Canada

WVL NIGERIA PROJECT
WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

actionaid

The POWER of Community Based Organizations IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHT

EDITION 2

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WOMEN VOICES: A COMPENDIUM OF SUCCESS STORIES - Edition 2

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About the Project

The Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria (WVL - NIgeria) project is a five-year project funded by Global Affairs Canada. The project is aimed at tackling the barriers to gender equality and supporting the empowerment of women and girls through provision of financial and technical resources to local feminist/women's rights organizations in Nigeria. This intervention is designed to respond to the challenges faced by these organisations in their efforts to elimiate discrimination and rights violations in policy and legislation and the provision of services, as well as harmful social beliefs and practices.

Through this project, ActionAid Nigeria has provided demonstrable evidence of its capability to effectively manage sub-granting initiatives. This is being done through the provision of mulltiple layers of funding and tailored capacity building support to these organizations.

Our STORIES

A Paradigm Shift through the Village Savings and Loan Scheme

Rakiya Aliyu a 41-year-old mother of 6 children from Gamawa Local Government Area of Bauchi state, is a beneficiary of the Village Savings and Loan Scheme, an initiative of the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria Project. With no knowledge and access to financial training and resources, she couldn't afford to save up to 20,000 naira a month, and getting access to financial support was not viable. Her struggles had always been supporting daily needs and paying for her children's education, as most of them were settling for trade to feed as against going to school.

With the emergence of this project, Attah Sisters Helping Hands Foundation (ASHHF) a partner in Bauchi state through trainings, peer education, and continuous mentoring on Village Savings and Loan scheme (using the modules translated into the Hausa language for easy understanding) was able to reach out to women like Rakiya. With constant advocacies to the community leaders on the need for women to be allowed to attend group meetings, there was a positive response from them.

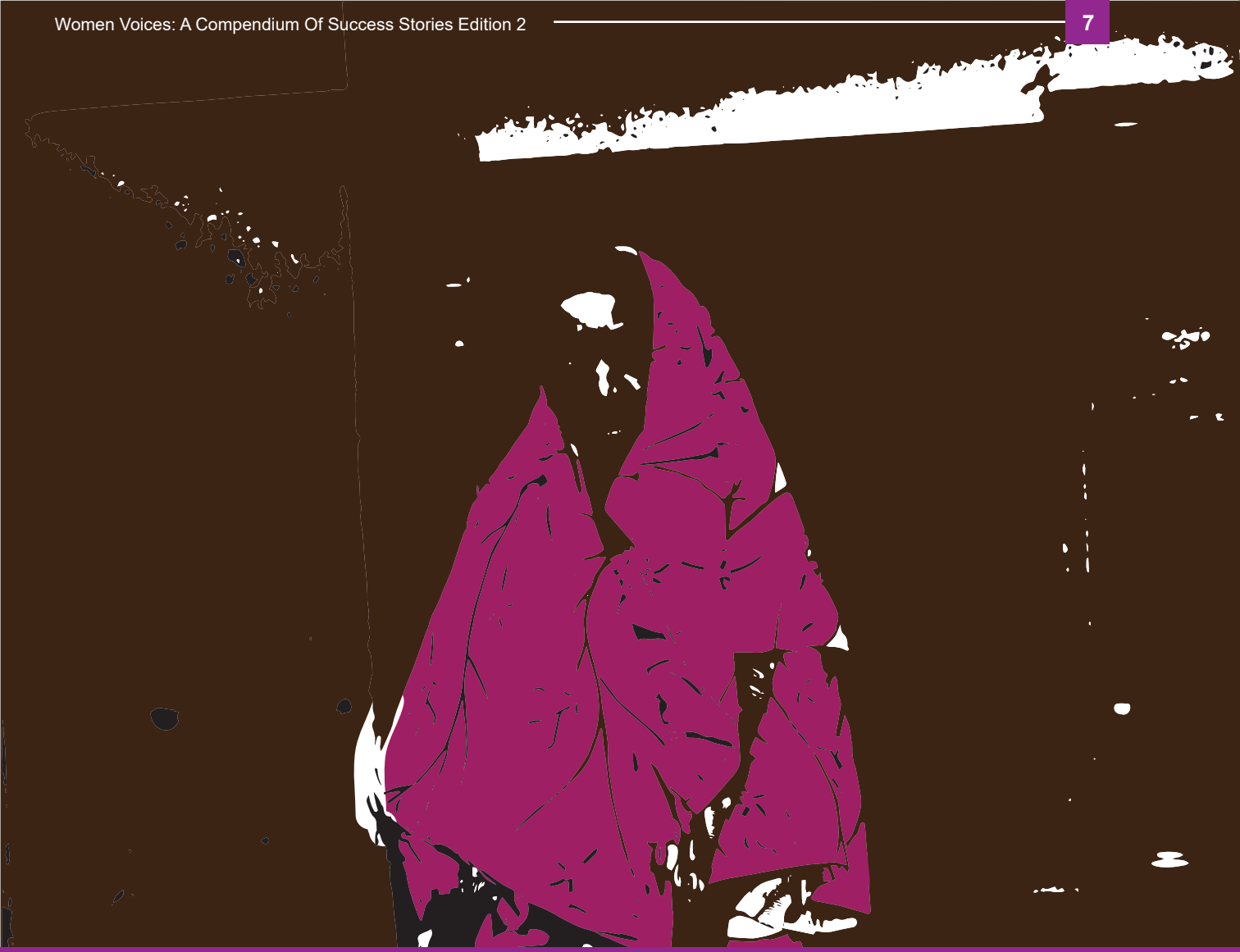
Rakiya and other beneficiaries were trained on income-generated activities and empowered with startup kits worth ten thousand naira. After these trainings, Rakiya joined the Alheri VSLA group at Udubo community and started saving as little as 300 naira a month, with advice from the group leader, Rakiya was able to increase her savings to 1000 naira with the goal of buying a refrigerator. With the collection of her saving of N55,000 by the end of the year, in addition to the loan collected from the VSLA group, Rakiya was able to purchase a refrigerator for her business as planned. This was a great success for her as Rakiya who hardly make N5,000 weekly before, now makes N8,000 – N9,000 weekly and has been able to expand her sales from just kunu and zobo (Local drinks) to soft drinks, sachet and bottled water, a dream she thought will never come true.

Rakiya can now save more money in the VSLA group and have expanded her business beyond the sale of soft drinks, she is also encouraging more women in her community to enroll in the scheme to improve their lives and family through the proceeds saved up. Her husband is also grateful to ASHHF for the program and pledges his support to the success of the scheme in the neighboring communities.

"I don't know how to start thanking this organization that use their time to come and trained us on this savings and loan (VSLA) my share-out money is what I used to buy refrigerator which has invariably helped me in the sale of zobo, kunu, soft drinks and water. I also used my savings to start rearing goats; I have been doing business before now, but I have never saved a large amount as this, all I can say is thank you, and God will bless you all at ASHH foundation." Rakiya Aliyu

Initially, beneficiaries in Bauchi state were skeptical about the introduction of the WVL project because many interventions have come and gone with no significant achievement for them. But with the emergence of the VSLA initiative, and the successes recorded, women and members of the community have changed their perception of gender equality and advancement. Apart from Rakiya, there are other women with similar success stories from this intervention.

Through the VSLA initiative, the WVL project has recorded significant successes, and these has impacted positively the life of the beneficiaries, their family, and the community at large. The intervention is affecting lives completely, improving women's livelihood, elevating community poverty, and increasing the enjoyment of human rights.



From a Survivor of Gender Based-Violence to a Thriving Businesswomen.

The story of Abosede (Iya Chinchin)

Abosede is a mother of two from Ajele community, Eyenkorin, Ilorin West LGA of Kwara State. Abosede, is a survivor of domestic violence and is single-handedly raising her two children. Her husband is a polygamist and due to that, she experienced socio-economic and physical violence such as spousal neglect, and destruction of property amongst others leaving her alone to cater for herself and the children.

Abosede is skilled in chin-chin production but lacked the capital to expand her business. This situation caused her to remain in sadness and depression as she had nothing to feed her children with. Through sensitization and referral, she was able to bring her story to Olive Community Development Initiative (OCDI) a partner in Kwara state implementing the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria (WVL-N) project.

With funding support from Global Affairs Canada, Abosede was able to enjoy some of the services provided for SGBV survivors which were psychosocial support and economic empowerment. When she got a surprise call from OCDI psychosocial unit that the Ministry of Women Affairs Ilorin in collaboration with OCDI bought her a gas cylinder, flour, sugar, frying pan etc. to support her hand work, she rushed down and was moved to tears, as she can now go about her business with ease.

Now Abosede runs a successful business and can buy all the ingredients she needs for her business effortlessly. She is making lots of profit and with that, she can afford to feed and send her children to school, feed herself, and save from the income generated. She is happy to be an independent businesswoman and excited about growing and expanding her business. With savings, she has embarked into "Melon" farming, which she combines with the production of chin-chin, and she now lives happily with her children.

"It never occurred to me that I will be one of those using gas cylinder in my life! as tears of joy rolled down her eyes, thank you so much, God bless OCDI". She spoke.

Empowering and supporting women helps to break the cycle of poverty and dependence on their husbands. Women's economic empowerment is essential in promoting equality between women and men and is a precondition for sustainable development. Every positive change in each woman survivor is a success.

Confidence built through Young Women Leaders Mentorship Programme – A Fadeela Story

"I, Fadeela M. Bello a student at College of Nursing Sciences, before I was selected to be one of the 50 mentees under WVL-N Young Women Leaders Mentorship Programme, I used to be very shy and did not have courage and confidence to stand in front of crowd to speak. Thus, based on my knowledge gained during the mentorship program I now have a truck load of self-esteem."

With so much confidence, is the words of Fadeela, a mentee on the Young Women Leaders Mentorship programme organized by Kungiyar Tallafin Mata Development Initiative (KTMDI) a partner on the Women Voice and Leadership -Nigeria project in Kebbi state. Due to the high level of patriarchal dominance, cultural and religious hinderance that plagues young women from participating in leadership and political spaces in the North, the WVL project has given voice to these women and girls to speak and attain leadership position in their various communities.

Fadeela is among the 50 Young Women Leaders Mentees drawn from Tertiary institution in Kebbi state and given the opportunity to break the barriers and norms that limit women from participating in political and leadership positions. With a six-months mentorship programme enroute, where topics around life skills such as leadership and communication skills and others were taught, this served as an eye opener for these women and girls building their confidence to vie for any position of their choice.

With this confidence developed, Fadeela contested for the position of Student Union Government (SUG) Vice President of College of Nursing and Health Sciences and Vice President, National Association of Kebbi State students (NAKSS) and won both positions against her male counterpart and other candidates making her the first female student to become a Vice President of Student Union Government (SUG) of College of Nursing Sciences in Kebbi state.

"As an elected female vice president, I am mentoring other female student to develop high self-esteem. After completing my education, I hope to participate in Political and leadership spaces beyond school level and I will continue to mobilize other young women to develop ambition for leadership wherever they find themselves. Am also willing to participate in political and other decision-making process" says Fadeela

With one of our strategic objectives focusing on strengthening female participation and leadership, the WVL project through funding from Global Affairs Canada is working to build the capacities of LWROs to empower women and girls, advance the protection of women and girls' right, and achieve gender equality in Nigeria. With more young girls like Fadeela, holding technical and important positions like this, it increases space for female participation in the leadership and decision making.

New Lease of Life for SGBV Survivors through Shelter

Living in a deteriorating and challenging environment, one could lose hope in fighting for what is considered a right especially when they have no roof over their heads. Kwara State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria without a safe space for SGBV survivors, and this has limited the provision of integrated services and support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

With the emergence of the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria project, GLOHWOC a partner of the project in Kwara state through the COVID-19 top-up intervention, collaboration, and partnerships with the State Ministry of Women Affairs acquired a safe space for Sexual and Gender Based Violence in the state. Through this space, GLOHWOC was able to provide integrated services (shelter, medical, psychosocial, and nutritional supports) to 19 immigrants trafficked all the way from Benin Republic.

The cases were referred by the Immigration Services for temporary safe spaces and with support and network of the Kwara State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, all the 19 survivors were successfully repatriated back to their country and reunited with their families. Through the WVL-N project GLOHWOC has been able to cater and care for over 70 SGBV survivors in the state.

The home which has served as a safe space for women and girls, especially SGBV survivors has been able to receive adequate care ranging from psychosocial support, counselling, medicals, life skills, vocational training, and educational support which has helped build their self-esteem and enlarge their mental capacity to enhance response, remission, and recovery.

"Shelter is the major challenge of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, but with the intervention of Global Affairs Canada and ActionAid through GLOHWOC, the survivors of SGBV now have a place, we are eternally grateful to GLOHWOC for facilitating this support for Kwara State, we seek the kind support of GLOHWOC for inputs during our budget planning to ensure sustainability of the shelter home and SARC". The Permanent Secretary, MWASD

Survivors have been able to access the shelter which has resulted in their ability to get support and has contributed to their mental health. This shelter gave a platform for survivors to be able to talk to professionals, express themselves and heal from the violence perpetrated against them. Survivors has been able to reunite with their families and are coping well.

"I never knew I could go through the journey and be strong, but with a roof over my head, I have been able to complete my studies and take care of my daughter". A survivor.

The shelter provided is one of the major achievements that has happened to the state and serve as a means of sustainability when the project phases out, it has given the state the platform to receive and treat SGBV cases, within and outside the state. It has also supported the state to manage issues around homelessness and to provide integrated services to survivors which has aided recovery and reintegration. This shelter has given the survivors an avenue to learn, heal, and grow as well as a voice too.

Reaching out to Rural Communities Through Community Based Organization – An ENIGA Story

Cassava Farming

Lack of land, and funds are the two major issues faced by community women in Nikiria community in Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State. Most women who have lost their husband, and lands collected from them from their in-laws with little or no source of income to take care of their children, these women are forced to beg for food from neighbors or family members.

Through the advocacy of the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria Project, ENIGA a Community Based Organization (CBO) in Cross River state visited the village head and other community leaders to seek for their support in empowering these women, demanding that their lands be recovered back, and voice given to them. This was possible through the trainings and capacity building done by ActionAid Nigeria through the project.

To actualize these demands, women of Nikiria community were trained in cassava farming, and processing, knowledge on commercialization and Packaging, and this created opportunity for women to venture into yam farming at a large scale. Through the WVL project, some women have been empowered with 500 heaps, while other lands belonging to them have been recovered. These widows can now feed their family as well as send their children to school.

To further assist their businesses these women started a savings and loans scheme where they save N200 naira every day to help them expand their business and solve immediate problems. With support from grants given to them through the WVL project and lands provided to them by the community head, ENIGA was able to build a cassava processing center where women can come, process, fry their garri and sell in the market. This center has also served as a means of generating income for women headed households or widows who have lost their husbands as a way to support them.

Kernel Oil Production

To ensure diversification of skills and need assessment to suit the community, some women of Nikiria community were trained on palm kernel production, knowledge on commercialization and packaging of kernel oil at any quantity of demand. EINGA who is the CBO in charge created an opportunity for women to venture into kernel oil in large scale. The project through funding from Global Affairs Canada empowered some of these women in Nikiria with basin of palm kernel each for processing.

With little or no fund to break this kernel, these women decided to form a group and make contributions to hire a machine that can process kernel in large quantity for lesser price to help save cost. Now women of Nikiria community are now palm kernel suppliers and have buyers within and from neighboring villages who come to purchase from them in large quantity as their oil are also used for medicine and cream for the body.

"By virtue of being a part of this group, I have been able to save some money through selling my palm kernel oil, most of us in this community, our husbands are dead, and this is a means for survival for us. My kernel oil is bought by all and sundry within the community and used for medicine by traditional medicine makers, this has in turn provided food for my family and given me a voice in family meetings. Thank you to the WVL project." Mary Ukpai

Ogkworogu Women Bee Farmers

In a related development, community women in Ogkworogu, Obudu Local Government Area of Cross River State, who lost their husbands or are bread winners of their families have been trained in Bee farming. With no knowledge on the use of honey box, honey wax, safety materials, or fund to go by these women wallowed in abject poverty with no help from nowhere. With support from LWROs and ActionAid, funds from GAC and help from the Community Based Organization, ENIGA these women were trained, and empowered with boxes, bee wax, protection gears/overall and fund to start up a bee farm and they are now the first women in Obudu LGA to venture into bee farming using honey box.

The farmers are now protected from Bee harm and are sure of were the bees gather to ensure a great harvest. This has increased productivity as most women and their families engage in honey farming for commercial purposes which is a great impact for the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria project. EINGA distributed safety materials to beneficiaries of Bee Farming to ensure their health and well-being during honey production.

"Thank God for bringing ActionAid, CCAPI and ENIGA for saving our lives, if not for this intervention, we would have been roaming the community begging for food, but now we can feed ourselves and our family and our children can now go to school. We thank the WVL project and Global Affairs Canada for the funds to make this possible. We appreciate them, now women in Ogkworogu community can speak and be heard, they can raise their head up high without fear. Una thank you ohhh" Theresa, A bee farmer.

"This bee farming has improved the livelihood of the women in our community, with the little money they get from sales they are able to take care of their children and support the community. Some of them belong to my cabinet council and they have been carried along in decision-making." HRH Oko Christopher Odang, Clan Head Ogkworogu community.

With the design of the WVL project and its paradigm shift in the streams of funding, it has given opportunities to Community Based Organization to reach the rural and excluded communities, especially women and girls.

Breaking the Habit of Silence Through Sensitization and Awareness

The Airport Road of FCT consists of several communities and estates. In this communities, cases of domestic violence and rape have been prevalent with little or no reportage. More so, the culture of silence has been an issue as many of these women and girls suffer alone in silence.

Peace Odo a 41-year-old hairdresser in Gbampe, Aco Estate in Airport Road, Abuja who has been married for six years, was suffering silently in the arms of domestic violence, confiscation, and dominance from her husband, with the fear of being labeled a divorcee, Peace kept quiet to this abuse to save her marriage. The continuous act of violence nearly cost Peace a right eye as her husband abused her one faithful day.

With the objective of the WVL project in mind, the Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigeria Society (CWEENS), FCT carried out several advocacies and sensitization visit to these communities' heads, churches, and school to create awareness on SGBV prevention and response, and this triggered a change of increased reportage amongst community members. With this knowledge in mind, Peace sister reported her case to CWEENS.

As a survivor who has suffered domestic violence, with an eye almost lost through physical abuse, Peace was sheltered for three months, she got quality medical care, psychosocial support, and therapy to help her heal from her injuries. After those months spent in the shelter, she recovered fully with her eye healed, emotions strengthened, dignity and hope restored. One month later, she was reintegrated back into the society and empowered with a skill in pastry making and selling. Now Peace is a proud baker with a skill that has helped her begin a new life.

Based on the WVL project's outcome 2: "Increase Women's access and control over economic resources" and the expression of the achievement of the organizational goals, CWEENS have been able respond to SGBV cases, and this survivor has now become a change agent and ambassador of CWEENS sensitizing other women to speak up against Gender Based Violence and report any form of violence.

"I thank God I met CWEENS. I have found hope, love, success and help, my life is restored, and I am grateful" Peace Odo

While women like Peace have spoken out against the culture of silence, abuse in Nigeria remains rampant and justice remains elusive, a growing number of women in Nigeria are using social media to share experiences of their traumatic sexual assault and abuse, this is a plus in the fight against SGBV.

The World We Envisioned - Fomwan

The deplorable state of women living in Dass, Tafawa Balewa and Ningi, Local Government Area of Bauchi state was nothing to write home about, as they were vulnerable, handicap, and have no business and entrepreneurship skills, basic literacy, or numeracy skills to get by life. Their children and their siblings could not be enrolled to schools, they were not involved in family decisions making or given a chance to speak or air their views.

The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria is a partner on the Women's Voice and Leadership Nigeria Project seated in the Northern part of Nigeria, with little or no direct means of resources for women, widows, or female headed household, due to customs and religion, a means to guide women with no voice to speak or be heard and who solely depends on their husband to survive or feed. FOMWAN when chosen as a partner for the project was only focused on SGBV with no interest in economic empowerment activities, although it envisioned a world where women are totally empowered.

In 2020, the WVL project funded by Global Affairs Canada was introduced to the communities in the state through FOMWAN. Trainings for women on economic empowerment activities such as packaging and re-branding started, and a Village Savings, and Loans (VSLA) scheme group was developed from this training. This group which was formed to help support women raise funds to establish a business or grow an existing one, gradually became the talk of the town as these women raised a capital of N17 million, till date with just N3 million left to qualify them from opening a microfinance bank. These women are making efforts to open a microfinance bank in the State, and advocacies are conducted to all possible stakeholders to push for this process.

Through the Village savings and Loan scheme, 325 women have been trained on entrepreneurship, basic literacy and numeracy skills, 400 women sat for the basic literacy exams with 80% pass while others indicated interest to

go back to school, 1,325 are business oriented and have ventured into the production of rice and other produce, with profits running into millions, these women have been able to send their children back to school, support their family and contribute to decision making.

"Before the interventions I have no business skills, no single Kobo of my own, on the start of the program I have no 200 naira to start off, I had to borrow from a relative to qualify me to access loan from the group savings to start a business. Alhamdulillah, now I have a capital and a profit all amounting to 72,600,90 naira. I thank the WVL project and FOMWAN na gode." Bilkisu Adam

Because of these changes brought about by the women folk, who before were vulnerable, handicap, and of no value, these LGAs and communities are now recognized in the state and was selected to host the rural women celebrations last year. The WVL-N project through funding from Global Affairs Canada is set to advance women's right and encourage women to speak up for their right.

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