

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND LIVELIHOOD FOR RURAL WOMEN THROUGH THE ACTIVATION OF WOMEN DEVELOPMENT CENTRES PROJECT

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Notwithstanding a variety of economic interventions designed to promote women's economic inclusion, the face of poverty in Nigeria is still unfortunately, very female. Women and girls still face legal, social, cultural and economic challenges across Nigeria. They still face and contend with stiff barriers and are often locked out of economic opportunities which should empower them on the one hand and help build vibrant communities on the other. Social perceptions, stereotypes and biases limit women's ability to reach the very top of the corporate ladder, while economic constraints prevent them from gaining access to adequate financing of their businesses, thereby curtailing their potentials and economic prowess.

Women's empowerment is crucial to mitigating poverty at the rural areas as women play an essential role in the welfare of their households and the development of their communities. Women Development Centres (WDCs) were established in all the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s for the purpose of empowering grass-roots women through strategic and vocational trainings, health, hygiene and sanitation, and basic literacy education. Acknowledging the diversity of culture, life style of Nigerian Women in the States and Local Government Areas, the Women Development Centres aimed to increase women's ability to recognize and respond to their yearnings and aspirations to be free from, neglect and exploitation. A survey conducted by the National Centre for Women Development revealed that only few Women Development Centres (WDCs) were functioning while the rest were moribund or ill equipped to achieve the purpose for which they were established.

Against this background, the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) embarked on a project to activate Women Development Centre (WDCs) in Nigeria. The project is aimed at poverty reduction at household level, since women at the rural areas perceive poverty more in household where they spend most of their times. Poverty is addressed in five aspects: economic poverty; physical weakness; isolation; vulnerability and powerlessness. The project is regarded as a veritable tool for the empowerment of rural women.

Objectives of the "NCWD WDC Activation Project" Project includes:

1. To improve the quality of services offered at the WDCs.
2. To ensure that WDCs are recognised and accepted as places of learning by the LGAs and communities where they are situated.
3. To strengthen the management of WDCs for effective service delivery.

To establish linkages with other agencies

The project also address some of the devastating effects of the insurgency on the livelihoods of displaced poor rural women, that left them economically stranded and excluded. It addition it provides a platform for Rural Women to be involved in development that concerns them and dialogue on how to improve on the implementation mechanisms in the design of new initiatives through Needs Assessment and Participatory Rural Appraisal carried in implementing the project. As it provides an environment for the exchange of knowledge and practice skills on managing WDCs models and help to enhance Nigeria's social investment driven poverty reduction strategy.

The National Centre for Women Development continues to be a trailblazer in reaching the grassroots through its Activation of Women Development Centres Project. The project which is focused on poverty reduction at the household level, as grassroots women experience poverty in the household where they spend most of their time. To actualize this mandate, the Centre has in the past few years in collaboration with other development agencies implemented the activation of Women Development Centres (WDCs) in order to improve women's livelihood at some selected states of the federation. Considering the numerous benefits of the project to women at the grassroots level, the project was implemented in phases in some selected states of the federation.

The WDCs reactivation project will enable the WDCs in the state to have the following:

- i. Improve the management of the WDCs through report writing/feedback mechanism, filing and record keeping, Development of effective management tools.
- ii. Enhance the quality of the services rendered by the WDCs through: Improving the WDC curriculum and Development of the capacities of WDC Instructors
- iii. Increase the positive recognition of the WDCs by the host communities through relevant sensitization/advocacy programmes

From 2017 to date the project was expanded to 25 states cutting across the six geopolitical zones of the Federation 75 Local Government Areas and 75 Women Development Centres (3 Women Development Centres in each senatorial district of the 25 states). During the period under review a total of 6,912 women benefited from the skills enhancement carried out in the 25 states. Below table is the list of states and Local Governments Covered.

SN	STATE	Local Government Areas
1	Abia	Isialangwa North, Ukwa East, Ohafia
2	Akwa Ibom	Uruan, Ika, Eket
3	Ebonyi	Ikwo, Ohaozara, Ebonyi
4	Bayelsa	Ekeremor, Ogbia, Yenogoa
5	Ekiti	Efon-Alaaye, Irepodun/Ifelodun, Emure
6	Enugu	Nkanu west, Igbo etiti, Enugu South
7	Gombe	Akko, Billiri, Gombe
8	Imo	Owerri North, Ideato South, Ehime Mbano
9	Jigawa	Dutse, Mallam Madori, Ringim
10	Katsina	Katsina, Mashi, Bakori
11	Kebbi	Gwandu, Suru, Yauri
12	Kogi	Idah, Okene, Lokoja
13	Kwara	Moro, Irepodun, Ilorin East
14	Ondo	Owo, Ojigbo, Akure
15	Sokoto	Sokoto North, Bodinga, Wurno
16	Yobe	Badde, Potiskum, Damaturu
17	Zamfare	Bungudu, Gummi, Shinkafi
18	Oshun	Ede North, Ilesha East, Oshogbo South
19	Taraba	Jalingo, Gassol, Wukari
20	Delta	Warri North, Ndokwa West, Sapele
21	Ogun	Ijebu –ode, Yewa South, Odeda
22	Plateau	Jos North, Pankshin, Shendam
23	Adamawa	Yola South, Hong, Mayo belwa
24	Edo	Akoko-Edo, Esan South, Ikpoba-Okha
25	Benue	Oturkpo, Logo, Guma

The Activities carried under the WDC Project includes:

- (i) Stakeholders Engagement/Consultation**
- (ii) Needs Assessment/Participatory Rural Appraisal/Baseline Survey of the WDC**

- (iii) Management Training**
- (iv) Skill-up Training**
- (v) Advocacy Visits**
- (vi) Handover of Equipment to beneficiary LGAs/WDCs**

(i) Stakeholders Engagement/Consultation

The Stake holders meeting is one of the most important activity of the Activation of NCWD/WDC Project as it brings together stakeholders from the WDCs, the Ministries of Women Affairs, Local Government, Religious leaders/rulers, Heads of the LGAs, Youth Leaders, Women Leaders. They are briefed on the project and consultations are made on the visits to the WDCs.

(ii) Needs Assessment/Participatory Rural Appraisal/Baseline Survey of the WDC

The Baseline Survey is usually conducted in the target three LGAs of each state to ascertain the level of intervention that will be required of the NCWD WDC Activation Project. The purpose of conducting the Survey is to extract possible and necessary areas of intervention, thereby ensuring that the WDCs are places where women can realize the skills acquisition and/or development for productivity socially, economically and politically. To achieve this, basic information that will guide the activation of selected WDCs are gathered. The Survey gathers information on the following areas:

- (i)** Current situations of WDCs; current situations of WDC in the three LGAs includes activities being carried out at the WDCs, the number of students being trained and graduates, involvement and capacity of HoC and instructors, facilities and equipment, challenges, etc.;
- (ii)** Organizational capacities of the key stakeholders (SMWA, SMLG, LGs); organizational capacities of the key stakeholders includes basic organizational information, strategies and policies for women's empowerment, technical supports given to WDCs, financial inputs given to WDCs, activities carried out for women's empowerment, relationship among relevant organizations, etc.;

the area (iii) situations of women in communities and socio-gender perspectives of the community people of the LGAs includes development needs of women, local perception of WDCs, expectation toward WDCs, etc.

The steps used in the Survey are guided by the “Guideline and Strategic Implementation Framework Plan for the Activation of Women Development Centres (WDCs) in Nigeria,” a publication on the strategies and steps to activate the WDCs drawn from the activities and outcomes of the Phase 1 of the Project.

The method used for the Survey is designed to obtain the information mentioned in 1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Survey.

The Survey comprises two types of survey:

- (1) WDC Survey, and
- (2) LGA/Community Survey.

The main method of the WDC Survey is individual interviews guided by questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions, with the intention to collect information on the current situation of the WDCs and the organizational capacities of the stakeholders.

The interviews were conducted for the following stakeholder:

- SMWA: Director of Women Affairs Department;
- LGC: Chairman, Head of Department of Community Development (supposedly the Department to which WDO belongs), WDO, HoC.
- Selected Community Leaders and Stakeholders
- WDC Management Staff, Instructors, Participants and graduates (where these exist).

While Focus Group Discussions held for Community Stakeholders was mainly used in the LGA Survey with the participation of Women and men in order to gather information on situations of women in the communities and to understand their perspectives on women's situation in the communities and their perception toward WDCs.

(iii)Management Training

Management Training is the third activity in the Reactivation of WDCs, the essence of the management training is to improve the management of the WDCs through report writing/feedback

mechanism, filing and record keeping and Development of effective management tools.

(iv) **Skill-up Training**

The training is geared towards building the capacity of the Instructors for them to pass on the skills acquired to the grass root women. They are trained on new trends and also it serves as a refresher course.

(v) Advocacy

Advocacy visits are a critical part of the NCWD WDC Project to seek the support of the authorities in the States and Local Government Areas for the support of Women's Projects and the WDC. The advocacy visits are usually led by the Director General, National Centre for Women Development, to ensure that Women Development Centres are supported and their voice heard on issues that are **important** to them. Also during the visits issues of Protection and Promotion of Women rights are also advocated for.

(vi) **Handover of Equipment to beneficiary LGAs/WDCs**

The NCWD WDC Activation Project also support the reactivated selected WDCs with equipment and material supplies to help make the WDCs more function are the trainings have been conducted.

The overall important of the WDCs to the grassroots women cannot be over emphasized as it takes development and economic empowerment closer home.