

# How to guide:

## Community Accountability Forums

## **What is the J4A ‘How to’ series?**

The guide is part of a series of products developed by J4A to communicate lessons learned from projects and pilots, to provide stakeholders with guidance on how to adapt and replicate the initiative in their own context.

## **Who is this ‘How to’ guide for?**

Influencers and decision makers in the justice sector (police, prisons, judiciary and civil society).

## **Reference tools**

Accompanying reference tools are available at [www.j4a-nigeria.org](http://www.j4a-nigeria.org) or by request from [info@j4a-nigeria.org](mailto:info@j4a-nigeria.org)

## The problem

- **Voluntary Policing Sector (VPS)** groups in Nigeria are largely unaccountable both in relation to their activities and their finances to the communities they serve.
- Often times VPS groups in rendering service to their communities, do so with little or no regard for the law.
- In most communities where the VPS groups and Police work together, there are usually no platforms for members of the public to lay complaints against the VPS and the police and receive feedback about their complaints.
- VPS groups are sometimes discriminatory in rendering services. This discrimination is based on ethnicity or religious affiliation.
- VPS involvement in some harmful traditional practices especially as they effect women/girls.

## Background

The pivotal role that VPS groups play in addressing the safety and security needs of poor communities is well documented and for many Nigerians, especially the poor, VPS groups are pre-eminent and in some cases the only groups they feel able to go to for their safety and security needs.

This notwithstanding, community members do encounter some problems with the VPS groups and unfortunately do not have a platform to table these complaints. Thus they cannot hold them accountable for their performance and conduct. This is even worse for women as many VPS groups, with mostly male members, are founded on traditional systems and values.

The Community Accountability Forums (CAF) are designed to facilitate interaction between the VPS, Police and the community, in order to improve relationships both within the forum setting and in the larger community. The focus of CAF as an oversight is primarily to transform and improve community relationships with their police and governance structures at local levels. Building and sustaining positive relationship at this level effectively addresses practical problems such as security concerns, social issues and conflict/violence issues- in particular violence against vulnerable groups such as women.

### Key Principles

- Respect for human rights including the rights of women.
- Imbibing of democratic values based on the principles of inclusion.
- Receiving and giving feedback to complaints by members of the community without discriminating or blackmailing.

- Jointly discussing and deciding on the best way to solve problems identified (joint problem solving).
- Recognising that neither the police nor the VPS alone can solve all the problems of a community.
- “We are one”.
- Communalism (collective security).
- Transparent and accountable service.

A successful CAF will ensure that there is no hiding place for criminals in the community. It will lead to a huge reduction in the likelihood of community members being caught up in crime, either as victims or even as perpetrators.

### CAF Objectives

- Coordinate and prioritize actions to resolve security problems, including those associated with ethnic tensions and conflict.
- Serve as a community complaint bureau against state agencies especially in the area of service delivery.

### CAF Functions

- Serves as an early warning and early response platform for prevention of crime and conflict.
- Help to prevent or resolve minor community conflicts including facilitation agreements.
- Proactive in nature with the main aim of prevention of crime and promotion of community unity.
- Information sharing (collection and dissemination).
- Resolving disputes and negotiating agreements.
- Enforcing compliance with agreements and laws.
- Facilitation of platforms for justice.

## What you can do

### CDA chairman, LGA Chairman or State Commissioner

Introduce a Community Accountability Forum, CAF to ensure that every member of the community - man, woman, child, young, old, educated, illiterate - has a voice on the twin issues of safety and security. Neither the police nor the VPS groups own and run the CAF. They are however members of the CAF. The CAF is owned by the community, with its affairs being run by a Steering Committee.

## What you can achieve

- Reduction in crime and community safety (including development) concerns.
- Increased trust in police and VPS activities.
- Early detection of threats to safety and security in the community.
- Improved relationship between the police/VPS and members of the community.
- Increased accountability by VPS members to their communities.
- Joint problem solving approach to safety and security issues.
- Enhanced community cohesion.



## Community Accountability Forums: Steps for Implementation

1. Advocacy meetings with various stakeholders in the community such as elders, religious leaders, the police, women's groups; youth associations, ethnic associations, businesses etc. At the meetings they are informed on the goals and objectives of the CAF; the Steering Committee that will run the CAF affairs; and request them to nominate a person to be on the Steering Committee. Selection is by choice of each representative group though conscious effort is made to achieve a balance of representatives.
2. Inauguration of the all-inclusive Forum on an agreed date with all stakeholders (as listed above) in the community present. Attendance of meeting is open to all. The objectives of the CAF are read out at the inauguration.
3. Members of the CAF Steering Committee are also announced at the inauguration and informed of their duties. They are asked to select a chairman and secretary from amongst themselves. Once this is done the Chairman takes over the meeting. At this inaugural meeting, the house agrees on fixed date, time and venue for the meetings.
4. The secretary must be someone who is literate enough to take notes and serve as facilitator.
5. In some cases, the Forum may ask to be given until the next meeting (the first after the inauguration), to discuss with their constituencies and come up with the name of their representative on the Steering Committee.
6. Meeting between the Steering Committee Members and the local government area (LGA) executive to discuss support (cash in kind) for the CAF meetings e.g. venue, chairs, stationeries and light refreshments to ensure sustainability.
7. Design of reporting format of complaints against police and/or VPS and any issue that may threaten the peace and security of the community.
8. Agree on an agenda for monthly meetings with Steering Committee members. A suggested agenda is available in the reference tools.
9. Prepare and administer a base-line survey (questionnaire) on their knowledge of VPS existence in the community; most prevalent crimes; and identification of dark spots. This takes place during the second meeting. A suggested agenda is available in the reference tools.
10. Organising and facilitating monthly CAF meetings.
11. Design of reporting format of complaints against police and/or VPS and any issue that may threaten the peace and security of the community.

## Key Roles: CAF Chairman and Secretary

- To drive the process and shape the forum's discussion to suit the forum's objective. Thus the Chairman must at all times create and sustain an environment of openness and trust where differences of opinion are respected and everyone feels safe to speak.
- They must have an in-depth knowledge of community dynamics in addition to establishing good relationship with most if not all government agencies.
- They must have the contact list of every important government agency, traditional ruler, DPOs etc. Conscious effort must be taken to update the contact list regularly.
- They must endeavour to promote dynamic exchanges where everyone has a chance to speak.
- They must support active listening, where people try to understand each other rather than to promote a point of view. As much as possible manage arguments especially unproductive arguments.
- Along with other committee members, they must be open and accessible at all times, friendly to all (not to any particular person) and disciplined. As much as possible avoid impressing their personal opinion at meetings. They may suggest possible solutions but let the audience decide what they want to do.
- Every member of the community attending the CAF must be treated equally.

## Cost Implications

Setting up and organising the CAF has very little cost implications. The major area cost would have gone into is venue (where to hold the meetings), but this is averted by holding the meeting in a communal space like a government primary school, community hall, local government hall etc. The areas little funding or donation is required from individuals, groups and organisations in the community are some light refreshments at the meeting (not compulsory), stationeries and recharge cards for phone calls.

**“CAF meeting is where we can bring our cries and steps can be taken to find a solution. We thank God for this forum”.**

Luka Kambai, community member, Kaduna

## Lessons Learned

### Lesson 1:

It is important that the CAF is inclusive in nature and not exclusive, where some members of the community feel left out or discriminated against. Therefore, right from the very beginning everyone or group living and/or working in the community must be involved.

### Lesson 2:

Members of the community may after a few meetings decide to change a Steering Committee member (nominated at the beginning of the CAF) who they feel is contributing to the problem of the community rather than help in solving it.

### Lesson 3:

The Chairman of the CAF Steering Committee must be someone who has clout in the community – a respected member of the community.

### Lesson 4:

It is important that the meeting is held monthly and a fixed day/time in the month is agreed upon so that community members all know and don't need to be reminded.

### Lesson 5:

Complaints/problems raised at a meeting must be followed up and feed back given at the next meeting in other not to make community members feel laying the complaint was useless as nothing was done.

### Lesson 6:

Sharing problems at a forum and finding solutions for them as a group helps in peaceful conduct of all affairs and minimizes misunderstanding that could lead to one crisis or the other.

### Lesson 7:

The CAF greatly improves the trust level between members of the community, the VPS and the police.

### Lesson 8:

A number of areas such as ethnic tensions, stereotypes, violence etc. can be addressed through a robust community platform-CAF.

### Lesson 9:

People feel safer if police and communities are seen to be working together.

### Lesson 10:

Partners (including government agencies and private business owners) bring different skills and improve social networks.

### Lesson 11:

Accessibility, availability and transparency of government agencies are usually key to performance of these forums.

## Improvements

- Better quality of community and police contact.
- Enhanced trust between the community and the police.
- Working in partnership to jointly solve community problems.

## Contact

The Justice for All (J4A) Programme is funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by the British Council.

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