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# Engaging Policy Makers & Communicating Effectively with Young People in Health Research



Lessons from Youth -Driven Policy Advocacy in  
Nigeria

Bridge Connect Africa Initiative



## What we do at Bridge Connect Africa Initiative



With the women, girl child and young people at the centre of what we do, we work to co -create innovative solutions with communities, women and young people towards an equitable, just, and sustainable future.



### Vision

A world where women and young people are empowered to live dignified lives.



### Mission

Our mission is to co-create innovative solutions with communities, women and young people towards an equitable, just, and sustainable future.





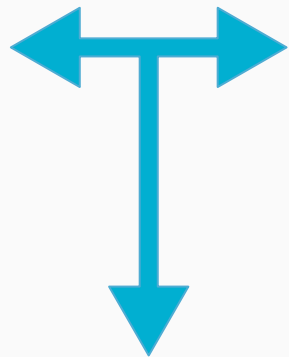
# Policy advocacy and campaigns we have conducted over the years...



Effective communication speaks to two audiences: decision-makers need clarity and urgency, while communities need trust and emotional connection

You're not just talking to decision-makers. You're also talking to the future.

Decision-makers  
need relevance,  
clarity, and  
pressure



Young  
people/communities  
need relatable  
language, trust, and  
emotional connection

Both must be engaged strategically and authentically

# Influencing policy requires understanding policymakers and crafting messages that capture their attention with a clear call to action 1/2



## Distill Research into Short, Compelling Insights

- **Why it matters:** Policymakers are often time -constrained and rarely read full academic reports.
- **How to apply:** (a) Develop one -paragraph summaries highlighting the “so what” of your findings. (b) Use narratives and data points that speak to urgency, feasibility, and public value (\*c) Translate complex epidemiological terms into plain, policy -friendly language (e.g., say “10 mothers die each week in Kano due to preventable complications” rather than citing a maternal mortality ratio).
- **Tool:** Develop a “Research Snapshots” series or short animated explainer videos tailored to specific decision -makers.



## Frame Evidence Through the Lens of Community Impact

- **Why it matters:** Policymakers respond more to stories that illustrate consequences for their constituents.
- **How to apply:** (a) Link findings to real -life examples e.g., how delayed immunization schedules are affecting survival rates in rural LGAs. (b) Use maps, case studies, and testimonials to humanize your data. (c ) Show inequities using disaggregated data (by gender, region, income group, etc.).
- **Tool:** Create impact maps, photo essays, or video testimonials from frontline health workers and beneficiaries.



## Clearly State Your Policy Asks

- **Why it matters:** Policymakers need clarity on what action you want them to take.
- **How to apply:** (a) Avoid vague recommendations like “increase investment in child health.” (b) Use concrete, time -bound calls to action, e.g., “Allocate 15% of the 2025 state health budget to nutrition,” or “Pass the Child Protection Bill in Kano before Q2.” ( c ) Align your asks with ongoing policy debates, legislative cycles, or electoral promises.
- **Tool:** Use bolded asks in briefs, slides, and emails, and repeat them in every interaction.

# Influencing policy requires understanding policymakers and crafting messages that capture their attention with a clear call to action 2/2



## Leverage Policy Windows and Entry Points

- **Why it matters:** Advocacy is more successful when timed with national or global attention moments.
- **How to apply:** (a) Link your message to relevant events like World AIDS Day, Immunization Week, or the state budget planning season. (b) Use legislative hearings, sector reviews, or presidential launches as hooks. (\*c) Position your evidence as filling a gap or solving a hot -button issue.
- **Tool:** Maintain a policy calendar to track key advocacy moments and plan outreach in advance.



## Use Strategic Tools: Scorecards, Briefs, and Forums

- **Why it matters:** Different tools serve different audiences and purposes.
- **How to Apply:** (a) Scorecards help track progress and foster accountability (e.g., State HIV Prevalence Response Scorecard). (b) Policy briefs should be visually engaging, no longer than 2 pages, and focused on a single issue. (\*c) Stakeholder forums allow for two -way dialogue, coalition -building, and public pressure.
- **Tool:** Create customized communication packs for different audiences —e.g., a one-pager for commissioners, infographics for the media, and technical notes for bureaucrats.



## Mobilize Grassroots Support through Petitions and Endorsements

- **Why it matters:** Policymakers are more likely to act when they see public demand.
- **How to apply:** (a) Use community -based organizations, faith leaders, and youth groups to endorse your message. (b) Circulate petitions or public letters signed by key stakeholders (e.g., health professional associations). (\*c) Amplify community voices through social media campaigns and local radio.
- **Tool:** Include community voices in your presentations, bring grassroots champions to high -level policy events.

# The Storytelling Framework Audience

## – Matching Message to

<b>Policymakers / Government Leaders</b>	—————	<b>Young People / Gen Z's</b>	—————	<b>Community or Religious leaders</b>
Evidence -based, brief, action - oriented, tied to policy or outcomes		Relatable, visual, emotional, peer -led, clear call to action		Respectful, values -based, anchored in community welfare and tradition
<b>Parents / Caregivers</b>	—————	<b>Donors / Development Partners</b>	—————	<b>General Public / Media</b>
Protective, informative, fear - reducing, benefit -focused		Impact -driven, data - supported, aligned with global goals.		Story -driven, shareable, human interest angle



## Together, We Are Breaking HIV Stigma

Whether it's misinformation, discrimination, or barriers to testing, YOLHAC empowers you to take action, raise awareness, and ensure access to HIV care for all.

Manage consent

# YOLHAC: The Youth Led HIV Campaign that Works

30  
Champions

18  
State Health  
Facilities Mapped

>300,000k  
Persons reached with  
HIV/AIDS information

### Our Aim



### Our Strategy

To empower young people to lead HIV awareness efforts, reduce stigma, and promote access to testing through youth - driven, tech-enabled communication.

- **Youth-Led Messaging:** 30 trained YOLHAC Champions used relatable, peer-driven content on social media to engage and educate.
- **Digital Innovation:** Launched Nigeria's first youth-led HIV platform featuring an AI-powered chatbot and mapped testing centers.
- **Multi-State Outreach:** Combined online and offline campaigns to drive awareness and increase testing uptake across several Nigerian states.



# North Normal Campaign – Advocacy That Mobilized Policy



## What We Did

- Organized a peaceful standstill rally at the State House of Assembly .
- Presented a list of budget and legislative demands, informed by youth experiences, storytelling and research .




## The Impact

Captured the attention of policymakers on Sexual and Gender -Based Violence (SGBV), leading to the domestication of the VAPP Act across several northern states and prompting efforts to harmonize it with the Penal Code in Kano State

## Why It Worked

The approach worked because it combined powerful storytelling with data and public visibility . **Youths didn't just share emotional experiences, they backed their narratives with evidence** . This credibility, along with sustained advocacy pressure, made it difficult for policymakers to ignore their demands .

A woman wearing a pink hijab and a black long-sleeved top is smiling and holding a white rectangular sign with both hands. The sign has text in black and red. The background shows a tree and a paved area.

I SUPPORT THE PASSAGE  
OF THE **VAPP BILL**  
IN KANO STATE

Sign the #VAPBill

#NorthNormal

#StandStillRally

*Stakeholders are more likely to respond when they see that a demand is not only emotionally compelling but also backed by facts and public support.*

# Raising Community Voices Against Child Marriage in Northern Nigeria

## Nazari Mai Zurfi Podcast Project

This project aimed to improve child protection particularly the girl child, by raising community voices to end child marriage and the passage of the child protection bill in Kano, Bauchi, and Jigawa states respectively.

### Our Strategy



#### Radio Series Engagement

- Created listening hubs and safe spaces to co-create and amplify the stories of young girls, parents, and key influencers.
- Broadcast of podcast at prime-times on political and family programs across major radio stations in the states.



#### Digital Outreach

- Use of podcasts format engagement across digital platforms to engage and mobilize Gen Z audiences with relatable data driven content and messaging.



#### Advocacy Visits

- Advocacy visits to key stakeholders, using story and evidence across the three states.





**10**  
Podcast  
Episodes

**14 M+**  
Listenership  
across all  
Platforms

**11,000+**  
Signed  
Petitions

### Key Wins

- Passage of the Child Protection Law in Kano and Bauchi States.
- An Agenda Review of CPB in Jigawa State.
- Empowered 90 listening hubs participants directly.

**We gathered 11,000+ signatures from young people and parents helped push for the review of the age of marriage in Jigawa and passage of the Child Protection Law in Kano and Bauchi States**

# Localizing Policy Conversations – The Case of Jataka



A community with low reproductive health awareness, no local health facility, high maternal deaths; nearest hospital 46 km away with poor, inaccessible roads



Amplifying voices through community engagement and local media.



Transforming maternal health care through evidence-based advocacy

## Key Wins

- Primary Healthcare Centre completed and operational
- Road construction with government funding of 400 million naira
- Hope restored for safe births, healthy children, and stronger community



# #ConstructJataka: Some Strategies You can Adopt as a Researcher



**#ConstructJataka: Tracking Construction of Primary healthcare center at Jataka Tofa Local Government Area, Kano State**

by followth  
Jataka is a remote village in Tofa Local Government Area, with a population of about 13,460...

[READ MORE](#)

Driving conversation using hashtags

**Pregnant women deliver babies at home**



Picture of FTM Community Champion Fatima Musa with Representatives of Jataka Women

25/09/2018: Saude Danladi, a

Storytelling backed by data

Community led advocacy

**Community members to demand timely project delivery**



Group picture of FTM Team, Fatima Musa Aliyu, Habib Sharif with Jataka Community Members

25/09/2018: Jataka community members said they will nominate 5

**Meeting with Tofa LGA Chairman**

24/10/2018: Follow The Money Team went to Tofa Local Government Secretariat for campaign meeting with the Chairman Nafiu Garba Yarimawa. Our previous media engagements on radio and Televisions made Tofa Local Government Council to expand the #ConstructJataka due to the feedback from listeners to include Lambu – Jataka –Yarimawa road at the cost of N450,000,000. At the moment the council has sent a memo to the Ministry for Local Government for release of the funds. Both projects will kick off at the same time.

Advocacy visits

Dialogues and Forums

**Townhall meeting for all stakeholders**



22/11/2018: Kano State Follow The Money organized a town hall meeting bringing all the stakeholders concerned with the implementation of the school project to discuss issues relating to the project. In attendance were: representative from the Local

# What we've learned from our campaigns

- Human stories move systems.
- Strategic timing (e.g. prime-time radio) drives attention.
- Visual, audio, and digital tools amplify reach.
- Collaboration with power holders builds credibility.
- Persistence – one campaign is never enough.



# Reflections on power dynamics in youth - adult collaboration



Youth -led campaigns supported by **technical coaching from adult allies**



**Shared ownership** of communication strategies.



Researchers who respected and compensated youth time and platformed their voices.

What Worked

What Didn't



Token youth involvement where messaging was **pre-set** by adults.



Youth not invited into the room where communication decisions were made.

## Researcher Guideline



Acknowledge knowledge asymmetries but **distribute communication power**.



Invest in **co-creation**, not delegation.

A photograph of three women in a radio studio. The woman on the left is wearing a brown hijab and smiling. The woman in the middle is wearing a white hijab and a blue headband with yellow patterns, looking towards the right. The woman on the right is wearing a blue hijab and large headphones, looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a logo for '102.7 FM KAND' and the word 'PREMIER' partially visible.

# What researchers can do

- Design with, not for: Include youth from the earliest communication planning stages.
- Build story from study: Translate key findings into formats youth can help own and deliver.
- Be a platform, not the center: Support youth as spokespersons, not just subjects.
- Name the power: Acknowledge adult privilege and intentionally redistribute decision-making power.
- Make it public: Pair every research output with a dissemination plan co-developed with young people.

In policy change, the strongest message is one that's co-owned by evidence and lived experience.

Thank You