, and lusophone countries, training staff, modernizing catalogues, and sparking cross-border collaboration. WAMP helps to ensure that West Africa’s collections inspire and educate future generations.



**Tackling rural poverty:** Ford made this issue a programmatic priority in West Africa in the 1980s.

“

**More than 30 years after the Ford Foundation helped bring together West Africa’s farming leaders, we still remember that partnership as a defining moment. For me, it was a formative time that gave farmers confidence and a voice.**

”

— Ngouye Fall, Executive Director, the West African Rural Foundation

1983

### Foundations for Memory

#### Support for establishment of Gorée's Island Historical Museum

The Ford Foundation supports the preliminary costs for establishing the Historical Museum of Senegal in Fort d'Estrées on Gorée Island. Later, it joins forces with UNESCO, as well as the French and Saudi embassies, to finance renovations. The museum, inaugurated in 1989, becomes a landmark effort to safeguard Senegal's history and cultural heritage.

1984

### Building a Culture of Rights

#### Shaping the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

At Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, the Ford Foundation backs a pioneering human rights program at the Institute for Human Rights and Peace. The program fosters research on critical legal and constitutional issues, shaping a community of jurists and legal scholars who are eager to test ideas and imagine fairer futures. From this dynamic community, Judge Kéba Mbaye—an eminent Senegalese jurist—draws both inspiration and expertise as he guides the drafting of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.



**Tuning in:** Culture became seen as vital to human dignity and democratic participation.

1985

### Fostering Independent Debates

#### Researching democracy in a time of autocratic rule

The Ford Foundation supports the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur la Démocratie Pluraliste dans le Tiers Monde* in Dakar to promote research on liberal democracy and provide a platform for open, independent discussion.

1986

### Sustaining Intellectual Life Under Strain

#### Ford maintains policy debate in Nigeria

In Ibadan, the Social Science Academy of Nigeria organizes research competitions, workshops, and publications that sustain an intellectual community. Even amid austerity and authoritarian rule, these efforts, backed by Ford, keep civic discourse alive and enable scholars to shape national conversations on governance and development.

1987

### Strengthening Civil Liberties

#### Building legal capacity for Nigeria's democratic transition

The foundation supports the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies to research judicial reform and to run seminars on civil liberties. This program prepares judges, lawyers, and public officials for the transition to civilian rule.



**Traumatic memory:** Ford supports establishing a museum on Senegal's Gorée Island memorializing the Atlantic slave trade.

1988

### Getting Leaders Ready to Lead

#### And face democratic, economic and accountability challenges

Former military Head of State, Olusegun Obasanjo, launches the African Leadership Forum, backed by Ford, to convene leaders, intellectuals, and international figures around Africa's renewal. Its inaugural session concludes that the continent's deepest crisis is one of leadership. Africa's future, participants argue, hinges on accountable governance, democratic participation, economic self-reliance, and sustained inter-African dialogue.

1989

### A New Model for Rural Development

#### Putting farmers at the center of policy and practice

Ford supports the Research and Support Program for Farmers, a turning point in West African agricultural development practices that recognizes farmers as both knowledge-holders and policy actors. Building on this momentum, the West Africa Rural Foundation (WARF)—created in 1993 with Ford's support—expands and replicates the model, financing farmer-centered programs that empower villagers to take more control over resources and decisions.



# Investing in Individuals and Leadership



**Global community:** West Africa's Global Fellows meet peers from across the world at the foundation's New York headquarters.



## Kofi Annan (1960)

### From Ford Scholar to Global Statesman

**Studying in Minnesota was a transformational experience.**

A young Ghanaian named Kofi Annan earns a Ford scholarship to study at Macalester College in Minnesota. “The world opened up to me when I received that fellowship,” he later reflects. Annan rises to become the first African Secretary-General of the United Nations, steering it through turbulent times and earning the Nobel Peace Prize. His journey proves how investing in education can ignite extraordinary leadership, with ripples of impact reaching far beyond borders.



## Abubakar Balarabe Mahmoud (1985)

### Door Knock to National Leadership

**Ford opened his way to life-changing opportunities.**

In the 1980s, Abubakar Balarabe Mahmoud, a young Nigerian lawyer, seeks training in international law but lacks support—until he knocks on the Ford Foundation's door in Lagos. The person he meets instantly recognizes and trusts his potential, and quickly opens his way to Ford's support. That visit leads to a life-changing scholarship at the International Development Law Institute in Rome, broadening his vision of law and development. Mahmoud later becomes Attorney General of Kano State and President of the Nigerian Bar Association.



## IFP program (2001-2013)

### Fellowship for Ordinary People with Extraordinary Leadership Skills

**IFP makes fellowships much more inclusive.**

The International Fellowships Program is the Ford Foundation's largest-ever grant, supporting ordinary people with extraordinary leadership skills—often excluded from elite fellowships because of birthplace, gender, or background. While global in scope, with over 4,000 fellows across the world, its impact in West Africa is especially striking, with fellows from Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal gaining access to graduate study that was long inaccessible for women, people from rural communities and other marginalized groups, and those with disabilities. Most return to their countries to lead in education, community development, politics, and gender equality, using their skills to strengthen institutions and influence policy.

“**The International Fellowship Program was a big bet: an unprecedented commitment that carried no guarantee of success but promised transformative impact, if it worked.**”

—Susan Berresford, former Ford Foundation President

## Papa Sène (2004)

### Championing Educational Reform in Senegal

**Papa Sene strengthens Senegal's schools and inspires the next generation of educators.**

Blending classroom experience with public service, Papa Sène rises from high-school teacher to coordinator of the division for middle and high schools at Senegal's Ministry of Education. Seeking stronger skills in education administration and reform, he earns an IFP fellowship and completes a master's in educational reform at Université Laval in Canada. Returning home, Papa applies his expertise to help modernize Senegal's school system. His leadership helps shape policy and improve learning conditions for more than 20,000 students.



## Philomina Nneka Nweze (2006)

### Breaking Barriers on Nigeria's Airwaves

**A Ford International Fellowship helps transform radio and inspires people with disabilities.**

Blinded by childhood malaria, Philomina Nneka Nweze breaks barriers as the first blind student at Nigeria's University of Jos and a rising radio broadcaster. After twice applying, before winning an IFP fellowship, she earns a masters in mass communication at Ohio University and returns with new skills that transform her radio broadcasts programs, Health Friendly and Radio Psych. She becomes Assistant Director at Capital FM and inspires women and people with disabilities across Nigeria.



## Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie (2011)

### Advancing Disability Rights in Ghana

**Ghanaian advocate builds policy expertise and drives inclusion for people with disabilities.**

Stricken by polio at the age of eight, Sefakor Komabu Pomeyie becomes a leading disability rights advocate in Ghana. A Ford IFP fellowship takes her to the School for International Training in Vermont, USA, where she studies Sustainable Development and promotes campus-wide disability inclusion. Later, she founds Enlightening and Empowering People with Disabilities (EEPD) Africa to enforce disability policies and improve school accessibility.

## Africa Leadership Transition Fellowship Program (2018)

### Strengthening Civil Society for the Next Generation

**New program empowers NGO leaders to craft personal and organizational succession plans.**

The Africa Leadership Transition Fellowship Program (ALTFFP) launches, with support from the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), and the Ford Foundation to help senior African NGO leaders prepare to hand over the reins. Fellows create personal and organizational succession plans, capture their knowledge in a reflective book chapter, and spend time at a host university with a faculty mentor.



## Kodzo Yaotse (2025)

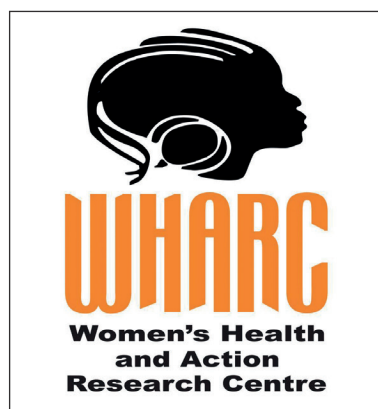
### Championing Inclusive Energy Governance

**A fellowship that opens access to a global network for change, bringing African perspectives.**

Kodzo Yaotse, Policy Lead at the Africa Centre for Energy Policy in Ghana, is an emerging leader in governance and accountability. As a Ford Global Fellow, he joins a network of changemakers tackling inequality through peer learning and shared leadership. His work strengthens transparency in energy and extractive sectors, amplifies voices of women, youth, and people with disabilities, and brings African perspectives into digital governance.

## 1990 – 1999

# Sowing Seeds for Renewal in Difficult Times



**Bold new campaigns:** Ford supported women leaders and healthcare for the marginalized.

**The 1990s in West Africa are marked by turbulence and a quest for renewal. In Ghana and Senegal, citizens seize new democratic openings; in Nigeria, they endure deep repression. Across the region, rural communities remain marginalized.**

Amid economic austerity and civic struggles, citizens push for justice, accountability, and inclusion. The Ford Foundation stands with them—supporting human rights defenders, independent journalists, women leaders, and grassroots organizations whose courage and vision begin to reshape the democratic landscape.

### 1990

#### Preparing to Overhaul Nigerian Justice

##### Landmark study drives reforms

The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies conducts a landmark study on human rights and the administration of justice in Nigeria, supported by a Ford Foundation grant. The initiative forms part of a regional renewal of human rights work, aiming to raise awareness, strengthen judicial independence, expand legal access, and drive reforms to safeguard basic rights.

### 1991

#### From Small Loans to Systemic Change

##### Building microfinance to foster economic inclusion in Nigeria

Ford places an early bet on Dr. Godwin Ehigiamusoe's bold idea that poverty is not only about income but also deprivation, poor health, and social exclusion. With seed support, his Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) trains women to manage loans, improve health, and challenge discriminatory norms. Over time, LAPO grows into Nigeria's largest microfinance bank and a model that informs national microfinance policy.

### 1992

#### Giving Human Rights a Voice

##### Supporting the first human rights organization in Nigeria

Co-founded in 1987 by Clement Nwankwo and others, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) is Nigeria's first civil society organization devoted to promoting and protecting human rights. It exposes torture, arbitrary arrests, and inhumane prison conditions. With the Ford Foundation's support, the CLO professionalizes. It amplifies its research, helping turn scattered complaints into systematic evidence that supports future campaigns on justice and accountability.

### 1993

#### Breaking the Silence on Girls' Rights

##### Pioneering sexuality and reproductive health education

The Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) sets out to challenge Nigeria's "culture of silence" around sexuality, early pregnancy, contraception, abortion, and sexual violence. Realizing change is harder with adult women, the founders focus on girls. With Ford's support, the GPI pioneers sexuality and reproductive health education in Nigeria's schools, gaining governmental endorsement and shaping lasting reform.



**Protecting girls:** Ford supported rights monitoring centers and action against abuse.



1994

## Shaping Women's Health Research and Practice Across Africa

### Expands focus to rights, justice, and opportunity

The Women's Health Action and Research Center (WHARC) redefines reproductive health in Africa—not only about birth rates, but also rights, justice, and opportunity. With Ford's support, it pairs research with advocacy, launches the African Journal of Reproductive Health—still a leading reference 30 years later—and champions Nigeria's first state law banning female genital mutilation. From revitalizing rural clinics to pioneering "Text4Life" to end preventable maternal death, WHARC grows into a trusted institution linking science, community, and policy for lasting change.

1995

## Global Conferences, Local Change

### From Cairo and Beijing to national advocacy by West African women

In the mid-1990s, West African women's rights activists—backed by the Ford Foundation, join the landmark conferences in Cairo and Beijing, where reproductive health is redefined as a question of rights, empowerment, and development. They return energized, carrying this vision home. From ministries to village meetings, they push for policy change and carve out new spaces for women's voices in governance.

**Supporting adolescence:** Health workers gather for a two-day CLP workshop on reproductive and sexual health.



**Battling HIV:** Members of the Vegetable Seller Association watch a video on HIV-AIDS.



**Protecting rights and health:** Women support a campaign in Benin City to outlaw female genital mutilation.

1996

## Film as a Catalyst for Change

### Harnessing Nollywood to drive social change

Communicating for Change (CFC) transforms media into a force for justice. With support from the Ford Foundation, it tackles issues such as democracy, governance, and female genital mutilation through bold, research-driven campaigns. From screening films on long-distance buses to embedding social messages into Nollywood blockbusters, CFC shifts public attitudes—and encourages new creative voices, launching the careers of Kenneth Gyang, Yinka Edwards, and Ty Bello.

1997

## Nurturing Independent Voices

### Powerhouse launched for press freedom

The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is established in 1997 in a small Accra office with a single staff member and a bold mission: to defend independent journalism in fragile democracies. With flexible support from Ford, MFWA builds a regional network, trains reporters, defends journalists in court, and grows into West Africa's leading media watchdog. Later, its newsroom, The Fourth Estate, uncovers truth, exposes injustice, and drives accountability.

1998

## Reforming Policing in Nigeria

### Shifting the Nigerian force from oppression to public service

CLEEN Foundation reimagines public safety by showing that evidence can drive reform. With Ford's support, it pioneers community policing, presses for Nigeria's Police Complaints Response Unit, and trains generations of officers. Trusted as both a watchdog and partner, CLEEN monitors protests, shapes policy, and advances justice reforms—standing as Nigeria's leading voice for accountable, rights-based policing.

1999

## From Taboo to Policy

### Nigeria's first national framework for adolescent reproductive health

In the mid-1990s, Action Health Incorporated (AHI) breaks taboos around adolescent sexuality and reproductive health through youth-friendly clinics and bold outreach. In 1999, with Ford's support, it focuses on Nigeria's new Reproductive Health Policy—which mentions adolescents only briefly—to convene the country's first National Conference on Adolescent Reproductive Health. Uniting government, civil society, and young people, the conference produces a framework that shapes Nigeria's first dedicated adolescent reproductive health policy in 2001.

## 2000 – 2009

# Making Democracy Deliver for People



**Community development training:**  
Ford supported rights to be claimed in practice, not just promised on paper.

**The 2000s bring a wave of democratic renewal in West Africa. Ghana and Nigeria consolidate civilian rule, while Senegal demonstrates that power can change hands peacefully through the ballot box.**

Citizens demand real dividends—better schools, justice, secure livelihoods, and dignity. Civil society shifts from protest to partnership, shaping policy while pressing for accountability. Ford broadens its work, focusing on reconstruction as democratic institutions take root.

## 2000

### Entrepreneurship as a Powerful Alternative to Traditional Jobs

#### Fate Foundation tackles youth unemployment

Founded in 2000, Fate Foundation takes on Nigeria's youth unemployment crisis by championing entrepreneurship as a pathway to dignity and opportunity. Over time, it upskills more than 230,000 aspiring entrepreneurs through in-person training, reaches 1.5 million people with digital tools, and provides intensive support to more than 8,000 entrepreneurs. With Ford's backing—from early-stage funding to program expansion—Fate becomes a cornerstone of Nigerian youth entrepreneurship.

**Supporting new entrepreneurs:** FATE Foundation was created to help them to grow their businesses.



## 2001

### Pioneering Litigation for Africa's Marginalized Communities

#### Legal challenge to Ogoniland abuses sets a continental precedent

The Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC), backed by Ford, becomes a leading voice for marginalized communities. SERAC's most renowned case, brought before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, challenges human rights abuses linked to oil extraction in Ogoniland. In 2001, the Commission rules that Nigeria violated rights to health, housing, environment, and life under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. This case remains a foundational precedent for advancing economic and social rights across Africa.

## 2002

### Inspiring a New Generation of Ethical Leaders

#### LEAP Africa enables young people to shape Africa's future

Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability & Professionalism (LEAP) Africa embodies the Ford Foundation's goal to nurture just and inclusive societies by investing in future leaders. In 2002, it sets about equipping young Nigerians to drive social change in their communities. LEAP has gone on to train over 80,000 participants and to reach an estimated 5 million indirect beneficiaries. Alumni bring lessons into their lives—showing professional integrity, engaging honestly in politics, and sponsoring other young people to access the same training.

## 2003

### Improving Legal Protection and Access to Justice

#### Ordinary citizens gain affordable ways to enforce laws

With Ford's support, the Lagos State Ministry of Justice pioneers Mediation Centers and Public Defenders Offices across local communities. These initiatives give ordinary citizens access to affordable, community-based mechanisms for resolving disputes and defending rights—reducing reliance on costly courts, easing social tensions, and embedding the rule of law at the grassroots level.

2004

## Shaping Nigeria's Pension Reform

### Insights from other countries' journeys

In 2004, Nigeria passes the Pension Reform Act, moving from a struggling, state-run system to a new contributory pension scheme. Prior to this legislation, President Obasanjo—himself a former Trustee of the Ford Foundation—establishes the National Pension Reform Committee, appointing Mr. Fola Adeola, founder of Guarantee Trust Bank and Fate Foundation, as its chair. With Ford's support, Adeola studies innovative pension models in Latin America, returning home with insights that subsequently shape this major policy shift.

2005

## Defending Women, Changing Laws

### Advocacy support leads to federal law against gender-based violence

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights rules that Nigeria's use of Sharia penal codes in the Safiya Hussaini case violates fundamental rights. BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights—backed by Ford since 1997—carries the case forward with peer organizations. This successful challenge to a local injustice, grounded in discriminatory customary and religious laws, sets an Africa-wide legal precedent. Blending research, advocacy, and legal aid, BAOBAB rises as a defender of women's rights, paving the way for greater safeguards, including Nigeria's first federal law addressing gender-based violence in 2015.

2006

## Building African Philanthropy for Lasting Change

### Ford's catalytic investment in TrustAfrica

The Ford Foundation commits a catalytic \$30 million to launch TrustAfrica, a pan-African foundation focused on African leadership. TrustAfrica strengthens African agency over particularly pressing challenges, through re-granting, convening, knowledge generation, advocacy, and movement building. It also becomes a key coordinator of major initiatives, including, in 2015, the "Stop the Bleeding" campaign against illicit financial flows.

2007

## Pioneering Feminist Philanthropy Across Africa

### The African Women's Development Fund champions gender justice

The first pan-African feminist fund, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is founded in 2000 with vital support from the Ford Foundation. Operating in 50+ countries, AWDF is both a funder and movement actor, resourcing feminist initiatives led by those directly facing gender discrimination. Beyond grants, it builds capacity, fosters movements, and amplifies influence. In 2007, Ford's endowment enables AWDF to acquire headquarters, strengthening its institutional sustainability. In 2022, AWDF begins hosting the \$3.75 million KASA Initiative, co-funded by Ford and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), to combat sexual violence in West Africa.

2008

## Nurturing a Cultural Epicenter in Nigeria

### It drives art, shapes careers, reimagines country

Terra Kulture becomes a hub for art, theatre, literature, and film amid fragile cultural infrastructure in Nigeria. With Ford's support, it hosts cross-cultural exchanges, nurtures artists who achieve global prominence, and later produces works such as 93 Days, a drama-thriller on the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the heroes who contained it. Terra Kulture shows how the arts create jobs, inspire pride, and can reshape Nigeria's image.

2009

## Catalyzing Democracy from the Ground Up

### Ford backs voter registration drive and election monitoring

The Ford Foundation takes a bold step by funding Community Life Project (CLP) to mobilize citizens for voter registration and for monitoring ahead of the 2011 elections. Though new to electoral work, CLP had already proved to be effective in mobilizing grassroots self-help networks through Ford-supported HIV prevention programs. Building on this model, CLP catalyzes the Reclaim Naija movement, which drives mass registration and monitoring, ensuring that Nigerians are informed, empowered, and can uphold electoral legitimacy.



**Strengthening democracy:** Reclaim Naija drives mass registration and monitors elections.



# 2010-2019

## Growing Institutions, Amplifying Voices



**Building for commitment:** The new Office of West Africa, Ford's first owned building in the region, opened in Lagos in 2010.

**Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal stand at a crossroads of turbulence and possibility. Democratic transitions strain under economic uncertainty, yet youth activism and women's rights campaigns gain momentum amid calls from citizens for greater accountability.**

Corruption, inequality, and insecurity still cast long shadows, but they cannot silence the drive for change. In this contested space, the Ford Foundation deepens its alliances—supporting bold civic actors, pioneering institutions, and grassroots voices—to turn fragile democratic openings into lasting progress in governance, rights, and social justice.

### 2010

#### Ford's Jubilee of Commitment

##### Celebrating half a century of partnership in Nigeria and West Africa

Marking 50 years in Nigeria and West Africa, the Ford Foundation opens its first owned office in Lagos—a space designed for openness, trust, and collaboration. It also launches the \$1 million Jubilee Transparency Awards, honoring civil society champions. These include Friends of the Earth Nigeria, for mobilizing citizens to demand environmental justice and transparency in extractives, and the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance for bringing participatory theatre to communities to spark civic education and embolden villagers to speak out.



**Protecting 2011 elections:** A citizen movement, Reclaim Naija, monitored intimidation and violence, during voter registration and election day.

### 2011

#### Building Trust in the Ballot

##### Voter verification drives first credible election since return to civil rule

With Ford's support, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) introduces technology to verify voters, trains staff, and it enhances communications. This builds public confidence and helps the 2011 elections to be widely recognized as Nigeria's freest since the return to civilian rule.

### 2012

#### Protecting Africa's Written Tradition

##### Timbuktu manuscripts rescued

When Islamist militants seized Timbuktu in 2012 and threatened its priceless manuscripts, a Malian NGO evacuated hundreds of thousands of texts, saving one of Africa's greatest intellectual legacies. The rescue was enabled by the Ford Foundation's fastest-ever grant, issued overnight—an emergency response rooted in a long partnership with the *Association pour la Sauvegarde et la Valorisation des Manuscrits pour la Défense de la Culture Islamique* (SAVAMA), which preserves and catalogues Timbuktu's legendary manuscripts. For over a decade, Ford has helped SAVAMA build libraries and train Malian conservators to protect these historic treasures.

### 2013

#### Girls, Not Brides

##### Community action and research drive change on child marriage

In northern Nigeria, communities mobilize to keep girls in school—reframing education as a way to delay marriage and expand opportunity. With Ford's support, ActionAid Nigeria drives this movement. Meanwhile, development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) leads a landmark study mapping child marriage across West Africa. Widely cited by the African Union, United Nations, and governments, the study links community action with evidence to shift norms and shape policy.

## 2014

### Building the Next Generation of Civil Society Leaders

#### Rising managers step into leadership with confidence

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) launches the Civil Society Leadership Institute with Ford's support, preparing mid-level managers for executive roles and ensuring smooth leadership transitions. The initiative reflects WACSI's broader mission: to fortify civil society across the region by building capacity, deepening knowledge, and amplifying advocacy.

## 2015

### Restoring Memory, Inspiring Justice

#### Gorée's Island House of Slaves becomes an active site of conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, in partnership with the Ford Foundation, begins restoring Senegal's iconic House of Slaves. Beyond repairing its walls, the project draws on Senegalese scholarship to create more accurate and inclusive narratives of the slave trade, while fostering critical dialogue. Gorée emerges not as a static monument, but as a living site of conscience, linking the legacy of slavery to contemporary struggles for justice and human rights.

**Site of conscience:** Work begins on restoring House of Slaves.



**Disability rights:** Campaigns urged Nigeria's Electoral Commission to facilitate voting by people with disabilities.

## 2016

### Driving Fair Resource Governance Across Africa

#### Africa Center for Energy Policy bridges strategy, governance, and climate action

The Africa Center for Energy Policy (ACEP) delivers independent analysis on energy and natural resource governance. Supported by Ford, it bridges policy, governance, and climate action to advance a sustainable and equitable energy future for Africa. Its advocacy saves Ghana billions—by renegotiating power contracts, blocking risky gold royalty sales, and by averting costly oil acquisitions—establishing ACEP as a trusted and influential policy voice.

## 2017

### Rewiring Education for Employment

#### A movement that prioritizes competencies over credentials

The Ford Foundation begins supporting West Africa Vocational Education (WAVE), advancing its mission to equip young Nigerians with skills for dignified work, valuing ability over credentials. WAVE promotes skills-based hiring, updates curricula, and trains educators for a changing economy. Since 2013, when it was founded, WAVE has reached 70,000 young people, achieved a 70% alumni employment rate, and has helped graduates triple their incomes within a year.

## 2018

### Justice Through Agency

#### Empowering communities to shape decisions affecting their lives

Nigerian communities, especially women, once excluded from decisions shaping their lives, now find their voices amplified through Spaces for Change. S4C transforms Niger Delta conflict zones into places of shared discussion through the National Extractive Dialogue whereby communities can air grievances peacefully. In Lagos, S4C provides families with legal aid against forced evictions. With Ford's support, S4C establishes inclusion as a cornerstone of social justice.

## 2019

### Lived experience makes disability rights central to democracy

#### Monitoring, advocacy, litigation, and community action propel reforms

Nigeria's Disability Act (2019) becomes a milestone for inclusion. Backed by Ford, the Center for Citizens with Disabilities and the Disability Rights Advocacy Center propel the reform with evidence-based advocacy—such as a 2014 audit highlighting that 99% of public buildings are inaccessible. Through monitoring, research, litigation, and community action, these organizations continue pressing for full implementation, making disability rights visible and central to Nigeria's democracy and development.

# 2020 – 2025

## Trials and Resilience



**Rule of law:**  
A CLEAP-Justice campaign with Ford and ActionAid to increase judicial accountability.

**West Africa faces overlapping challenges: COVID-19, global price shocks, mounting debt, climate pressures, chronic poverty, growing inequality, and political turbulence.**

Institutions are tested. However, across the region, communities mobilize, civic movements press forward, innovative youth drive a growing service sector, and determination for change grows stronger. In this charged landscape, Ford works to protect civic spaces and strengthen governance. It advances gender, youth, and climate justice, ensuring that the energy of citizens translates into lasting transformation.

### 2020

#### Shifting Harmful Narratives about Africa

**Africa No Filter confronts stereotypes that drain \$4.2 billion annually**

Launched by the Ford Foundation in 2020, Africa No Filter (ANF) is a pioneering donor collaborative working to dismantle stereotypes that reduce Africa to images of famine, corruption, and conflict. A landmark ANF study reveals the cost of these harmful narratives: an estimated \$4.2 billion lost to the continent every year. In response, ANF invests in storytellers, artists, journalists, entrepreneurs, and researchers who spotlight Africa's creativity, resilience, and agency.

### 2021

#### Initiative Focuses on Strengthening Young People

**Nigeria Youth Futures Fund equips young people to push for justice and accountability**

The Nigeria Youth Futures Fund—a donor collaborative launched by the Ford Foundation and others in 2021—is a generational call for justice, dignity, and accountable governance. It strengthens youth capacity and supports grassroots movements to influence policy and shift social norms. By 2025, the fund, managed by LEAP Africa, has invested nearly \$2 million in 800 young leaders and organizations, fueling local change and shaping national debate.

### 2022

#### Power in the Hands of Communities

**Equipping villages to achieve justice when facing mining and pollution**

The *Centre de Recherche et d'Actions pour les Droits Economiques, Sociaux et Culturels* (CRADESC) turns human rights from paper promises into lived realities. Working where mining, pollution, and mega-projects hit hardest, it translates research into action. Communities gain data, legal tools, and advocacy skills to hold government and corporates accountable. With Ford's support, CRADESC sparks a new kind of civil society—rooted in villages, driven by citizens, and empowered to demand justice and protect their future.

“Global events like the Live Aid concert helped cement an image of Africa as a broken continent, defined by aid and outside help. Missing were stories of progress, opportunity, and innovation. Africa No Filter fills that gap—amplifying narratives that reflect creativity, resilience, and agency.”

— Moki Makura, Executive Director, Africa No Filter





**Check on power:** A delegate at a conference on ensuring judicial accountability.



**New images for Africa:** supporting skills and talent, transforming the negative global narrative about the continent.

## 2023

### Challenging Gendered Violence, Changing Norms

#### Survivors engage faith and cultural leaders to break stigma and protect rights

The survivor-led Dorothy Njemanze Foundation (DNF) elevates gender-based violence into the public square. With Ford's support, it mobilizes faith and cultural leaders as "gatekeepers," transforming them into active bystanders who challenge harmful practices and promote accountability. Through forums, televised dialogues, documentaries, and art exhibitions, DNF secures leader commitments, fosters peer-review systems, and builds community pathways to justice—turning cultural influence into a force for protection, dignity, and systemic change.



**Law reform:** A campaign poster to support reform of the law.

## 2024

### Defending Democracy

#### A regional fund for civic resilience in coup-hit states

Launched in 2024 with Ford and peer donors, the \$20 million West Africa Democracy Fund becomes a lifeline for civil society in coup-hit states. Under TrustAfrica's stewardship, it delivers fast, flexible grants to journalists, activists, and grassroots movements across Burkina Faso, Guinée, Mali and Niger. Even in the face of coups and repression, the Fund ensures civic voices endure and shape the region's democratic trajectory.



**Stop the bleeding:** TrustAfrica and other civic groups campaign to end illicit financial flows from West Africa.

## 2025

### Traditional Leaders Give Voice to Gender Justice

#### Theology reframed to dismantle patriarchal norms and affirm women's equality

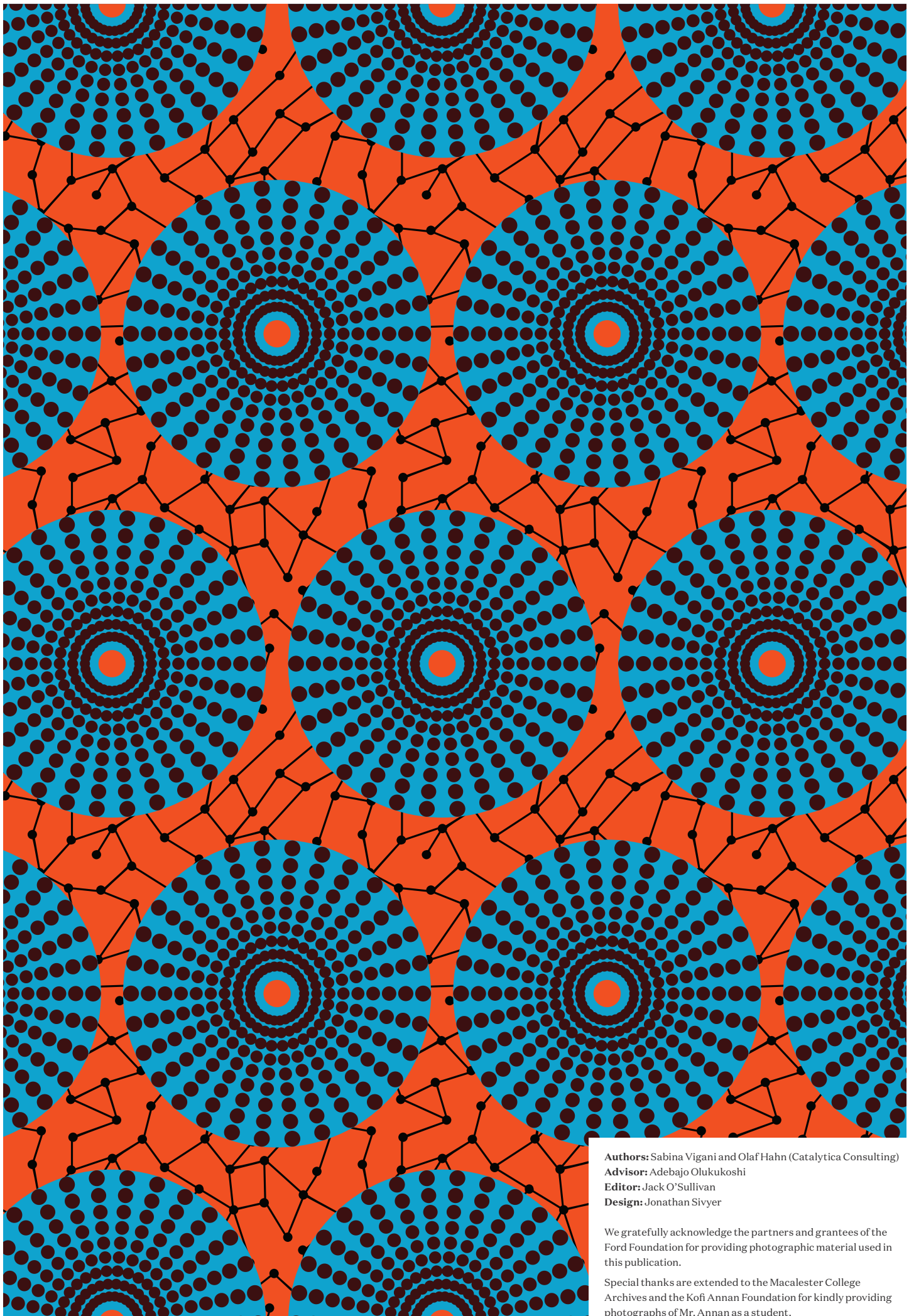
The Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) engages male faith and cultural leaders to challenge injustices to women—using sermons, bylaws, and moral authority to shift norms. It also reclaims theology for women's rights, producing research like "New Wine in Old Wine Skins" which reframes sacred texts to counter patriarchal interpretations and open space for equality.



**Ending sexual violence:** The public campaign against gender violence drew supporters from across different faiths.



Over  
\$500 million  
in 2,726 grants  
to 1,098 grantees



**Authors:** Sabina Vigani and Olaf Hahn (Catalytica Consulting)  
**Advisor:** Adebajo Olukukoshi  
**Editor:** Jack O'Sullivan  
**Design:** Jonathan Sivyier

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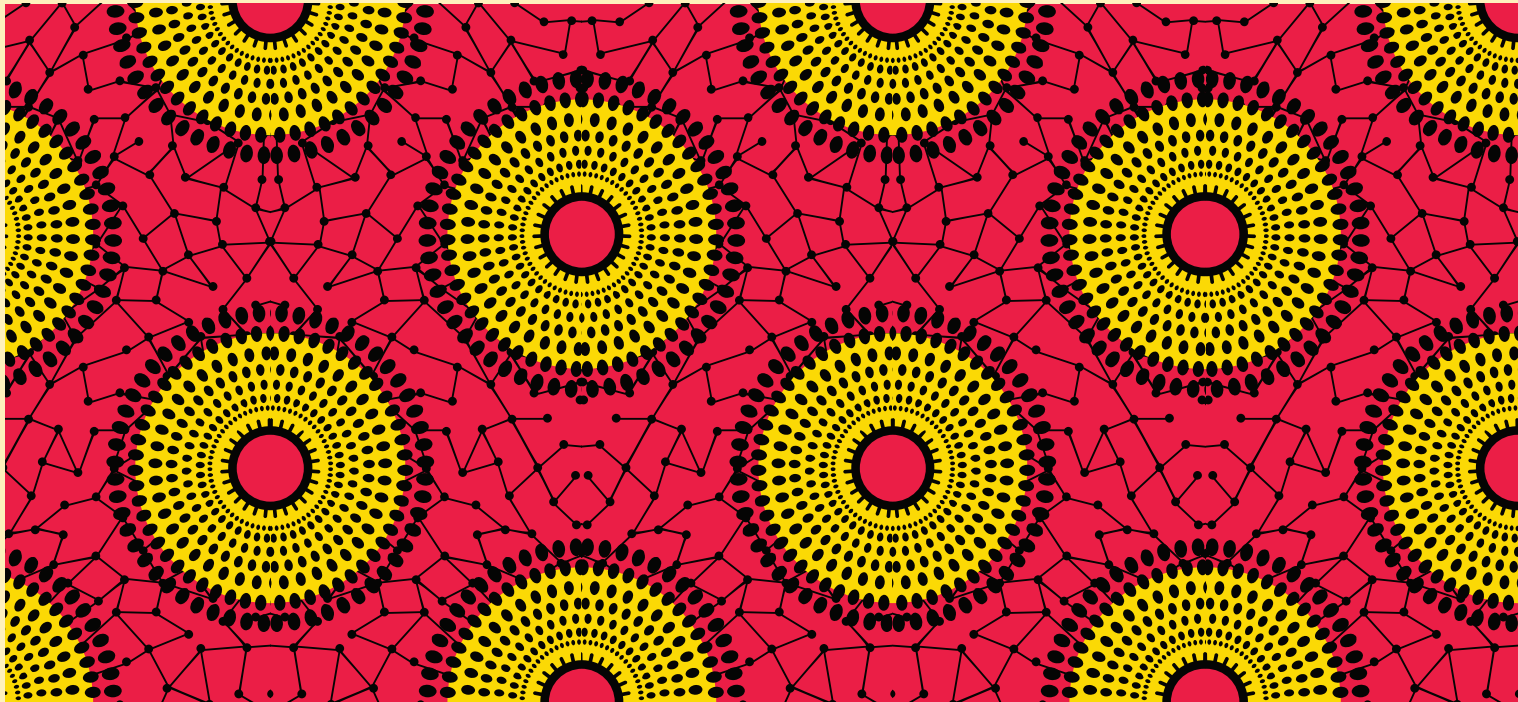
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**The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice.**

For nearly 90 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.



Learn more at [www.fordfoundation.org](http://www.fordfoundation.org)