

FIVE YEAR REPORT

AND FIVE YEAR VISION



**AFRICAN
COMMUNITIES
TOGETHER**

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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When African Communities Together was born in 2013, those of us who were here from the beginning could never have foreseen just how critical its work would become.

We could never have imagined the hateful slurs and repressive policies directed at our communities and our countries of origin. We couldn't have guessed how ACT would be in the center of some of the most important battles over what this country stands for and how we treat one another.

Now more than ever we are grateful that ACT exists as a vehicle to empower African immigrants who are at the intersection of multiple oppressive systems. Not only to improve their own lives, but to take their place as leaders of a movement to challenge these systems and work for a more humane future.

Our work has just begun. There are more than two million African immigrants in the U.S. today, and our work so far has only touched a fraction of them.

In this report, you will find a powerful vision of where we are heading in the future—including deepening ACT's work in our current chapters, expanding to new cities, and building the infrastructure that will make it all possible.

As members of the Board of Directors of ACT, we are honored to serve this organization, proud of the progress it has made in its first half-decade, and thrilled to support its growth in the years to come.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Amaha Kassa,
Executive Director,
African Communities Together

Dear friends,

Five years ago, African Communities Together was just a vision, a project I was working on at my kitchen table in Harlem. All we had was an idea, and support from a handful of early believers.

The idea was simple, but bold: organize the millions of African immigrants in the U.S. to make change.

Five years later, ACT has grown to a dozen staff and offices in two cities (and more to come!). We have helped hundreds of African immigrants each year get immigration relief, even as immigration laws have grown harsher. We have trained hundreds of leaders and mobilized thousands of people.

We have fought—and won!—to extend Temporary Protected Status, include French and Arabic in New York City’s language access policy, and raise wages for thousands of workers. We have lost some battles along the way, but we continue fighting to uplift the rights and humanity of workers, families, immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

We’re grateful to all of you who have made this journey possible: donors and funders, partners and allies, and, most of all, the grassroots African immigrant members who are ACT’s purpose and power.

These are uncertain times for all of us, and for African immigrants in the U.S. especially. But there are some things we can be certain of: we have overcome even greater threats than these, and we are stronger together.

Forward Ever, Backwards Never,

Amaha Kassa

2013-2018 BY THE NUMBERS

\$45K

Amount per year of the seed grant that launched ACT in 2013

\$850K

ACT projected budget for 2019

200

Number of individual “Co-Founders” who contributed to ACT in its launch year, raising over \$48,000 to enable ACT to open its first office and hire its first organizer

\$100

Average Co-Founder donation size

571

Number of African immigrants provided with immigration legal services over the past year

30

Number of African immigrant community members who attended ACT’s first Membership Meeting in 2013

528

The number of community members who attended an ACT meeting over the past year

2013-2018 BY THE NUMBERS

1.2K

The number of community members reached over the past year through community education/know your rights sessions

500

Number of community members and allies mobilized for 2017 World Refugee Day

1.5K

Number of community members and allies mobilized for 2018 World Refugee Day

95K

Minimum estimate of New Yorkers who benefited from increased language access

\$5M

Estimated increase in wages of as a result of the successful campaign for the DC Airports Wage Policy

1.04K

Number of Sudanese TPS holders who benefit from injunction to block termination of TPS

244.6K

Total number of TPS holders benefiting from the injunction

FIGHTING FOR FAIR IMMIGRATION POLICIES

ACT led national campaigns to defend immigration policies that benefit African immigrants. We mobilized, researched, publicized, and advocated against attempts to end the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs for Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, winning extensions that enabled thousands to maintain legal status and work papers.

We organized Sudanese TPS holders to join a national lawsuit that won an injunction halting the Trump Administration's termination of TPS for Sudan and four other countries.

Working with allies, ACT led advocacy that prevented the Diversity Visa program from being eliminated as part of an immigration bill.



"African Communities Together gave me hope. I lost hope back in March when I thought TPS was ended. My case was rejected and ACT helped me out with getting my TPS, giving me hope and then getting involved with this lawsuit, I see things going in the right direction."

*-Samir, ACT Member
Sudanese TPS holder fighting for just
Immigration policies.*

DEFENDING AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

ACT built immigration legal programs that provided free immigration legal assistance to hundreds of African immigrants in New York, DC, Maryland, and Virginia each year.

Our immigration programs have helped African immigrants become citizens, gain legal status, fight deportation, and win release from immigration detention. Many of ACT's immigration clients were unreached or underserved by traditional immigration legal service providers due to language and cultural barriers.

In response to escalating immigration enforcement and acts of hate, ACT organized the Community Guardians network, a community defense and rapid response network of African immigrant leaders.

We recruited over 40 Community Guardians and led them through a year-long training series in reporting, documenting, and responding effectively to attacks on our communities.



"I had a friend that was in a detention center. When that friend called me, with the [little] training that I got from ACT, I was able to help the friend to get out of the detention center and I brought the friend to ACT here, and ACT was able to help him and now he is getting on his feet and he is able to get legal representation."

-Omar, ACT Member, Gambia, Community Guardian.

Leading the Movement for Humanitarian Immigration

In response to the Trump Administration's Muslim ban, attacks on asylum seekers, and threats to end Temporary Protected Status, ACT organized the City of Refuge Coalition, an alliance of over 40 immigrant, black-led, faith, labor, and progressive organizations.

The City of Refuge Coalition organized powerful actions that mobilized thousands of New Yorkers to defend humanitarian immigration, including an overnight Tent City in solidarity with refugees and a march of 1,500 New Yorkers on World Refugee Day 2018.



"We were able to add French and Arabic to our group of languages, making sure that you get quality translation and interpretation when you request it, when you go to courts, hospitals and schools."

*-Rosemary, Member, Nigeria,
Language Access Campaign*



EXPANDING LANGUAGE ACCESS

ACT led the successful campaign to expand New York City's language access policy to include four additional languages, including French, Arabic, and Urdu. The new policy facilitates access to rights, benefits, and services for thousands of African, Arab, and South Asian New Yorkers with limited English proficiency.

Through our Community Interpreter Program, ACT has trained dozens of multilingual African immigrants, prepared them to pass the New York State Court Interpreter Exam, and placed them in paid interpretation assignments.

Community Interpreters use their language skills to gain income while providing language access for limited English proficient community members. ACT is currently incubating an African Language Services Worker Cooperative, a worker-owned business that will provide African language interpretation, translation, and language instruction.

RAISING STANDARDS FOR AFRICAN WORKERS



"At the DC airports, a lot of the Africans were making very little money before--\$8 or \$9 an hour. My union organized the airport workers, and ACT organized the African communities to support us. It wasn't easy, but together we won the wage policy, and now thousands of workers have gotten raises that all together are worth millions of dollars."

*-Aschalew Asabie
Ethiopian Airport Worker*

ACT's DC chapter organized African immigrant communities and clergy to support the campaign, led by labor union partners UNITE HERE and SEIU, to raise wages for thousands of workers at Reagan National and Dulles airports. The airports are the largest employers of African immigrants in the country. As a result of the campaign, the Metro Washington Airports Authority passed a policy that raised wages for thousands of airport workers by as much as 50%, and hundreds of airport workers have successfully organized unions in their workplaces

Joined with union, community, and environmental organizations to demand "Justice for Mouctar" after garbage hauling company Sanitation Salvage killed their employee, Mouctar Diallo, then falsely claimed he was a homeless trespasser. The Justice for Mouctar campaign successfully campaigned to revoke Sanitation Salvage's business license and the killer company is now out of business.

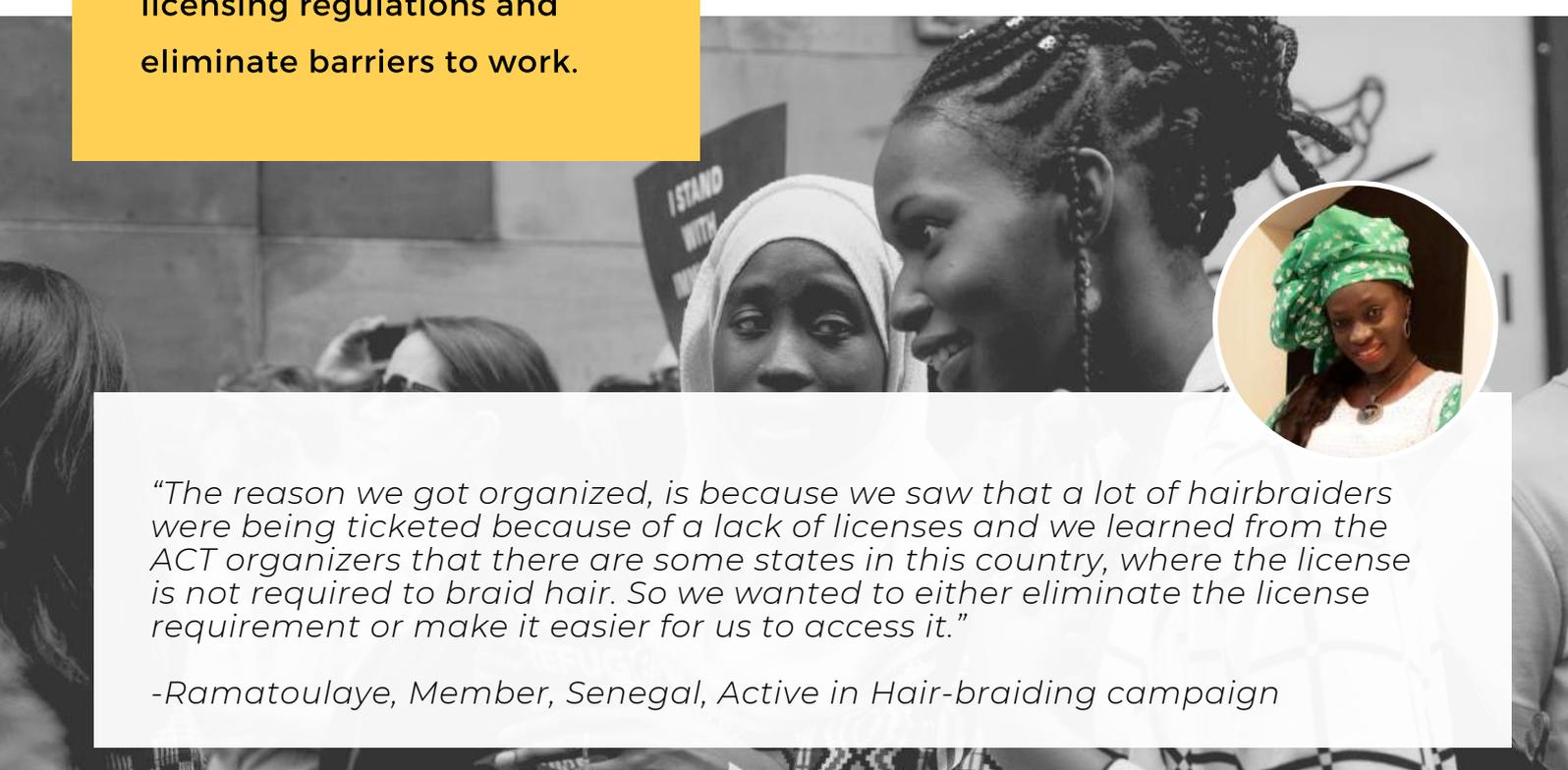


ORGANIZING AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDERS

ACT conducted over 600 grassroots surveys among professional hair braiders. Hair braiding provides a livelihood for thousands of African immigrant women in New York, but state rules and language barriers make it difficult for many to get mandatory state licenses. We recruited leaders and built the campaign to change licensing regulations and eliminate barriers to work.

600

**Grassroots surveys conducted
among professional
hair braiders**



"The reason we got organized, is because we saw that a lot of hairbraiders were being ticketed because of a lack of licenses and we learned from the ACT organizers that there are some states in this country, where the license is not required to braid hair. So we wanted to either eliminate the license requirement or make it easier for us to access it."

-Ramatoulaye, Member, Senegal, Active in Hair-braiding campaign

5 PRIORITIES FOR ACT'S NEXT 5 YEARS

Over the next five years, ACT will continue to connect African immigrant communities to services, develop African immigrants as leaders, and mobilize for policy change. We will continue to fight for just immigration policies, good jobs, and access to services.

The following priorities, identified by ACT's members, staff, and Board of Directors, will guide our work:

1

Deepen the leadership and ownership of ACT's members: Strengthen leadership development of African immigrant members by expanding ACT's leadership committees, trainings, and Membership Meetings. Expand the role of grassroots leaders in ACT's governance, including membership voting, participation in the Board of Directors, and our first National Convention.

3

Broaden ACT's financial base. Triple ACT's budget from \$850,000 to approximately \$2.5 million. Increase the proportion of ACT's budget that comes from member dues, individual donors, fundraisers, and other non-foundation funding.



"ACT is what we needed now to be seen, to be represented in the community. I see ACT as a hope and support for our kids, for our next generation of Africans, for our kids and our grandkids, who want to run a campaign for politics. I want every African to be ambitious, what we couldn't do, to let our kids do that, to push our kids to study, to have ambition and to be part of decision-making and ACT will be here to support them. We are proud to know that we have an organization we can count on."

-Malado, ACT Member, Mali, Language Access Campaign.

2

Expand to new regions. Build a new chapter in Minneapolis-St. Paul in 2019 and in at least two additional metro areas by 2023.

4

Strengthen ACT's organizational capacity. Improve ACT's financial, administrative, technological, and governance infrastructure to support our growth. Invest in staff development and management.

5

Expand ACT's national leadership role. Take on a central leadership role in advancing African immigrant issues and voices in the national immigration policy debate, including state and federal legislation, and in shifting public opinion for humanitarian immigration policies. Strengthen our national network of African immigrant leaders and organizations.

AFRICAN

COMMUNITIES



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ACT IN THE HEADLINES



It Was Like There Was a Fog in the Sky Only I Could See

Immigrants from Africa and the iron gateways of mass deportation.

Overlooked, Undercounted, Underserved: New York Must Improve Language Access for Africans

For African immigrants in New York City accessing services in languages they understand can be difficult. African Communities Together wants to change that.



[Health](#)

A new hotline fights Ebola-related stigma against African immigrants

ACT IN THE HEADLINES

12/4/2018

Influx of West Africans in the Bronx Spurs Demand for Interpreters - The New York Times

The New York Times

Influx of West Africans in the Bronx Spurs Demand for Interpreters

By [Liz Robbins](#)

Nov. 26, 2015

Conversations were still bubbling when Afua Atta-Mensah took the microphone and welcomed

Trump's decision to deport 200,000 to his 'shithole countries' challenged in lawsuit

Administration recently terminated temporary protected status for all individuals from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan

David Smith *in Washington*

Mon 12 Mar 2018 16.26 GMT

A lawsuit is being filed on Monday to overturn Donald Trump's decision to end immigration protections for more than 200,000 people from four Central American and African nations the president reportedly called "shithole countries".

12/4/2018

Ethiopian immigrants turn job niche into labor activism - The Washington Post

 The Washington Post

Social Issues

Ethiopian immigrants turn job niche into labor activism

By [Pamela Constable](#)

May 2, 2016

In his native Ethiopia, Bert Bayou was a middle-class professional with a United Nations job. But like

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