CASE STUDY 2:
EMPOWERING WOMEN TO UPHOLD THEIR SOCIO POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS
SDN
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INTRODUCTION

Building on the evaluation of SDN’s holistic and sustainable solutions to the problems of the Niger Delta, we conducted a comprehensive assessment of the complexity of female disempowerment in Nigeria. This enabled us to develop a defined process for the empowerment of women embedded in five phased theory of change. We conducted four year interventions from 2000, across three communities in the Delta. Stemming from our field research in Bodo, Ogbia, Otuaasega, we were able to facilitate the transformation of women in these communities as agents of change. This enabled for women to work together to challenge traditional power dynamics and subvert the confines of patriarchal culture. The remarkable transformation of the women who were engaged by our intervention validates SDN’s Community Empowerment Model, as an effective process for advancing the protection of women’s rights in Nigeria.

IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATION: Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN)

LOCATION: Bodo, Ogbia, Otuaasega, Rivers and Bayelsa States, Niger Delta, Nigeria

FUNDER: Cordaid

DURATION: 2010-2014
ASPECTS OF WOMEN’S DISEMPowerMENT

LACK OF EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Research has confirmed low levels or total lack of formal education among women in target communities, with the majority found to be illiterate or semi-literate. This is a combined result of limited educational opportunities and cultural marginalisation resulting from patriarchal culture. This confers them lower social status and represents a technical as well as social barrier to participation in decision-making at the household and community level.

IF I DID NOT GO TO SCHOOL, HOW CAN I HAVE MOUTH IN COMMUNITY MATTERS; IF I DON’T HAVE MONEY, WHO AM I TO TALK TO?

Woman in one of the communities

Lack of education renders women economically vulnerable. The school drop out rate for girls is often high as they are forced into early marriage and pregnancy. Illiteracy among women has also been identified as a factor that contributes to poor coordination and collaboration of women groups.

WOMEN RIGHTS AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Apart from lack of education, another factor identified in our research that is preventing more women from capitalizing on their potential is a general lack of awareness and understanding of women’s rights and their application, both among men and women. Women themselves lack the confidence and support necessary to challenge the patriarchal culture. Meanwhile, the majority of men in the communities believed that the role of women in society should be confined to domestic activities, and did not expect that women should assume leadership positions in community decision-making. Decision making at the community level is still very much viewed as a man’s responsibility and ‘men’s business’, and women continue to be excluded from civic and religious forums where decisions are made.

Bodo City, like many other communities in Nigeria, is patriarchal. Women are largely marginalized within the family and in the community at large. Decision-making is the exclusive domain of the man of the house or the community leaders. It is only in recent times that a woman representative has been consulted occasionally or included in the decision making process by community leaders.

WOMEN OPINIONS ARE NOT RESPECTED IN THIS COMMUNITY. MORE ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE NOT INFLUENTIAL OR WEALTHY...WITHOUT THIS YOU DON’T HAVE RIGHT IN THE COMMUNITY.

Naduna, Bodo community

According to our survey, only 4% of respondents in Bodo believed women’s views are considered important in family decision-making. Even worse, none of the respondents (0%) posited that women’s views are considered important in community decision-making. Women frequently complained that they have no voice in community matters, despite their perception that they are more industrious in the community than men.
ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT AND MATERIAL POVERTY

Women are frequently assuming the roles of breadwinner for their families. Lack of education and livelihood skills, as well as poor access to micro-credit facilities and discriminatory traditional practices make them more economically vulnerable. Early marriage and pregnancy can further reduce the economic independence of women and increase their vulnerability.

Women observed that poverty, lack of income-generating opportunities, overwhelming domestic workload, and lack of time are significant factors that undermine their confidence, position in the family, and participation in community decision-making. Women’s economic insecurity also increases and reinforces their vulnerability to various forms of abuse of their rights, such as early marriage or gender-based violence.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT – IMPACT ON WOMEN

Women can be particularly vulnerable to gender based violence and violence perpetrated by state and non-state armed groups. Their vulnerability is increased by a deeply rooted patriarchy, a culture of impunity, weak security and justice institutions, low literacy, and poverty. They are also the group that is most affected by the conflict.

Gender disempowerment impacts women and their families. Unequal participation in political and economic spheres prevents them from achieving their full potential, from being fully involved in decision-making processes and from acting as powerful agents of change at all levels of society. Patriarchal culture in the Niger Delta produces and reproduces the obstacles women encounter in political and economic life. Where gender is not taken into account, budgetary allocations fail to acknowledge women’s needs and fail to distribute resources evenly.
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

SDN believes that women that are knowledgeable, confident, cohesive, inclusive and organized can become agents of change and are able to participate in decision making to uphold their basic social, political, economic and environmental rights. Empowerment, understood as a process, is a systematic approach of building women’s individual and collective assets in order to leverage equal status in society. Our theory of change identifies five stages of empowerment, towards women’s inclusion in public life: capacity and knowledge; confidence and attitude; cohesion and inclusiveness; women’s cooperation and organization; and, women’s political participation and influence in the community. In our understanding, the outcome of women’s empowerment at the individual level is the ability of women to achieve their personal goals, such as ability to improve income and well-being, provide education for themselves and their children, and have more voice in family and community decision-making. The outcome of collectively empowering women will be their ability to ensure that their strategic needs are met through challenging the relations of power using rights based approaches.

The empowerment process has the potential to change the patriarchal culture which reigns in the Delta, by enabling women the agency to govern their own lives with an awareness of their entitlements. Such power cannot be given or bestowed, but it has to be self-generated. This process starts when women acquire self-respect, confidence and realize their inner strength (‘power from within’ or ‘conscientisation’). The next stage is realizing the strength that comes from associating together and networking (‘power with’) in order to acquire the power to act and realise women’s individual and collective goals (‘power to’).

Following their individual ‘awakening’ women can build their capabilities and existing assets to create opportunities, which in turn gives them an increased control over their destiny. With greater potential for self-reliance, women challenge the confines of their lower social status.

Our research and analysis of personal stories of selected community members demonstrate that the non-material capabilities and assets, such as self-confidence, creativity, imagination and determination, play the most important role in overcoming barriers and creating opportunities. This proves what psychologists have long said: external resources are necessary for empowerment but not sufficient.
CASE STUDY 2: EMPOWERING WOMEN TO UPHOLD THEIR SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Women are a particularly disadvantaged group in Niger Delta society. Numerous obstacles at the social, political and economic levels combine and mutually reinforce to perpetuate women’s discrimination and render them extremely vulnerable to abuses of their rights. The majority of women, particularly in rural areas, are illiterate or semi-literate. This affects their self-esteem, confers them lower social status and renders them economically vulnerable. Women are unaware of their rights, marginalised in family and community decision-making and lack confidence to challenge the patriarchal culture. These factors render them extremely vulnerable to violations of their rights and gender-based violence.

HOW TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO UPHOLD THEIR RIGHTS AND BECOME COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDERS?

1. CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE
   Impart women livelihood and entrepreneurship skills, teach them advocacy, negotiation and conflict resolution techniques.

   WOMEN WILL BECOME MORE SELF-RELIANT, CAPABLE TO ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS AND TO PARTICIPATE IN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING

2. CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE
   Sensitise women and men on women’s rights; build the life skills of women; support women to improve their economic and social position in the community.

   MEN WILL HAVE RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, WHILE WOMEN WILL BECOME CONFIDENT AND DETERMINED TO STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES AND UPHOLD THEIR RIGHTS

3. COMMUNITY INCLUSIVENESS AND COHESION
   Support women’s participation in community decision-making processes and community needs prioritization. Encourage women to use their peacebuilding skills to encourage peaceful resolution of conflict in the community.

   THE NEEDS AND OPINIONS OF WOMEN WILL MATTER IN COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING, WHilst ULTIMATELY IMPROVING THEIR STATUS WITHIN THESE STRUCTURES.
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HOW TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO UPHOLD THEIR RIGHTS AND BECOME COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDERS?

4. **COMMUNITY COOPERATION AND ORGANISATION**

Promote women’s cooperatives and self-help initiatives. Support women networking and experience sharing.

**COLLABORATION WITH, AND LEARNING AND SUPPORT FROM OTHER WOMEN WILL AMPLIFY WOMEN’S POWER**

5. **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE**

Facilitate women’s participation in advocacy and campaigning; encourage and support female representatives in community and local government decision-making structures.

**SELF-CONFIDENCE, ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT AMONGST WOMEN WILL TRANSLATE INTO POWER TO CHALLENGE ALL OBSTACLES AND IMPROVE THEIR LIVES**

Empowered women will have the skills, confidence and resources to address all obstacles and barriers that they face in the socio-cultural, economic and political sphere at all levels – from the domestic and community level, through to local and state levels. They will become agents of change to improve the well-being of themselves and their families, advance the agenda of women’s rights, whilst realising their own potential.
THE IMPACT OF EMPOWERING WOMEN

In our research, powerful stories of female empowerment stand out among other stories. This highlights the importance of the empowerment of women that should be central to the development agenda. Amartya Sen argues that a limited role of women's active agency seriously affects the lives of all people, men as well as women, children as well as adults. World Bank states that and gender equality is a core development objective in its own right and it can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative.

Women understand the needs of their children, families and communities, and the needs of others are often more important than their own. Their empowerment therefore has direct beneficial effects on community development. The women of the Niger Delta play unique roles as caretakers of their families. Recognising their role in community development, NIDPRODEV made them main beneficiaries of their ONLAG alternative livelihoods project.

Examples from Uzere community where the ONLAG project was implemented, as well as from other communities, demonstrate how women are able to gradually build their power and translate economic empowerment and education into power in the socio-political domain: at the family, community and local government levels. The earning power, economic role outside the family, literacy and education of women is interconnected. These factors have a positive contribution to adding force to women's voice and agency through increased independence and empowerment.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND ENHANCED POSITION IN THE FAMILY

Most female beneficiaries identified increased levels of confidence and self-esteem as one of the most important outcomes of various projects in which they participated. This was the result of the education received and skills acquired during trainings, as well as major exposure. This led to their enhanced status in the family:

**Miss Sarah Alter, Otuasega**

**THE TRAINING GAVE ME THAT BOLDNESS, THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF HUNDRED MEN AND ME THE ONLY FEMALE, I AM NOT AFRAID TO SAY ANYTHING, I CAN MAKE A GREAT DIFFERENCE.**

**Charity, Bodo**

**I CAN MAKE DECISIONS IN MY FAMILY TOO, FOR INSTANCE IF MY HUSBAND WANTS TO DO SOMETHING HE WILL CONSULT ME FOR MY OPINION. I CAN TELL HIM NOT TO DO IT IN SOME WAYS AND WE WILL DISCUSS THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE HIS AIM. THE TRAINING HELPS ME TO ADVISE MY HUSBAND ON THE BEST OPTION TO TAKE IN FINANCIAL DECISIONS. IF HE HAS SOME MONEY KEPT FOR A PURPOSE WE WILL DISCUSS THE AVAILABLE OPTIONS SO THAT WITH MY KNOWLEDGE IN BOOKKEEPING I CAN CONFIDENTLY TELL HIM TO DO IT IN A WAY THAT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO OUR FAMILY.**

**Faith Ekpere, Uzere**

**I’M THE ONLY FEMALE IN MY FAMILY BUT NOW THEY CANNOT TAKE A DECISION WITHOUT MY CONSENT, I MUST BE THERE; EVEN IF I AM AWAY IT’S EITHER THEY WAIT OR CALL ME TO SEEK MY OPINION ON ANY DECISION THEY WANT TO TAKE IN THE FAMILY. BEFORE, MY DADDY USED TO TELL ME: “AFTER ALL YOU ARE A GIRL” (...) NOW MY DADDY VALUES ME MORE THAN HIS MALE CHILDREN BECAUSE I’M DOING BETTER THAN THEM AND HE SEES ME AS SOMEBODY WHO IS MORE BRILLIANT THAN THE MALE CHILDREN...**

**Miss Sarah Alter, Otuasega**
Applying new skills to earn an independent income, increase social standing and change lives. For some women their lives changed completely and irreversibly. They learned new skills, which translated into more income, higher authority and respect:

**THIS HAS EXPOSED ME AND HAS IMPROVED MY CAPACITY TO RELATE. IT HAS ALSO AVAILED ME THE OPPORTUNITY OF GOING TO EVERY RULING HOUSE HERE IN UZERE. SOMETIMES DECISIONS ARE NOT TAKEN UNTIL THEY SEND FOR ME TO IMPART MY KNOWLEDGE.**

_Helen Ogeh, Uzere_

iland an independent income also had a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of women in the household and the society. Their contribution to the prosperity of the family became more visible; women also have more voice by being less dependent on others.

_In my home, sometime last month my husband approached me to loan him some money. At least before I release the money for that project, I must know what and how he intends to spend that money. I will make sure I monitor him on how he spends the money. If the money is not mine, I would not be bold enough to ask him questions._

_**Faith Ekpere, Uzere**_

_I can do things for myself and if my husband is not around I can take money from my purse and get the thing done. I have been able to assist my home by providing household items and food._

_Miss Oghenkaro, Uzere_
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INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING AND BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Women's power in the family has been replicated at the community level and reinforced by the training and sensitization of men. Women are now part of leadership structures in Uzere and Otuasega:

THEN EVEN WE TOO, THE FEMALE YOUTH WE ALSO HAVE A GROUP LIKE THAT WHICH AM THE SECRETARY AND AS YOU CAN SEE, AFTER THE WHOLE THING, EVEN THE COMMUNITY GOT TO REALISE THAT THESE WOMEN ARE NOW SERIOUS AND THEY ARE NOW ENLIGHTENED AND AS IT IS NOW, THEY ARE NOW BRINGING WOMEN INTO THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

Miss Sarah Alter, Otuasega

WHEN IT COMES TO COMMUNITY ISSUES, THIS PROGRAMME HAS REALLY DONE A LOT. IN SOME OF UZERE RULING BODIES, THEY SAY WOMEN ARE NOT ALLOWED AND CANNOT BE INCLUDED. BUT WHEN WE WENT FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING, WE WERE TAUGHT THAT WOMEN AND MEN ARE ALL EQUAL. WE APPLIED THAT KNOWLEDGE HERE AND WENT TO THE WOMEN LEADER. WE SENSITISED THE WOMEN TO ORGANISE THEMSELVES AND WE GOT WOMEN INCLUDED IN THE CDC IN UZERE. SO IN EVERY RULING HOUSE IN UZERE, WE HAVE AT LEAST TWO WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP POSITION. THESE REPRESENTATIVES COME BACK TO THE COMMUNITY WOMEN TO INFORM THEM OF ANY DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEADERSHIP AGREEMENT. THE DECISION IS COLLECTIVELY AGREED UPON AND SENT BACK TO THE LEADERSHIP. I THINK THE LEADERS NOW SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN INCLUSION IN POWER.

Helen Ogeh, Uzere

When women are empowered and participate in decision-making processes, the whole community can benefit, as women tend to understand better urgent community needs and are well placed to come up with solutions that benefit the majority:

IT IS NOT ONLY THE WOMEN THAT HAVE REALLY BENEFITED FROM IT, BUT IT HAS ALSO CHANGED THE PATTERN OF LEADERSHIP IN OUR COMMUNITY. THEY NO LONGER SIT ALONE AND TAKE DECISIONS ON THEIR OWN, THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS THEY CALL THE COMMUNITY AND EVERYBODY CONTRIBUTES IDEAS. THEN WHEN IT COMES TO DEVELOPMENT, CHOICE OF WHAT WE REALLY WANT, THEY CALL WOMEN. I WAS THERE IN ONE OR TWO OF THEIR MEETINGS AND I ALSO CONTRIBUTED... WHEN THEY WERE DISCUSSING ON HOW TO BUILD UP THE MARKET, THE ELECTRIFICATION AND THEN THE WATER. I ALSO CONTRIBUTED SAYING THAT I THINK WATER AND THE ELECTRIFICATION ARE MORE IMPORTANT, BECAUSE EVERYBODY WILL BENEFIT FROM THOSE TWO.

Miss Sarah Alter, Otuasega

For women, employment outside the home had useful ‘educational' effects in terms of exposure to the world outside the household, making their agency more effective. Similarly, women’s education strengthens women's agency and also tends to make it more informed and skilled:

MOST OF THESE GIRLS HAVE BEEN ENLIGHTENED; THEY TAUGHT US HOW WE CAN PREVENT EARLY MARRIAGE, TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND SO MANY OTHER THINGS AND THESE GIRLS ARE NOW COMING UP. INITIALLY, GIRLS DO NOT REALLY TAKE EDUCATION AS A WOMAN THING AND ALL THESE TRAININGS WE HAVE GOT HAVE OPENED THE EYES OF MANY OF THEM TO START THINKING ON HOW THEY CAN GET EDUCATED, GO TO SCHOOL. THOSE WHO ARE SCHOOL DROP OUTS HAVE STARTED GOING NOW, AND YOU CAN SEE THAT THE LEVEL OF REASONING OF THE PEOPLE IN MY COMMUNITY HAVE CHANGED.

Miss Sarah Alter, Otuasega
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Helen Ogeh, Uzere
CONCLUSION

Our intervention in these pilot communities highlight the abilities of women to harness their awareness of their rights, to leverage increased power and economic status. The advancement of these women and their respective communities verifies the efficacy of the Community Empowerment approach; highlighting how psychological awakening facilitates the accumulation of greater physical assets and increased socio-political status.