

Women Economic Empowerment Project

Niger Delta



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**Prepared By:
Titilope Fakoya
Mobile: 0234 8022791011
tfakoya@yahoo.com**

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AFRODEP | African Centre for Development, Peace and Justice |
| CDP | Community Development Partners |
| DEVIN | Development Initiatives |
| GEM | Gender Empowerment Measure |
| HQ | Head Quarters |
| HQCF | High Quality Cassava Flour |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IITA | International Institute for Tropical Agriculture |
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| LMC | Local Management Committee |
| NGO | Non – Government Organisation |
| NNDC | Niger Delta Development Council |
| DESOPADEC | Delta State Oil and Mineral Producing Development Commission |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| WDC | Women Development Centre |
| YTF | Youth Technology Foundation |

1. Introduction

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed a programme to support women businesses in communities in Nigeria, and to be piloted in 3 Niger Delta States (Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers.)

The project ran for a period of 3 years (2004 - 2007) and was funded by the Japanese Government through the Human Security Fund established in UNDP, New York with UNIFEM taking the lead in implementing the project. The project was piloted in 3 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the 3 States respectively (Onna LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Warri South - West in Delta State and Ikwerre LGA in Rivers State) with the support of 3 NGOs, Development Initiatives, (DEVIN), Community Development Partners (CDP) and African Centre for Development, Peace and Justice (AFRODEP). A fourth NGO, the Youth Technology Foundation (YTF) was responsible for the ICT component of the programme. The 3 LGAs and NGO were selected based on criteria developed by the UNDP and the Japanese Government in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

Women's Economic Activities and the Environment of the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta of Nigeria is geographically located in the South / South and South Eastern parts of the country and is politically made up of 7 States. The ecology of the region largely determines the economic activities of the women and is substantially different from the other parts of the country. Coastal ridge barriers, mangrove and fresh water swamp and forests combine with the soil types, water, climate, plants, animals and the overall ecosystem to dictate the extent and type of women activities.

Thus, women in the Niger Delta mangrove forests are found mainly in fishing and gathering seafood whilst those in the mangrove and fresh water swamp systems are farmers. This variation determines the emphasis of women on cassava cultivation and processing in certain areas, whereas in others, the focus is more on fishing activities.

Oil Spillage, Gas Flaring and Noise Pollution

Oil spills are an effect of oil drilling and prospecting in the region and are caused by variety of factors. These include blowouts, equipment failure, rupture or corrosion of flow line/pipelines, engineering error, erosion, accident, and sabotage (Awobajo, 1981). Whatever the cause is, oil spillage damages the environment.

Further damage to the environment is by gas flaring which pollutes the air and suppresses plant growth near the flaring points. In cassava, for example, there is a decrease in length, weight, starch, protein and ascorbic acid content (Imevbore and Adeyemi, 1981). These all directly impact the farming work of the women.



Oil spill in a farm in Ikwerre

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in Niger Delta.

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) measures the inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in a country. It combines inequalities in three areas: political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. It is a very useful tool for evaluating progress in advancing women's standing.

The justification of this project is improvement in the subordinate status of women and girls in the area of economics, education, health and politics. Women in Nigeria remain seriously disadvantaged in terms of access, status and skills. Cultural and traditional beliefs and the value system prevalent in many communities continue to be responsible for the low level of female education and this also impedes access to information and communication technologies and thus limiting the opportunities to take themselves and their families out of poverty.

The average GEM for the Niger Delta States is 0.399 (Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006). Compared with the lowest GEM performance in the world (Yemen, 0.123); Saudi Arabia (0.207); Iran (0.318) the Niger Delta is not doing too badly. Despite this, much more needs to be done for the women of the Niger Delta to empower them to attain their maximum potential.

Cassava in the Niger Delta

Malnutrition is widespread in Nigeria and most vulnerable are women and children. Cassava is consumed in large quantities by the poor for whom it is a staple. Cassava roots have low protein content (typically between 1-2%) and efforts to improve cassava have mainly focused on increasing yield and dry water content of storage roots. (IITA 2005). Current research however, now focuses on how to improve the nutritional yield of cassava, particularly in iron and zinc through a process known as ploidy manipulation which enhances the carotenoid concentration and thus increases the nutritional value of the tuber. Detailed below are further uses of cassava:

Garri

Garri is a creamy/ white granule derived from cassava which may be cooked into porridge or eaten as a snack. The yellow – fleshed genotype (YF) of cassava has a high density of B- carotene and is now being used to make garri. This exciting new species cuts down garri processing time and cost, as it eliminates the additional step of palm oil enrichment to the granules.

High Quality Cassava Flour

The law on the use of cassava in bread and confectionery has automatically put the farmers and cassava processors into the supply chain of bakers and flour millers in Nigeria. This has created an opportunity for farmers and cassava processors to work together with the flour millers and bakers and explore investment opportunities in the cassava flour industry. However, the number of High Quality Cassava Flour (HQCF) agro processors in Nigeria is still very low. (IITA, 2005)

Cassava starch

Based on imports alone, the estimated size of the Nigerian domestic starch market in 2002 was 67000t. This is projected to reach 130,000 by 2010 (IITA 2005)

Ethanol

Made from cassava chips, ethanol is produced from sugar, high starchy crops or biomass (organic waste from forest wood, switch grass, corn husk, rice hulls, paper and pulp residue). The Kyoto Protocol and Convention on Climate Change Protection continue to make increasing demands on world ethanol production. Global ethanol output is currently at 40 billion litres per annum and is expected to increase to 70 billion litres by 2012. The Nigerian domestic market for ethanol is estimated to be 180 million litres per annum and is used primarily for industrial and beverage purposes.

Livestock

Cassava chips, chunks and pellets are used in producing major livestock feed.¹ The central states of Nigeria provide a location advantage for the establishment of cassava processing plants that removes the use of expensive artificial drying technology

Local Government in Nigeria

The Local Government in Nigeria is considered the third tier of government (the first two being the Federal and State respectively). Local governments are independent governance structures and are autonomous in their dispensation of services at the grassroots.

¹The total feed requirements in Nigeria is estimated at 1.2 million metric tonnes and about 80% of that is used by the poultry industry. Research by IITA and other institutions document the clear benefits of using cassava as the energy source in livestock feeds particularly as the price of cassava is about 65% the price of maize.

Leadership at this level is by election and the ruling body consists of a chairperson and councilors. Election is every 3 years compared to 4 years at the other two levels. In the absence of a duly elected council, a caretaker committee is appointed to govern the affairs of the council.

The location of the headquarters of the local government is a politically sensitive issue as a selected town is perceived to have enhanced access to funds, accelerated development and opportunities for growth, being that it is the 'seat of government' at that level.

The three Local Government Areas selected as pilot for this study were chosen on the basis of carefully considered criteria. (see previous Scoping Report)

1. Onna LGA of Cross Rivers State is best described as a creation of circumstances. In responding to a call for further development in the hinterland, in 1991 4 clans -Oniong, Nnung, Ndem and Awa were brought together to create ONNA Local Government Area. The headquarters is in Abat Town



2. Ikwerre LGA of Rivers State

The governance of the Ikwerre LGA was in the hands of a Caretaker Committee at the time of this project. Recent events in the State had seen the leader of the House of Representatives become the State Governor in an unprecedented judicial fiat. Tensions between the ousted governor and the current were apparent at local council level with Ikwerre LGA - home to both - as it were an arena for the warring parties. In the absence of a substantive head, decisions could not be taken and projects were put on hold. The headquarters of this LGA is Ikwerre Town.

3. Warri South LGA

In 1997, the siting of the headquarters of the newly created Warri South West Local Government Area in Ogodigbe (an Itsekiri settlement in the creeks) sparked off far reaching ethnic sentiments in the complex and multi-ethnic Delta State. Itsekiri and Ijaw youths protested vehemently, attacking villages, killing and maiming, stopping oil production and disrupting travel. There were counter attacks from Urhobo youths and a wide scale ethnic cleansing and inter tribal wars ensued. The violence only abated with the decision to relocate the headquarters to Ogbeloh, a suburban town of Warri.

The post conflict state of this LGA has impacted the project in many positive ways: Mainly, the project has served to bring together women from warring factions and demanded them to work together and achieve results. However, some of the women are internally displaced as a result of the conflict and are not able to step down the training as they no longer have access to their networks of women or their cooperatives.

1.1 Background

The project supports improved access of women in selected project sites/communities to information for economic decision - making through increased use of ICT facilities and training. It also supports the provision of technical and entrepreneurship skills to women in selected communities and provides relevant and appropriate equipment such as farm implements, cassava processing equipment, sewing machines, catering equipment and other tools

for small scale enterprises to the women groups. To strengthen women's interaction and influence in local decision making, the project supported the facilitation of advocacy meetings to sensitize community leaders, local government elected and appointed officials in the benefits of participatory budgeting and inclusive governance at the local level.

1.2 Project Objectives

- To improve access of at least forty women in each of the three selected project sites/communities to information for economic decision making through increased use of ICT facilities and training.
- To improve the technical and entrepreneurship skills of women including their ability to identify business prospects and opportunities within their locality.
- To provide relevant and appropriate equipment such as farm implements, cassava, and palm oil processing equipment etc to the women groups at selected project sites in order to enhance their productivity.
- To facilitate advocacy meetings to sensitize community leaders, women groups, local government elected and appointed officials of the benefits of participatory budgeting and inclusive governance at the local level

1.3 Objectives of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was

- To assess methodologies and strategies for project implementation in terms of effectiveness;
- To assess the achievement of project objectives
- To assess the impact of project on beneficiaries.

Additional objectives were

- To assess the CD Rom Tool developed for achieving the project objectives
- To assess the partnerships formed towards achieving the project results.

1.4 Research Methodology and Approach

There was a 3 fold basis for the evaluation and the methodology:

- *Evidence-based*: conclusions based on data, reports, interview material and secondary sources
- *Participatory*: maximising opportunities for different stakeholders to present their experiences and views.
- *Appreciative Inquiry*²

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been described as the most important advance in *action research* in the past decade (Bushe, 1991); a model of much needed participatory science (Harman, 1991); a radically affirmative approach to change which completely lets go of survey methods, culture change, measurement systems, socio – technical systems etc (White, 1997). AI fundamentally challenges the conventional approach to organizations and individuals and encourages people to celebrate their successes rather than focusing too much on problems and challenges.

² Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' (kwir), v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY

An Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Evaluation

AI has two goals: the responsibility to talk and celebrate successes and understanding the detail of what is working. To work with these two goals as guiding principles, there are 8 assumptions³ that the theory holds. For this evaluation project, the guiding principle was the first assumption of AI focusing the consultant's questions around 'what is working?' Following AI assumption 1, if we believe that in every organization (country, individual, or programme) something works (otherwise it would have closed down long ago), then it is essential to focus on that which is working. In this way, energies can be drawn from the successes and used in a positive way to address those things that are not working.

The traditional problem solving approach of evaluating projects follows the assumption that communities need a problem to be solved. This is followed by an analysis of causes and eventually, an analysis of solutions. In this evaluation however, this approach was replaced by AI methodology of valuing the best of 'what is' and envisioning 'what might be.' Thus many interview sessions began with the question 'What is working?' 'What have you done well?' 'Tell me something about this project that you are proud of.' 'When you think of the role you have played in this project as WDC Manager / NGO Executive / LGA person, what makes you smile?'

In asking these questions, there is no prescription of a right answer; instead there are different strategies that can be explored to arrive at an answer that has worked in the past, is acceptable to all, and provides the energies to journey confidently into the future.

There is also a deliberate emphasis on the positive. Later in the questioning when complaints and challenges are tabled, there is usually sufficient energies or positive examples to draw from which eventually show the way out of the challenges.

1.5 Scope and limitation of the evaluation

1. Timing of the evaluation. This evaluation was severely constrained by the timing of the study. The consultant had to schedule appointments for field visits during the Christmas period. December 2007 had two major holidays; the Eid –el-Kabir and the Christmas festivities. Many people had travelled / or were planning to and access to persons and information was constrained

2. Evaluation schedule. The evaluation took place within 2 weeks of delivery of the equipment to Onna LGA and Ikwere LGA. Thus there had not been a sufficient period lapse to as it were try out the equipment and ensure its sustainability. These constraints were beyond the scope of the consultancy

³ The 8 assumptions of AI are: 1) in every organisation something works 2) what we focus on becomes our reality 3) reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities 4) the language we use creates our reality 5) the act of asking questions of an organisation influences that organisation 6) it is important to value differences 7) people have more confidence to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past 8) if we carry parts of the past forward, they should be the best about the past.

SECTION 2

Overall Project Assessment:

Meeting the strategic needs of the communities in terms of poverty alleviation

Strategic gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men, and may include the abolition of sexual division of labour, removal of institutional forms of discrimination such as rights to own land or property. Practical gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience in their gendered position within the sexual division of labour for example, focus on the domestic arena, on income generating activities and also on community level requirements of housing and basic services (Moser, 1989). The project, in addition to meeting the basic needs of women in terms of their economic empowerment also provided skills for women to begin to value themselves as people who have the capacity to earn income and provide for family needs. This form of empowerment changes the way women are viewed and increases their level of participation in decision making at home, thereby moving them from their subordinate positions to a more visible position in the affairs within the home and by extension, in the community.

"When my husband died my children were very young. Some of them were in primary school, only one was in secondary school, others were in primary school. So I have to struggle a long way for them to go to school. And it's not easy doing this farming, farm work. Sometimes we sell at a very meager rate which it's not enough to pay everybody's school fees at the same time, and to eat was very difficult. Now, everyone around me is improving because of all of us are now busy, doing what we're supposed to do." Nfon Etete Ituen

"I want to use this medium to say that this programme has effectively changed my relationship with my boyfriend in the sense that formerly when I needed anything like (to) make my hair, I always had to demand money from him but since I learnt how make chin chin on own and sell, I have been able to afford those things I used to always ask him for. Since then, he too has come to always say that there is a need to educate a wife or a sister on a certain skill. This UNIFEM has in fact has changed to me totally, me just put it that way." Christy Omamofe, Orere Community

From the male perspective:

"With this training our wives are now more empowered to support us. It's not everything they need that they always have to ask for money from us." Idongesit, Onna LGA

The women working in groups also provided an avenue to work together towards a common goal while supporting each other. The women now have the capacity to manage their income and take decisions that affect their lives and those of their children. The human rights education component of the programme has enabled the women to begin to challenge the status quo and ask themselves basic questions on how their rights have been protected over the years. This shift in thinking provides the appropriate avenue for women to move for a change in those practices that subordinate them.

"I have to be sincere. Before this programme I knew about fundamental human rights but when I came into this programme I got to know about the women's rights that even in a society women also have mouth; (a say in the scheme of things.) Even in the home you are married too, you are not just there as a housewife; you're there even to make a contribution to your family. You're not to leave everything for your husband to do alone. I now know that a woman has a lot to do in the society even in the home." Eyitemi Oma, Ugborodo

Rights based approach to development

This strategy has once again proven itself as the basis for advancing the cause of women. Women are now more aware of their rights as women. They champion girlchild education and are all very aware of the concept of human rights and how to make it for them in their own peculiar circumstances. The following statements by some of the women portray this fact.

"I have to be sincere. Before this programme I knew about fundamental human rights but when I came into this programme I got to know about the women's rights that even in a society women also have mouth; (a say in the scheme of things.) Even in the home you are married to, you are not just there as a housewife; you're there even to make a contribution to your family. You're not to leave everything for your husband to do alone. I now know that a woman has a lot to do in the society even in the home." Eyitemi Oma, Ugborodo

"Like in my case, I have noticed that this programme has taught me to know about girls (unmarried girls) having rights in their father's property, or how to speak about their property in a community. In my own community, they don't share land to females, only the males, but at this programme, they taught us that even if they don't give a share of your father's property to you because you are a girl, you can have the rights to go to court and demand of your father's property. So I think I can have very right now, to demand for my father's property." Beauty, Isaba Community

Working with the Women Development Centre (WDC)

The Women Development Centers were created by the State Ministries of Women Affairs to serve as the gender machinery at the Local Government Councils. There were created with the mandate to ensure gender mainstreaming in local government governance as well as women empowerment. In many LGAs, including Ikwere and Onna, the WDCs focus on women empowerment issues and in Ogbah – Ijoh the WDC is effective and separate from the LGA, running independent activities and sourcing for external funding for their programmes.

There was a distinct difference in the execution of the programme in the 3 LGAs and the relationship between the partners and the beneficiaries was determined to a large extent by the WDC. In Onna LGA, the WDC was committed to the programme and had earned the trust and confidence of the women. The same can be reported for Ikwere. In Ogbah Ijoh LGA where the vestiges of ethnic conclaves still existed, the programme achieved the unintended benefit of arbiter / peace broker. Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo women were united in their participation in the programme and support for one another. The period of time covered by the project (3 years) the various topics discussed (including HIV/AIDS, business, farming / fishing skills, women's poverty) and the frequent interactions of the women's groups provided scope and leverage for new insights, understanding, compassion and learning to live together.

"There was a topic we learnt during the training. A glass of water was put on the table and we were asked "what do you see". Different people saw different things based on the direction from which we were looking at it. The speaker now used it to explain that we should work together irrespective of the different ways we see things so we can move forward. That is one of the things we learnt so many other things, like some things I now apply even in my situation in church, I learnt it from this UNIFEM programme." Mabel Aturmu, Deghere

Working with a Local Management Committee (LMC)

The Local Management Committee (LMC) is the advisory and management body for the project. Membership of the LMC was made up of civil servants within the LGAs and opinion leaders, who are perceived to have influence on members of the community. They were responsible for monitoring project activities as well as ensuring that project outcomes benefit participants. These roles were useful in conflict resolution and in advocating for women's participation in the project. For example, the LMC in Ogbah Ijoh ensured an equal number of Ijaw and Itsekiri women in the project, selected from each of the 20 Wards of the LGA.

The strategy of working with LMC was very effective as it created an interface between the project recipients and the collaborating partners. This ensured the commitment of the women leaders in the community and in turn gave

the women buy-in into the project. Be it in collaboration with the WDC as in Onna and Ikwerre, or alone – as in Ogbeh – Ijoh, the project overall:

- Harnessed the potential of Women Development Centers by introducing targeted programmes for women entrepreneurs
- Improved the technical and entrepreneurial skills of women in each of the communities, including their ability to identify prospects and opportunities within their locality.
- Provided relevant and appropriate equipment to the women groups at selected project sites and enhanced their productivity
- Facilitated advocacy meetings to sensitize community leaders, women groups and local government officials

Occasionally though, as in the case of Ogbeh – Ijoh, the councilors who were members of the LMC had differences, and the project sometimes served as an arena for settling such. Overall, however, the situation was contained.

Continuous programme monitoring by UNIFEM

During the course of the programme, UNIFEM kept in close contact with the partners and the beneficiaries in the field. The Partners Forum held two meetings which provided a platform for sharing best practices and creating a sense of oneness in the entire programme. Regular reports were also sent in from the fields by partner NGOs to UNIFEM. This continuous monitoring had an overall beneficial effect on the project

Gender Training by UNIFEM

In the course of monitoring the project by UNIFEM, the need for gender training was highlighted to ensure that all participants were as it were 'on the same page' and had a collective understanding of gender issues. A workshop was therefore held, facilitated by an external consultant. Staff of the four implementing NGOs were participants at the workshop and all reported that they greatly benefitted from the experience. (see separate report by UNIFEM)

Micro – Finance Training

Another immensely beneficial training was the Microfinance training organised by DEVIN, during which external consultants explained the rudiments of microfinancing to the beneficiaries of the programme to enable them access loans from banks. UNIFEM was an effective liaison between the beneficiaries and Access bank, who explained the requirement for the women to organize themselves into groups, as loans were not easily granted individuals. The women of Onna LGA have since formed and registered a co-operative group for this purpose.

A strong ICT component of the programme

The ICT element added overall value to the programme to make it a 21st century Women in Development programme. In recognizing that true advancement and development requires technology such as computers, the opportunity given to the beneficiaries to interact with up-to-date technology was exciting and rewarding.

Working with flexibility / responsiveness

- When it became obvious that there was a need for gender training for the partners and stakeholders of the programme, there was enough flexibility in the design to allow for such. The timely response went a long way to ensure a common understanding of the programme in order to achieve the desired results.
- The flexibility with numbers of LMC was also commendable and, when necessary, more people were added into the Committee

Project Methodologies and Strategies

Working with partners

The project was funded by the Japanese Government through the Human Security Fund established in UNDP, New York. UNIFEM took the lead in implementing the project. The programme was piloted in 3 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the 3 States respectively (Onna LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Ogbeh – Ijoh in Delta State and Ikwerre LGA in Rivers State) with the support of 3 NGOs, Development Initiatives (DEVIN), Community Development Partners (CDP) and AFRODEP. A fourth NGO, the Youth Technology Foundation (YTF) was responsible for the ICT component of the programme.

Identifying partners and other stakeholders for the project was a very successful strategy. Better still was the all inclusive strategy of the regular meeting with the implementing NGOs and their partners. This was very useful for the NGOs as well as the beneficiaries of the project, particularly when all concerned participated in collecting data and images for the CD Rom tool.

Partnership on the project was at three levels:

- Institutional partnership with organizations such as IITA, Access Bank, NACB and other community banks. These provided training, equipment and support to the beneficiaries of the programme
- Local government as partners: they provided housing and security for the donated equipment as in the case of the Isaba community where the chief, through the LGA donated the building housing the equipment.
- Implementing partners: AFRODEP, CDP, DEVIN and YTF who worked directly with UNIFEM and with the beneficiaries of the project

These partnerships are assessed in greater depth below.

Support from the LGA was varied:

In Onna, the LGA gave full and total support. They have donated a building that houses the cassava processing equipment, and provided security for the equipment. They also provided staffing support to the WDC.

In Ikwerre: political instability which has characterised the State in the last 10 months has sufficiently marred the project. Frequent and successive caretaker committees and change in leadership personnel has created a lack of ownership for the programme by the LGA and a consequent difficulty to obtain buy – in.

In Ogbeh – Ijoh, the Local Government, through the WDC donated furniture for the computer room and also continue to pay the salary of the instructor. The local government influences the management and operations of the WDC and this in turn impacts the project as discussed below .

Selection of participants

Stringent measures used in selection of participants were very successful project strategy.

For DEVIN, participants had to:

- *provide letters of identification* and confirmation of membership of a group.
- *be literate* to at least School Certificate level or Teacher's Grade 2 Certificate
- *have professional affiliation* and /or be a member of a co-operative. All selected women belonged to one or both ie a co-op or a WDC
- *demonstrate evidence of a previously acquired skill*. These skills could then be further developed. There was also the extra that women who had some level of training had high levels of confidence and greater ability to disseminate the learning

For CDP the women's group is currently in the process of registering as a co-operative entity. This should enable them access loans and other programmes targeted at cooperative societies.

Selection in Ogbeh – Ijoh was not as stringent, as the LMC unilaterally decided the beneficiaries of the project. Thus women with no previous skills could not maximize the opportunities offered and were (understandably) unable to learn much in the skills acquisition classes. However, those who had previous skills benefited tremendously from the classes

Study tours

To provide participants with practical information on fish farming and other businesses a study tour was organized. This was to enable women see a functioning fish farm/business venture and ask questions that relate to establishing one. It was also expected that the owners of the fish farm/businesses will share their lessons and experiences to enable participants take informed decisions as it relates to their own situations.

The participants' visits to the successful fish farms (Songhai, Sapele) and other business ventures (Nalt – Nusho, Nkusska) were very useful and greatly enhanced their learning. Several women from Ogbeh – Ijoh returned to set up their own fish farms, and those who already had, learned on improved production and management techniques

A striking example of this was Alice, who after the training formed a co-operative to start up her own project on artificial fish pond farming. Extreme water pollution had caused a decline in her crayfish and after the visit to SONGAI where she learnt and saw fish pond farming in practice, she was encouraged to create an artificial pond herself, and now runs a thriving business in the Warri South West LGA

Methodologies and strategies of the beneficiaries

- **Use of town criers**

Effective communication strategies amongst the participants included the use of town criers to announce meetings and encourage attendance.

- **Appropriate matching of skills to training and interest**

The participants themselves selected interest areas and matched their existing skills to those on offer. For instance women who already had excellent cooking skills opted for bakery classes in Ogbeh - Ijoh. In Ikwerre, women who already had hairdressing skills added on barbing skills.

- **Involving local capacity eg community banks**

A very successful strategy was to involve community banks as partners in the process. In Warri South West, the community bank pledged to grant any loan to finance the project should any of the women present a proposal. That way, there was accountability built into the loan allocation processing. Although many of the women were yet to take up the offer, demanding start up grants from UNIFEM, the community banks continued to indicate their willingness.

- **Involving local politicians**

Another successful strategy devised by the women was to involve the local politicians. They invited them as guests of honour to the advocacy meetings and solicited their support throughout the programme. This guaranteed the success of the programme in very many ways

Project management

With improved mechanization of the garri processes, the women reported a much lighter workload and more time for domestic work and other economic activities.

"I like all the various things that I learnt so much. Processing cassava; let me speak on that. Before now also, we leave our farm land about 5 to 6 years and saying it has matured for planting. But now we learned that even if it is just a year or two (it's okay.) You plant this year and you can also use the same soil next year. Instead of clearing and bush burning, you can clear the bush, remove the stumps, plant your cassava, and space out the stems. But before now, we used to plant cassava on the same farmland, coco yam, tree leaf (and all sorts). Now I have learnt about planting just cassava; space out and make sure cassava has enough air to do very well and when you go through the farm, go to watch what's going on, you have space walk about and check if there is any pest. Is pest for cassava. But if you do mixed cropping, you wouldn't know how to kill the pest because you won't be sure of which pest you're dealing with. But if a pest for cassava, you can more easily look for the particular treatment for that pest." Eunice, Bateren Community

ICT and other equipment.

The ICT component of the project was set up to:

1. provide business guides with up – to - date information to women who are running small scale businesses or planning to set up businesses. Based on the notion that information is power, the ICT guide is ' an asset that can help to overcome uncertainty and open new doors of avenues for opportunity.'
2. provide practical information to women on conflict management, managing groups, HIV/AIDS and gender within the context of local governance.

The donation of computers, printers and photocopiers as part of the project is a laudable attempt to bridge the digital divide and empower the women in the 3 selected LGAs. The content of the programme was developed by YTF in Owerri, Imo State, and were also responsible for training the women (in collaboration with the women centers). A CD and manual was given to each participant at the end of the training course.

In assessing the success of the equipment it was discovered that:

- The ICT equipment is being put to good use, but not by the beneficiaries of the project. Onna LGA recently used their computers to produce exam papers for a local primary school. The photocopier and generator are located in the office of Local Government Chairperson and are available for the Council use. This makes it well nigh impossible for the women to access.
- Ikwerre LGA had not set up ICT equipment as at the time of the evaluation, allegedly because the ICT centre was still under construction and / or a suitable alternative had not been identified to house the equipment.
- The computers are in good use in Ogbah – Ijoh. Where the women cannot attend the training or are not literate enough, they send their children. The equipment is available for use by the entire community.

The CD Rom tool

The tool is in a bright and attractive package with easy to use instructions. However, the tool is not useful for meeting the programme objectives and has had very little impact on the beneficiaries of the project. Indeed, for a

middle level computer users, the state – of - the - art presentation is attractive and the information, the guide and the business tips are excellent; but for women farmers, and petty traders, it is much too sophisticated for their use.

Beneficiary impact assessment.

Economic empowerment of women continues to play a key role in poverty alleviation at both the micro and macro level. Women reported that the project has **enlightened** them, **empowered** them and even boosted their **confidence** in themselves (and in their processes.) The impact of project on the gender relations within the household (in terms of decision making, access to and control of resources and economic autonomy) cannot very easily be measured, least of all by an external party. However, women record the success of the project in terms of increased earnings, more respect for them within the household, more independence (to attend meetings and trainings) and much more involvement in decision making

" My own confidence is that even as a graduate or not, you have something doing and can teach your kids. I can bake and do buns. Marriage is now no longer just sitting in the house idle. Now you can do something. You can be running your hands on a machine or doing your children's hair." Edith

In particular, women of Onna LGA reported their excitement at the enhanced status of their daughters. According to them, it is accepted nationwide that the 'best house-girls are from our area.' With this project, the young women can now remain in the villages until marriage and earn an income for themselves. The need to go out and earn income from afar to fend for themselves and their families has thus been eliminated.

Other women as beneficiaries. *This section assesses whether other women in the community who were not direct beneficiaries of the project have felt an impact of the project from the direct beneficiaries*

Women cooperatives recognize the beneficiaries as trainers and cascade the learning amongst others in the groups.

"I have shared it with the Ubimma community, their women, and they have learnt according to what they taught us. Because we trainees have to train others after having received training. I have done that in my community. I even have some of the photos of the events here with me!" Joan Egbuche

For computer literacy in Ogbeh Ijoh, the women who could not attend sent their sons and daughters. This provided an excellent platform for persons (male and female) who were not direct beneficiaries of the project to be impacted.

Women in Development Dialogue

- 17 selected Women Leaders & 3 LG officials from Warri South West participated in the two day consultative session.
- Warri South West Local Government budget allocation on development issues affecting women was increased by approximately 40% in the current fiscal year 2008. This is a direct outcome of the consultative meeting held in February 2006 as part of the project activity.
- Prior to the consultative meeting only 8 Adult Literacy centers were functional in the Local Government. After the meeting, 2 additional centers were reopened at Ogidingbe and Ajudiagbe communities respectively. Ms Omaghomi Eyitemi one of the participants at the session and a beneficiary of the project was appointed coordinator of Ajudiagbe Adult Literacy Centre.
- Ms. Fanti Wanuya is currently contesting for the chair of the local government council and 3 other women are candidates for councillorship in the forthcoming 2007 LG elections.

Assessment of partnerships. *This section assesses the partnerships of the project and those that yielded the greatest benefits towards achieving the projected results*

Partnerships were at different levels with various institutions.

By far the most rewarding was with IITA as this yielded the greatest benefits towards achieving the project results. To celebrate World Food Day in November 2007, IITA donated 4 cassava processing plants to Akwa Ibom State through the Ministry of Agriculture. This is in addition to the high yield cassava stems donated to the communities which site the processing plants. One of such plants is at Ikot Okudom in Eket, 25 km from the Onna LGA HQ.

IITA has also donated cassava roasting and drying furnaces to complement the equipment donated by UNIFEM

ADMAS: Will finance and organise the training of an initial set of 20 women from Ikwerre LGA in their office in Port Harcourt. Skills acquisition will include ICT skills. However the transportation issue must be sorted as women must make their way to the venue.

NDDC: as a major donor in the Niger Delta region, the project beneficiaries are planning to request for grants and seed money from the corporation. corporation

DESOPADEC: Ogbeh Ijoh women would like to partner with DESOPADEC and seek funding for their work. However, they are unsure of how to go about it and are seeking guidance from UNIFEM.

Trade Bank, Access Bank: both national banks have indicated interest in the project. Access bank has a product that is specially designed for women, giving loans at minimum interest with little or no collateral required.

Equipment and achievement of project objectives

All the equipment supplied was appropriately matched to the skills of the beneficiaries. For the period that they had them, they could be seen to be used and well maintained. They were durable, long lasting and required low maintenance. Hair clippers, hair driers, sewing machines and embroidery machines were all standard models which would require minimum maintenance.

Ovens and cooking stoves are relevant, affordable and easy to operate and maintain, with parts available on the open market.

Generators, photocopiers, computers were all in good working order.

The cassava processing equipment is appropriate technology that will benefit both the women and the larger community, far exceeding the objectives of the project. All equipment seen were in use and show evidence of good maintenance. Thus, long term use of equipment is very likely since parts are available and locally sourced

The Micro - Finance training

The success of the micro finance training is obvious in the vocabulary of some of the women in the project. Their recent enlightenment shines through as they correctly intersperse sentences with financial terminology such as 'opportunity cost'; 'budget'; 'costing'; 'planning'; 'overheads' etc

Project management

There was continuous project monitoring by collaborating partners – AFRODEP, CPD, YTF, and DEVIN- by UNIFEM throughout the project. The NGOs regularly submitted work plans and reports of activities carried out. They also conformed with the UN standards of financial management. Project partners demonstrated excellent capacity to manage the project as they had implemented projects before; DEVIN with Shell Petroleum Development Company, GTZ, AGIP and the Church of Christ in Port Harcourt had in various capacities since its inception provided microfinance and economic empowerment training to local communities. CDP also had an enviable track record in working with the EU on the MPP6, Johns Hopkins University / Exxon Mobil in Malaria in Pregnancy Project and the Open Society Initiative West Africa on the SEEDs project.

However where skills were lacking UNIFEM provided training, as was the case of the gender training. Partners

understanding of project objectives and expectations helped them to programme in such a way that project objectives are achieved.

SECTION 3

Conclusions

From the evidence gathered during this assessment and evaluation exercise, it was obvious that UNIFEM has performed particularly well in contributing to reducing poverty and elevating the status of the women of Ikwerre, Onna and Ogbeh - Ijoh communities and more widely, those of the Niger Delta because of the demand from neighbouring communities. However, it is also evident that WEEP – or for that matter, any other single project – is not sufficient to empower the women economically, particularly not within the 2 year period of the project.

UNIFEM has supported and trained 120 women; donated equipment (including computers) and has built the capacities of local government, women development centers, as well as community stakeholders. The project has therefore been able to create a facilitating environment that protects and promotes the rights of women in the project communities

Furthermore, through its own performance management assessment, UNIFEM has recorded several project achievements and learnt many lessons. This is despite significant staff turnover during the project and many problems of logistics.

The beneficiaries of the project have partnered with development agencies such as IITA, LGAs, community banks in capacity building activities, development dialogues and advocacy. The LMC has also been strengthened and their participation guaranteed that the women attended all the meetings

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

- UNIFEM was able to provide technical support that enabled women to establish contact with other partners such as IITA, UNDP, Community Banks, Commercial Banks, DESOPADEC, who will explore providing seed money to the beneficiaries. Going forward, this process can be led by the LGA's with technical support from UNIFEM.
- Transportation was a recurring troublesome spot in the 3 LGAs. For the women in Ogbeh Ijoh, it was particularly more expensive, as some had to travel by sea in ferries or canoes to attend meetings, training sessions and workshops. This was further compounded by the choice of venue for the training. For security sake and also to appear to be non partial to previously feuding parties, all training sessions were conducted at the PTI hall in Effurun Warri, beyond the LGA itself. Though less expensive, but equally as traumatic, travel for women of Ikwerre and Onna LGA was just also vociferously described as 'the biggest issue about the programme'.
This problem has provided further avenues for involvement of the LGAs who had to supplement the women's transport fares to the venues. In Ikwerre LGA, the women's groups are in the process of requesting that the LGA donates a bus to them for their training.

- Review of terms of engagement of LMC members. The LMC were very useful in the start up phase of the project and played positive role in identifying and motivating the women. By the end however, they were querying their own relevance to the project. It is therefore recommended that:
 - New terms and conditions determined for engagement with future committees with clearly communicated roles for its members throughout the lifespan of the project.
 - Ogbeh Ijoh LGA believes that the LMC was unduly influenced by councilors and other local politicians. It is therefore recommended that much care be taken in selecting the stakeholders of future projects. Local knowledge of the background, personality profiles and success stories of all interested persons should be carefully vetted.

Replicability of the programme

The programme has been very successful and is recommended for replication. To this end

- A different set of LGAs must be selected to minimize the impact of local and State politics on the project
- UNIFEM needs to involve more persons external to the programme during the programme to ensure that it is on course to achieving its stated objectives
- Programme timetable to be carefully planned and followed with much less time lapses between events.
- Sufficient time should be allocated between completion of programme and its assessment to get true readings of the functionality of the equipment and the sustainability of the programme.

Based on the success of this project, AFRODEP, has received funding from other donors to replicate this work in economic empowerment of the women of the Niger Delta. This is a welcome development, which validates both the work of UNIFEM, UNDP and Afrodep to the Niger Delta women.

A project monitoring and evaluation refresher training should be organised for the partners with a focus on impact assessment. This provides long term follow up to the women and makes them feel valued. For sustainability to be built into the programme, there should be overlap between the alumni and fresh intakes, so that best practices can be shared.

A well developed exit strategy for the women should be discussed with the NGOs and the WDC. Points to note will include graduation of beneficiaries from the scheme, how to devolve the learning to other members of the various co-operatives, expected support from the group and indices for measuring each beneficiaries' progress.

The visibility of the project should be increased using the media, political events etc particularly of the garri processing facilities and new culinary developments. Government officials in the three states should be encouraged and supported to visit the intervention communities. Such visits would not only expose the officials to the realities on ground, but will also increase the scope for further Government /Non – Government collaboration.

The project has proven to be an effective rallying point for feuding ethnic communities and an arbiter in post conflict communities as in Warri South LGA. This is an enormous success and such strategies should be repeated elsewhere. However, LGAs with a history of political instability or uncertainty as in Ikwerre should be avoided as this negatively impacts the programme.

Recommendations on the ICT component

Technology needs to be relevant and sustainable. A different and more relevant form of ICT intervention to be used. Most women after the training went to their homes and attempted to reinforce their learning. Believing the CD Rom to be the same as a DVD or VCD, they inserted the disc into their players, expecting to recreate the experience they had on the computers during their training on their television sets! This led to intense frustration in many cases and the discouraged women abandoned the ICT component of the training

In Onna LGA, the women were evidently more at home with a hoe and cutlass than behind a computer. Appropriate technology in their case would have been intermediate technology such as the improved means of garri production and facilitation of farming. The computer training and expected use is out of place amongst women in such rural setting where there is no cybercafé for miles and computer literacy and appreciation is very remote.

UNIFEM should explore converting the current file format into to VCD format.

Alternately, a different VCD / can be produced which will actually train / teach women the same principles as contained in the current CD Rom. This ensures that women at both ends of the literacy spectrum are well catered for.

Considering the widespread use of the VCD – thanks to a mushrooming Nollywood film industry - this mode of getting the message across will gain acceptance, will impact a large number of women and will achieve the desired results

Strategies should be put in place targeting some activities at boys / men as well. At Ogbeh – Ijoh, young men are beginning to complain that attention is being given only to women in the communities by the project. Men / boys should be invited to advocacy visits, development dialogues and space created for them to air their own views as well as demonstrate support to the womenfolk.

Cassava Initiatives

- Garri

With increased partnership with IITA , (and UNICEF) the new garri can be made popular and promoted amongst women and children especially in areas of vitamin A deficiency.

- High Quality Cassava Flour

The law on the use of cassava in bread and confectionary continues to provide a perfect leverage point for this project. Again with further partnerships with NAFDAC and SON, the women can be encouraged to commercialise their products and set up large scale bakeries and biscuit factories. This will in turn guarantee jobs and increase income for the women

- Cassava starch

Cassava starch is another derivative of cassava that is currently being imported, as there is insufficient domestic production to meet the demands of the local market. This is a whole revenue - generating area to be mined.

- Ethanol.

As an alternative to fossil fuel, the whole world is looking at ethanol as the bio – fuel of the 21st century.

Opportunities abound this area for further development, particularly for the economic empowerment of women.

Selected experiences

Further examples of development dialogue, particularly in post conflict Ogbeljoh:

“ There was a topic we learnt during the training. A glass of water was put on the table and we were asked “what do you see”. Different people saw different things based on the direction from which we were looking at it. The speaker now used it to explain that we should work together irrespective of the different ways we see things so we can move forward. That is one of the thing we learnt so many other things, like some things I now apply even in my situation in church, I learnt it from this UNIFEM programme.” Mabel Aturmu, Deghere

“We were able to work with the LGA. Before now, they would not allow us women to have a say, but as I'm talking to you now, a slot has been given to women in the forthcoming elections in this very Local Govt. “

“For many years, I had gone through frustration in my aspiration for Ward Councillorship position in the election ... actually for 9 years. I brought up the issue and in this last election, I was actually INVITED to come and vie for the position. I'm the one who declined, because I felt I had

grown above that level. Really, a lot more opportunities are being given to women now. That is why we are asking for a little thing to push us forward. That is what is remaining."

The Rights based approach to development has been a success. Women are now more aware of their rights as women. They champion girlchild education and are all very aware of the concept of human rights and how to make it for them in their own peculiar circumstances.

Onna

The women have composed a song, which has more or less become their theme song.

"Know your rights, women know your rights,

Onna women, arise

The time for progress has come

You better catch up with time oh,

Know your rights!"

(sung to the catchy tune of Yoruba song 'Ba mi jo, ara e ba mi yo)

" I have to be sincere. Before this programme I knew about fundamental human rights but when I came into this programme I got to know about the women's rights that even in a society women also have mouth; (a say in the scheme of things.) Even in the home you are married too, you are not just there as a housewife; you're there even to make a contribution to your family. You're not to leave everything for your husband to do alone. I now know that a woman has a lot to do in the society even in the home." Eyitemi Oma, Ugborodo

"I want to say that this programme has helped us a lot especially me. I've known that training is not only for men. You can also train the woman too. They used to say it's not good to train the girls – it's better to train only the boys and leave the girls because they will soon marry and go out of the home. But this programme has taught us that training is not only for the boys, also for the girls and even when they go out, they will take the training along with them and will make impact in their new family." Esther

Ikwerre

"This programme has taught me a lot of things... a woman has equal rights; no discrimination, no violence ... I have learnt a lot." Stella

"Like in my case, i have noticed that this programme has taught me to know about girls (unmarried girls) having rights in their father's property, or how to speak about their property in a community. In my own community, they don't share land to females, only the males, but at this programme, they taught us that even if they don't give a share of your father's property to you because you are a girl, you can have the rights to go to court and demand of your father's property. So I think I can have very right now, to demand for my father's property." Beauty, Isaba Community

- **To assess whether other women in the community who were not direct beneficiaries of the project have felt an impact of the project from the direct beneficiaries**

Women cooperatives recognise the beneficiaries as trainers and cascade the learning amongst others in the groups. In each LGA the beneficiaries reported as having begun the training, whilst in Onna, the 40 women beneficiaries have since come together to form a co-operative.

Ogbe – Ijoh

"My mother, she will be lacking for some certain things and I wouldn't be able to assist her but since I have started baking biscuits, bread, I'm proud of what I can do. I can also make fried rice

on my own, so it has done a very good thing for me. UNIFEM passed on a very good thing for me." Bridget Amaechi

Ikwerre:

"I have shared it with the Ubimma community, their women, and they have learnt according to what they taught us. Because we trainees have to train others after having received training, I have done that in my community. I even have some of the photos of the events here with me!" Joan Egbuche

- **Evaluate the impact of the project on women's perception of themselves and their economic status in the family and community**

Onna

"I have benefited a lot from this programme. How to process garri. I learnt it well and gather to the women in my communities to teach them. So all what we learned and achieved here, we also achieved them in my community. So I thank you UNIFEM because I know we have achieved a lot. May God bless you." Peace Sunday Omaghwan

Ogbe – Ijoh

"What I like most is that now, somebody will not deprive me of my rights. The second thing I learned is how to set up a business. In my community ... widow's rights ... quick early marriage 12 or 13 year old girls being pushed prematurely into marriage. This programme has made us to understand that this kind of early marriage is not good. You have to train up your daughter as well as you train a boy child. The both have equal rights. This is what I have learnt." Ijeoma Obisike, Ozabhan Ward 2.

Ikwerre

" Good morning. I really like this programme because it taught me so much about cassava. I thought it was only being used for garri, I didn't know that there are so many other varieties. I can use cassava to make flour and buns. I've known that we can make cakes. It has taught me a very creative thing."

" My own confidence is that even as a graduate or not, you have something doing and can teach your kids. I can bake and do buns. Marriage is now no longer just sitting in the house idle. Now you can do something. You can be running your hands on a machine or doing your children's hair."

- **To assess the project's effects on their workloads in other agricultural production and other economic endeavour they are involved in**

"I like all the various things that I learnt so much. Processing cassava. Let me speak on that. Before now also, we leave our farm land about 5 to 6 years and saying it has matured for planting. But now we learned that even if it is just a year or two (it's okay.) You plant this year and you can also use the same soil next year. Instead of clearing and bush burning, you can clear the bush, remove the stumps, plant your cassava, and space out the stems. But before now, we used to plant cassava on the same farmland, coco yam, tree leaf (and all sorts). Now I have learnt about planting just cassava; space out and make sure cassava has enough air to do very well and when you go through the farm, go to watch what's going on, you have space walk about and check if there is any pest. Is pest for cassava. But if you do mixed cropping, you wouldn't know how to kill to pest because you won't be sure of which pest you're dealing with. But if a pest for cassava, you can more easily look for the particular treatment for that pest." Eunice, Bateren Community

"The project is very educating. Makes me to be technically inclined and hazards well as a woman. Above all in agriculture and skills I have learnt so many things that is why I like the program. I never knew that people used to train bees."

- **To assess the impact of project on the gender relations within the household (in terms of decision making, access to and control of resources and economic autonomy)**

" I want to use this medium to say that this programme has effectively changed my relationship with my boyfriend in the sense that formerly when I needed anything like (to) make my hair, I always had to demand money from him but since I learnt how make chin chin on own and sell, I have been able to afford those things I used to always ask him for. Since then, he too has come to always say that there is a need to educate a wife or a sister on a certain skill. This UNIFEM has in fact has changed to me totally, me just put it that way." Christy Omamofe, Orere Community

From the male perspective:

" With this training our wives are now more empowered to support us. It's not everything they need that they always have to ask for money from us." Idongesit, Onna LGA

- **Evaluate the impact of the Micro Finance training in the management process of the beneficiary women co-operatives**

The obvious success of the micro finance training is in the radical change of the vocabulary of some of the women in the project. Their recent enlightenment shines through as they correctly intersperse sentences with words and phrases such as opportunity cost; budget and planning;

Onna

Gloria mma Amadi; "Concerning management. Before I came into this programme, I had a small business and I was managing. Instead of managing the business myself, I put a girl there to help me. But I soon discovered that the business was going down. But at this programme I learnt that I should manage the business myself so I asked her to leave and I started managing the business myself. I discovered so many things; go there now and see for yourself the business is so large that I cannot believe it was something that was very small when I first started it."

"what exactly did you learn in this programme that has helped your business?"

" I learnt budgeting ... financing ... marketing..."

" just one aspect you remember very strongly"

" I know how to do Business Plan Very Well!"

Ogbe – Ijoh

" We learnt how to budget and differentiate between interest, capital and expenditure. If you don't balance, that is your own problem!" Alice Okoturoh, Deghele Community

Ikwerre

" This programme has enabled me to get to know one another. Even though we have come from different communities, we have now come together as one. So I'm thanking you once again for organisation this programme. God bless you. All of us have gained a lot like in the testimonies you have been hearing. I myself am one of them; I have a business I'm running. With this business of budgeting and opportunity cost, I know it and I'm applying it for my neighbours in the market. We have all achieved a lot. God bless you!"

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