OSIWA's work is driven by the vision, mission and values of creating an open society in West Africa – an environment where strong leaders and government institutions are accountable to their citizens, where natural resources are equitably distributed, and where human rights and rule of law prevail. Moving towards these goals, we are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating our work. Did we meet the goals we set out to achieve? What worked? What didn’t work? Where do we need to refocus? What lessons were learned? Ensuring our work has “impact” forms a buttress of how we monitor progress and evaluate successes.

At the beginning of every year, OSIWA takes a moment to step back and reflect on our work in the region over the preceding months. The work of grant-making and advocacy – especially in a region as diverse and dynamic as West Africa – is a constantly evolving endeavor. But even outside West Africa, knowing how to evaluate and what to evaluate are two key questions that have, for years, stirred debates within various circles of development actors.

In our area of work, “impact” is usually defined as the long-term effect brought on by one or more projects or activities. It’s seen as a change in behavior, habits or initial context and can vary in perception according to the various actors and their roles. We try to adopt this approach when we evaluate OSIWA’s work. When reviewing our partners’ projects, we try to look beyond the numbers; to see past the “checked” boxes. We are interested in knowing more than how many people participated in a rural sensitization workshop on gender rights, for example. We want to know how men and women are actually using this newly acquired knowledge – what actions indicate a socio-cultural evolution in women’s empowerment? Are more husbands allowing their wives to start their own business? Are more women seeking legal aid as a result of violence? Are more females running for parliament? These are some of the questions OSIWA looks to address when assessing the successes of our work.

We understand that for a project to achieve impact, it is not a singular or unified process. It is a multifarious endeavor with many different threads. Developing an effective strategy that negotiates the careful balance between ambition and realism is imperative. But the strategy must also define the area of intervention, including how, when and at what level to intervene. To prevent stasis, it must also work to create synergies between various actors. Clear communication from the onset is imperative.

In the following set of pages, we’ve put together a selection of over 25 OSIWA-supported projects that reflect how our partners go beyond merely achieving project results to actually “go the extra mile” towards achieving impact. And these lasting results – this “impact” – is often the type that is slowly, but surely changing lives. Some of our partners’ stories show more immediate and tangible outcomes, such as Mobility Foundation’s work on empowering leaders in Ghana, BudgIT’s money tracker in Nigeria or the training of Sahelien.com journalists in Mali and Niger. Others, such as the Human Rights Clinic at the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, ONEF’s rights awareness project with women in Côte d’Ivoire or YUMA’s social reintegration work for previously incarcerated minors in Senegal, produce more subtle but often equally powerful effects over the longer-term.

It is our hope that this publication serves not only as a portrait of the types of work we support – giving some faces and names to the variety of partners we work with and the breadth of thematic areas in which we work. We also hope these reports, stories and firsthand accounts further incite conversation, inspire ideas and motivate new partnerships, so that together we can continue to work to achieve lasting and impactful results in a region so replete with dynamism, vitality and promise.