

2011 – 2013 ACTIVITY REPORT OF GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISK REDUCTION INITIATIVE (GERI)



Moto: Building Resilience for Sustainable Development

Benue Office: No. 2, Suites 9 & 10, Ugbokolo Street, High Level, Makurdi,
Benue State, Nigeria,

Abuja Contact Office: Suites D1 & D2, Third Floor, Awmar Plaza, By Gudu
Market Junction, Apo, Abuja

Nasarawa Contact Office: No. 3, First Floor, Danma 'Aje Shopping Complex,
Beside Access Bank, Jos Road, Lafia, Nasarawa State.

Phone Contacts: 0803 613 7411, 0818 454 9900, 0706 839 7658

E-mail: geri_initiative@hotmail.com , info@gerinitiative.org

Website: www.gerinitiative.org www.facebook.com/GERI

Twitter: @GERIinitiative

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ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative, GERI was founded in 2009 and is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) of Nigeria as a non-political, non-profit making and non-governmental organization. The importance of environment to the development of individuals, communities and nations is enormous. It provides the resource for physical, economic and social development with attendant gender dimensions. Increasing evidence reveals that there is a strong linkage between the natural environment and livelihoods of people especially the poor men and women and other vulnerable groups. In the recent past decades, man has been faced with a rapidly deteriorating environment that daily draws a very disturbing attention. The world today is faced by global warming and climate change, flooding, deforestation, land misuse leading to gully erosion, solid waste disposal problems, excessive gaming, marine and atmospheric pollution. Currently, this issue of global environmental change has drawn more attention than in the past. Informed by the depth of environmental problems and deplorable livelihood conditions of men and women, GERI is set out to help build resilience and facilitate the reduction of risk resulting from environmental change and associated problems on livelihoods of especially women, youths and children in Nigeria and Africa.

GOAL

To build resilience and facilitate the reduction of risk resulting from environmental change and associated problems on livelihood of especially women, youths and children in Nigeria and Africa.

VISION

A future for Nigeria and Africans in which men and women's ability to adapt to a changing environment is enhanced.

MISSION

To promote the core values and tenets of environmental sustainability and a healthy relationship between gender, environment and sustainable environment.

VALUES

- Transparency and accountability
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Gender equity
- Volunteerism
- Justice and fairness

STRATEGIES

- Partnership
- Networking
- Capacity building
- Resource mobilization
- Advocacy
- Mentoring
- Research, documentation and publications
- Gender mainstreaming

- Collaborations

THEMATIC GROUPS

- Environment and WASH
- Peace building and conflict resolution
- Women and youth empowerment
- Family and reproductive health
- Agriculture business
- Gender issues
- Governance

PREFACE

In the years under review, the organization adopted a holistic and integrated approach in the implementation of its activities. This was due to the strong recognition that there was increasing scarcity of resources and that issues of development are intricately interwoven. Hence, gender and HIV/AIDs among other issues were mainstreamed in a bid to achieve maximum impact of activities among beneficiaries with the minimal available resources. GERI also thrived for 50% gender representation on all its projects. Strict fiscal discipline was also observed in the implementation of its activities, striving to comply with financial best practices. The organization is looking to improve on its operations to meet international standards.

GERI considers its staff as the hub of its operations. To this end, the organization steadily increased its workforce by the year. For instance, from having 3 members of staff in 2011 made up of (2 males 1 female) the number and composition increased to 5(3 males 2 females) in 2012 and further to 7, that is, (4 males and 3 females) in 2013. Its volunteer force also witnessed a more than geometric progression from 5 in 2011 to 14 in 2012 and to an appreciable 39 in 2013. Having a large workforce without the capacity to effectively execute projects is tantamount to not having any. Fully aware of this fact, GERI built the capacity of its workforce by sponsoring its staff to trainings and sensitization workshops.

Since commencing operations, the organization has implemented projects worth over 25million naira. GERI's accountability in the use of project funds has earned her more trust from funders and the government. Unfortunately, most of these projects have no finances allocated to monitoring and evaluation of projects. Notwithstanding this major flaw of non-inclusion of a budget for M&E in some of the projects, GERI recognizes the critical role of the M&E component in the project circle as such mobilized resources to fill the gap.

As GERI looks forward to impacting more lives in 2014, it expresses its openness to collaboration and hopes all prospective development partners will find her a veritable collaborator to gain more experience and improve on the lives of the many vulnerable persons in Benue State and Nigeria and by extension, Africa and the world over.

Elizabeth Jeiyol

Executive Director

ACTIVITIES FOR THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW

1. COLLABORATING TO ADDRESS UNEMPLOYMENT BY PROVIDING CLEAN, EFFICIENT AND AFFORDABLE SOLAR ENERGY SERVICES TO POOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

The cries of some rural dwellers who lack access to clean, sustainable and safe energy options in Nigeria and Benue State will soon be a thing of the past. Unemployed persons in



During the product acceptability assessment

these rural settings will soon gain meaningful and sustained self employment and within a short while, become employers of labour. This good news comes on the heels of GERI's work with a multinational oil company, Total E&P to provide clean and affordable energy services to rural communities and employment for the youth, women and men in these communities in the process. The intervention was birthed in recognition of the peculiar inability of rural poor dwellers to take charge of

their lives and rise out of poverty due to their low economic status. The project thus aimed at empowering these persons to take charge of their lives and rise out of poverty.

To this end, GERI, in collaboration with Fresh Impact assessed the acceptability of the proposed solar energy products among 10 off the electricity grid rural communities in Makurdi (Seven communities), Otukpo, Okpokwu and Ogbadibo (one community each) Local Government areas of Benue State. Findings from the assessment which was conducted in the first quarter of 2013 revealed an almost 100% acceptance of the intervention by the communities.

Arising from the overwhelming acceptance, GERI then facilitated the identification of prospective

beneficiaries who were unemployed persons for empowerment. The identification was with the active engagement of the community to foster ownership of the programme. As such, communities were asked to nominate prospective beneficiaries based on set criteria which they did. At the end, a total of 20 unemployed persons (particularly youths and women)



GERI staff and Total E&P Consultants at the product acceptability assessment report presentation

were selected after a screening conducted in Otukpo and Makurdi respectively by a team comprising of Total E&P, Total Plc and IECD (a French consulting firm) staff with GERI's facilitation.

GERI facilitated the identification and renting of 20 shops in 6 local Governments of Makurdi, Guma, Gwer, Otukpo, Okpokwu and Ogbadibo which will house the businesses of



GERI, Total E&P, IECD staff and selected prospective entrepreneurs at the training on basic business management at the Doo Palace Hotel, Makurdi, August 2013.

the selected persons for a period of one year. The selected persons who were later trained and given more start-up capital to start business hence, become entrepreneurs were actively engaged in the shop identification process. The would-be entrepreneurs were at liberty to identify shops in any strategic location in any local government of their choice (this could be away from their LGAs of origin or residence) which conformed with Total's criteria that the place should have heavy human and/or vehicular traffic so as to enhance the visibility of the

business.

Later in August 2013, GERI facilitated the training of the selected prospective entrepreneurs in Basic Business Management. The three day training took the would-be entrepreneurs through the rudiments of business management in a bid to prepare them to sustainably manage the business which will be set up for them later in the year. GERI also



GERI facilitated this refresher training for entrepreneurs in December, 2013 at Doo Palace Hotel, Makurdi



Total Staff at the refresher training

facilitated refresher training for the entrepreneurs which was later held in December, 2013 prior to the inauguration of the programme.



GERI facilitated the inauguration of the scheme shown here where a trained entrepreneur receives a branded roll up banner as part of her sales promotional materials

Specifically, the would-be entrepreneurs commenced business in November, 2013, when GERI facilitated the disbursement of solar lamps to about 50% of the would-be entrepreneurs. They thus, became proper entrepreneurs. The lamps were fully paid for by Total E&P. The expectation is that the entrepreneurs will be economically empowered as they sell the clean, safe and affordable solar lamps in their rural communities thus, achieve the two fold objective of providing clean energy services to rural dwellers and empowering unemployed persons in the communities in the process. It is also expected that at the expiration of one year of business operations, the entrepreneurs should have made enough profits to offset the investment made on their various businesses, sustain business operations and possibly employ labour as a way of further reducing the number of unemployed persons within their communities. The success of the project will inform its upscale to other LGAs in the State.

To ensure the success of the pilot project, GERI was hired as consultant to mentor, monitor and report to Total on the performance of the entrepreneurs on a monthly basis with a view to addressing adverse reports. The monitoring agreement was for a period of six months beginning from the day of the inauguration of the project/scheme.



One of the 20 shops rented for entrepreneurs is commissioned by Total E&P at the Makurdi Modern Market

The scheme, tagged The “Awango Entrepreneurship Programme” or Solar TATS Projects was inaugurated on the 6th of December, 2013 in Makurdi. In attendance were the management of Total E&P, Total Plc, government agencies, corporate organizations, Civil Society Organizations, market women and men among others. Total E&P expressed its commitment to reducing poverty among rural dwellers adopting an integrated approach hence, the programme. Promising that the programme



GERI staff assists an entrepreneur to sell solar lamps

will be up-scaled subject to the success of the pilot phase. It is worthy of note that beyond its monitoring contractual terms, GERI has assisted the entrepreneurs in the advertisement and actual sale of lamps, in restocking and drawing up of marketing plans among many others. All these are anchored to GERI’s commitment to going the extra mile in supporting initiatives that foster sustainable



Two entrepreneurs; Aule Linus (right) and Terhemem Iorkoso (left) ecstatic about the empowerment opportunity as they display a stock of solar lamps given to Aule as start-up capital in one of the 20 shops rented for the entrepreneurs in Modern Market Makurdi. Also note the AWANGO Solar lamp branded tee-shirts worn by the entrepreneurs, which were provided by Total E&P to boost the visibility of entrepreneurs’ businesses.



development.

A GERI staff collects data on solar lamp sales during a monthly monitoring visit to an entrepreneur in Okpoga, Okpokwu LGA.

2. REDUCING NIGERIA'S ARMED VIOLENCE PROFILE

GERI is contributing its quota to reducing the menace of armed violence. This, it is doing to



The Nigeria Immigration Service giving their support to the armed violence reduction cause as the Assistant Commissioner of Police (right) and other stakeholders listen attentively.

place Nigeria on the path to peaceful coexistence and by extension, sustainable development. Informed by the recent wave and dimensions of armed violence in Nigeria generally North-Central in particular.

GERI, under the auspices of the Nigeria Working Group on Armed Violence which the organization is North Central Coordinator, conducted a mapping of key efforts by stakeholders and institutions to

prevent and address armed violence in Benue state. Security agencies, CSOs among other stakeholders in security were mapped with a view to ascertain an overview of armed violence in the region with regards to the nature, causes, perpetrators, victims and victim assistance, reportage and measures to address such among other indicators. Similar mappings were done in other geo-political locations in Nigeria. The intervention was sponsored by an international NGO; Action On Armed Violence (AOAV) a UK based charity organization through the Nigeria Working Group on Armed Violence (NWGAV). Lunching of the preliminary findings of the report was conducted to



Audience at the preliminary report presentation event coordinated by GERI

collate stakeholder inputs so as to compile a final report on the armed violence profile in the zone.

As the North Central Coordinator of NWGAV, GERI coordinated the launching of the preliminary findings of the report in July, 2013. Key findings were that armed violence in Benue State and the zone were largely due to ethno-religious, resource based, political and communal conflicts. Other findings were that the reportage of incidences of armed violence in the zone is low as compared to other geo-political regions hence, the poor funding of interventions to address such conflicts in the region. Government security agencies also decried poor funding and dearth of work gadgets just as participants decried the poor sharing of information between security agencies and CSOs among others. Participants actively interacted as clarifications were sought and given just as observations were made.

Among those who attended was Ms Julia Knittel from AOA UK, Col. Basil Kwembeh Rtd. the Special Advisor to the Benue State Governor on Security, represented by Hon. Sam Kave



From left to right: Mr Sam Agwa, UNDP Focal Person and NEPAD Coordinator Benue State; Ms Mimidoo Achakpa, Coordinator, NWGAV; Ms Julia Knittel AOA UK; Hon Sam Kave Rep. of the Special Advisor on Security to the Benue State Governor; Victoria Daaor, BENGONET and the rep. of the Nigeria Prisons Service displaying copies of the preliminary report at the event.

and Ms Mimidoo Achakpa, National Coordinator NWGAV. Others were the Assistant Commissioner Police V.O Brown of the Nigeria Police Force, Mr Sam Agwa, the UNDP Focal Person and NEPAD Coordinator, Prof. A.A Lyam, the Director Centre for Peace and Development Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi who delivered a key note address via a representative, Dr Magdalyne M.Dura, Director of Centre for Gender Studies, Benue State University, who worked on a review of legal instrument addressing armed violence (a component of the project)

as a consultant. Also in attendance was the Chairman of Benue Non Governmental Organizations Network (BENGONET), Barr. Justin Gbagir represented by the Chairperson of BENGONET's Education and Peace Thematic Group who doubled as the Secretary of BENGONET's Network Administrative Team, Mrs Victoria Daaor.

Others were the representatives of the Nigeria Immigrations Service, Nigeria Prisons Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), State Security Service and the Civil Society. GERI hopes that its contribution will in no small way; reduce governments spending on security so such funds can be channeled to economic and infrastructural development. A total of 59 stakeholders attended the launch.

3. ENHANCING THE KNOWLEDGE OF STAKEHOLDERS ON THE GENDER DIMENSION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK TO MANAGE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The threat to the livelihoods of especially poor women and men caused by climate change may soon be a thing of the past. This is because GERI coordinated the implementation of an intervention that sought to create a ripple effect in reducing the impact of climate change on especially, women. The intervention was a two-day training of trainers' workshop on gender sensitive leadership and institutional frameworks to manage climate risks and



Participants and Resource persons at the workshop

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opportunities in Benue State funded by United Nations Development Assistance Fund Project (UNDAF), through Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET). The intervention was spurred by the warning of experts that if urgent remedial steps are not taken to address the lingering negative impacts of climate change, sustainable development would be elusive and the survival of the human race will be further threatened. It was expected that the stakeholders thus trained will replicate the training in their various sectors as a way of creating more consciousness and arousing actions and support in the management of climate change risks as they affected especially women. The activity was also a way of complementing government's efforts at addressing the almost overwhelming climate change challenge which stakeholders agree, is anti development and which cannot be effectively handled by government alone.



A break-out session during the training workshop

To this end, for two days, on the 1st and 2nd of August, 2013, 85 stakeholders cutting across government, Civil Society Organizations, traditional institution and media among others were trained on the concepts of Gender, Gender Sensitive Leadership and Gender



A resource person facilitates a training session during the workshop

and Climate Change. Other topics covered were the Effect of Climate Change on Women Economic Activities and Institutional Frameworks for managing climate risks and opportunities. In the ensuing discussions which arose from the presentations, stakeholders identified the need for political will on the part of the government in making legislation to address issues of gender sensitivity and climate change; Emphasized on qualitative female gender representation in leadership instead of quantitative considerations;

The need for traditional rulers to be enlightened on gender issues as they relate to climate change and leadership

positions with a view to improving the status quo. Stakeholders also advocated for the strengthening of government institutional structures which will ensure gender balance in the allocation of resources, roles and responsibilities via forming synergy with other MDAs. The need for continuous sensitization on issues, mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change was also stressed.

GERI coordinated the implementation of activity with three other organizations which were: Center for Gender Studies (CGS), Benue State University, Makurdi, Women In Nigeria (WIN) Benue Chapter and Gender Advocacy for Justice Initiative (GAJI). At the end of the workshop, the organization also coordinated the writing of both the end of activity and financial report which was submitted to UNDP through BENGONET. This attests to the organization's capacity in coordinating projects and

programmes of this nature and many others.



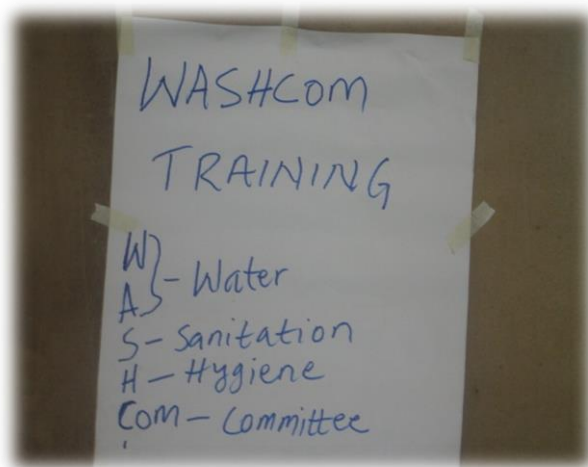
Cross section of participants at the workshop

4. ERADICATING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE BASED DISEASES THROUGH THE TRAINING OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE SANITATION HYGIENE AND WATER IN NIGERIA (SHAWN) PROJECT

GERI is actively contributing to achieving the MDGs goal seven by the year 2015. To this light, the organization was selected among many other qualified CSOs to implement the UNICEF, DFID, UKaid and Federal Government of Nigeria and Benue State Government co-funded Sanitation, Hygiene and Water in Nigeria (SHAWN) Project through the Benue Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency



A WASHCOM step down training session in Ogbadibo LGA



A WASHCOM training resource material

(BERWASSA). The project has three chronological components: Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), WASHCOM and Hygiene Improvement Framework (HIF) all arranged in increasing levels of technical demand in the implementation. The achievement of the project's goal of 100% access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is anchored to the sequential and

effective implementation of the trio in benefiting communities. The project is currently been implemented in four states of Benue, Bauchi, Katsina and Jigawa. In Benue State, SHAWN has been implemented in four Local Government Areas of Konshisha, Oju, Ogbadibo and Tarka.

The first component which is CLTS was implemented by staff of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) units of the various Local Government Areas. However, UNICEF engaged CSOs in the implementation of the second and third components which are WASHCOM and HIF. GERI was thus selected among other CSOs assigned and trained to step down the WASH community management (WASHCOM).



A GERI trainer puts WASHCOM officials through an exercise that demonstrates the power of unity in project sustainability during a step-down training in Tarka LGA.



Two out of ten WASHCOM officials in Ijoho Community, Tarka LGA display a community developed WASHCOM Action plan. GERI trainers facilitated the development of the plan which is meant to streamline the implementation of WASH activities and foster ownership of the project by the community.

members in another 50 communities of Tarka LGA. Here too GERI maintained its culture of hard work and commitment to effective implementation of the project for deeper impact in the attainment of project goals.

This was evidenced in the display of in-



A drama rendition which had WASH targeted messages during the 2013 Global Hand washing Day event at Tarka LGA



A GERI trainer (middle) facilitates rapport building during a WASHCOM training in Ogbadibo LGA

depth and comprehensive understanding of the SHAWN objective and commitment to its attainment as played out by Bigina Nachi Community, one of the 50 communities trained by GERI in Tarka

LGA. There was an explicit, targeted and comprehensive drama rendition on the negative interplay of mythical misconceptions on the causes of disease and communal underdevelopment during the marking of the Global Hand washing day on the 18th of October, 2014 in Tarka LGA, Benue State. The Bigina Nachi drama clearly related poor hygienic practices of open defecation, exposing food to germs by uncovering it and non-proper washing of hands at critical times as the basic causes of some common diseases. Some persons in the audience which included traditional rulers, government representatives and UNICEF consultant, school children agreed that the drama opened new insights to them on causes and measures to control diseases.

In further attestation to GERI's increasing capacity to implement the SHAWN project, GERI was engaged to implement the most technical component, the HIF in 35 communities of Tarka LGA between October and November, 2013. The organization successfully trained 352 Volunteer Hygiene Promoters (VHPs) and 350 Special and Strategic Hygiene Promoters (SSHPs). Though a first timer in implementing the HIF, the organization brought its hard work and commitment to excellence to bear on the step-down trainings, which action has contributed to achieving the goal of the SHAWN project. In December 2013, GERI was again engaged to train 1360 WASHCOM officials in 136 communities of Ogbadibo and Tarka LGAs which it has since successfully completed. From August 2012 till date, GERI has trained a total 3060 WASHCOM officials, 352 VHPs and 350 SSHPs in a total of 395 communities in Ogbadibo and Tarka LGAs.



GERI facilitates HIF Implementation in a community in Tarka LGA

5. GERI AND OTHER NGOS DONATE RELIEF MATERIALS AND SENSITIZE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) ON SEXUAL HEALTH, WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE BEST PRACTICES



Some of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at RCM Primary School Daudu.

GERI intervened in the conflict between the nomadic Fulani's



IDPs articulate emerging challenges to the intervention team which GERI was among

and the predominantly farming Tiv people of Benue State which resulted in the displacement of over 30,000 persons. This was anchored to a recommendation on the intervention of a UNICEF team that a critical need arose for IDPs to be provided with needed relief material to alleviate their sufferings.

The IDPs camped at RCM Primary School Daudu, Guma LGA. Consequent upon this, NGOs, particularly those working in peace building and conflict management did intervene to reduce the sufferings of the IDPs.



The sensitization session with the few available IDPs

In line with the aforementioned need, the following Non-Governmental Organizations: Ngueinja Initiative for Self Help and Development (NISHAD), Gender and Community Empowerment Initiative (GECOME), Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative (GERI), Okaha Women and Children Development Organization among other members of Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET) collaborated

to donate relief materials to the affected IDPs and sensitize them on Water Sanitation and Hygiene best practices.



During the visit, the head of the donating team, Tersoo Agera, the Executive Director of NISHAD informed the priest of the essence of the visit. He said it was to contribute to reducing the suffering of IDPs in the camp. Afterwards, the relief materials were handed over to the priest for onward distribution to the IDPs. It may be interesting to note that the relief materials were donated to the

GERI and other NGO staff and IDP officials at the hand-over of the relief materials

priest based on the recommendation that the materials were more secured and the distribution method employed by the priest was largely accepted by the IDPs.

After the presentation of relief materials which included ante-natal registration fees for ten pregnant women, the team proceeded to the camp for the last lap of the visit and facilitated a session on sexual health, water, sanitation and hygiene best practices for the IDPs.

During the visit, the Priest revealed that the challenges posed by the IDPs were not restricted to material resources alone but cut across other critical areas as security. On this, he decried the state of insecurity at the camp and in the larger Daudu community saying since the IDPs arrived in March 2013, security challenges had increased. This he said was further worsened by the fact that IDPs were strangers. He called for collaborative efforts to ending the root cause of the displacement. Though relative calm has been restored, more needs to be done to prevent a resurgence of the ugly incident.

OTHER ONGOING COLLABORATIVE INTERVENTIONS

1. ADVOCATING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

GERI is forming strong coalitions to advocate for gender equality in Benue State and Nigeria. In this regard, it is a member of the National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA), Benue State Chapter, a network working towards the domestication of the Convention on the



NCAA Benue Chapter and Management of NTA Makurdi Zonal Centre during NCAA's advocacy visit to the NTA

Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) nationally and in the states. To this end, it is advocating for the passage of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill at the state level. However, since issues of Women and Children were not on the Exclusive Legislative List, it implies that for the bill to be binding in the various states of the federation, 2/3 of states i.e. 23 twenty three states of the federation have to pass the bill.

GERI as a member of the NCAA team thus, set out to address the impediments to the passing of the bill which include wrong held notions about gender equality among others. It recognized that awareness creation and advocacy to stakeholders including media organizations, policy makers and the general masses would be an effective tool. Hence, GERI and other members of the NCAA team paid



advocacy visits to the Nigeria Television Authority and Spouses of Benue State House of Assembly members. The visit to the latter was to soften the ground for the main visit to the state parliamentarians.

During the visits, the NCAA team dispelled wrong held notions about the bill saying it was humanitarian and was meant to benefit both sexes, not just the women only further giving a progress on the states that had taken the bold step to pass the bill. The NCAA stated that Kogi and Kaduna States had already passed the bill and expectations were high that Benue passes the bill soon considering the perceived level of commitment of the populace to gender equity. She also pleaded for highly subsidized airtime on the NTA to increase visibility for NCAA programmes considering that the network has the widest coverage.



NCAA's visit to the spouses of members of the Benue State House of Assembly (BNHA) to enlist their support in passing the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill in the State.

Specifically, during the visit to the spouses of Benue House of Assembly Members, the Chair of Benue Non-

The NCAA advocacy session to the NTA

Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET), Barrister Justin Gbagir stated the need for all to understand that gender does not mean empowering women to lord over men and vice versa saying gender

equity was about providing a level playing ground for all sexes. He added that that most kingdoms or countries which have significantly reduced poverty in their countries had women as their leaders saying as a result, the men were firmly behind the bill because they knew it will benefit all genders. He however decried the uneven playing ground for women participation in leadership citing the issue of scheduling political meetings during wee hours of the day. He discouraged this practice saying many women could not afford to attend such meetings as their husbands would not permit their staying away from home at such times. Unfortunately and to the disadvantage of women, men attend such meetings with little or no hindrances. This he said was an impediment to speedy and sustainable development. Efforts are being intensified by the coalition to pass the bill in the state.



NCAA Benue Chapter and spouses of BNHA members

GERI CONTRIBUTES TO GLOBAL EFFORTS AT PROMOTING HAND WASHING

GERI is contributing to reducing the number of persons, especially children who suffer from and even die from diseases arising from improper/non washing of hands. This it is doing

through its yearly participation in the marking of the Global Hand washing Day. The Global Handwashing Day (GHD) which was initiated by the UN in 1999 is usually marked on the 15th of October every year. The day is marked to raise awareness on the need and promote the practice of proper hand washing among humans with specific target for children. This is based on the finding that addressing water, sanitation and hygiene related disease is the key to reducing disease by half.

In Nigeria and in Benue State, UNICEF through the Benue Rural water supply and sanitation Agency (BERWASSA) and Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET) marks the day by creating awareness on a rotational basis across local government areas implementing the sanitation, hygiene and water in Nigeria (SHAWN) project. GERI as a member of BENGONET (and in her operations in Environment, Water Sanitation and Hygiene thematic area), has been actively participating in the yearly marking of the day.

In the year 2011, GERI reached out to over 1000 persons, mostly school children who attended the marking of the day at the Oju Township Stadium in Benue State on the 18th of October same year. On that day, the organization keyed into the theme of the year which was “clean hands, save lives” by demonstrating hand washing models using locally sourced and low cost materials like calabash and wood ash which are alternatives to industrially made plastic/metal hand washing cans and soap respectively. The school children who were in attendance also practiced the washing of hands with the locally sourced materials. The expectation was that the school children will internalize and wash their hands at critical times with the locally sourced materials when the industrially made materials are not readily available.

In 2012 also, GERI contributed to promoting hand washing in another direction by donating plastic hand washing kettles and bar soaps to schools across the four SHAWN implementing LGAs in Benue State. This time, it was at the Ogbadibo L.G.A Secretariat in Benue State. In a similar vein, the organization took part in a match pass that aimed at drawing the attention of the children to the SHAWN targeted messages through songs that were sang by organizations which took part in the match pass. At the close of the event, teachers from the various participating schools expressed joy at GERI's intervention and promised to strengthen, promote and sustain proper hand washing among the school children in their care. Similarly, some school children affirmed that their level of knowledge on the importance of proper hand washing with soap/ash and water was enhanced and they promised to share such knowledge with their peers. The school children also prayed the organizers to upscale the activity to involve more school children in all the LGAs across Benue State so that the suffering of children due to hand washing related diseases will be over.

The year 2013 also marked a feat in the efforts of GERI at promoting attainment of the objectives of the SHAWN project in Nigeria. Bigina Nachi, one of the Communities trained by the organization under the WASH committee management presented a drama which was an indicator of the community internalized the knowledge gained from the WASHCOM training. The year's GHD was marked at the Mbakor community secondary school Wannune where

over 1500 persons especially school children attended. Keying into the year's theme which was "the power is in your hands", the various organizations which attended delivered WASH targeted messages to the audience. Similarly, hand washing models were demonstrated using locally sourced and low cost materials which included clayey pots. The event saw the attendance of traditional rulers in their numbers which was a demonstration of commitment to the SHAWN objective attainment. There were two drama rendition targeted at showing the health and economic dangers of poor sanitation and hygiene practices, one by school children and the other by Bigina Nachi community.

The drama rendition by Bigina Nachi community WASHCOM shows GERI's modest efforts at properly training the community as indicated in their grasp and explicit display of understanding of the nexus between water-sanitation-hygiene-health and economic well being. Based on Bigina Nachi community's front row performance, GERI has plans underway to organize experience sharing sessions with other communities using Bigina Nachi as reference point.

GERI OBSERVES NOVEMBER 2012 BENUE L.G ELECTIONS

GERI under the auspices of Benue Non Governmental Network was selected by the Benue State Independent Electoral Commission BSIEC to observe the November 24th 2012 Local Government Elections in Benue State. The organization covered twenty five polling units, in seven council wards of four LGAs which included Makurdi, Gwer, Konshisha and Gboko. The breakdown shows that in Makurdi LGA, Iwenge and Adeke polling units all in Bar Council Ward were visited. In Gwer LGA, the polling units observed were: Market 1, Market 2, and RCM Prim School Ayati all of Mbasombo Council Ward. Others were RCM Igbor, Orvar and Leprosy Ikpough polling units all of Ikwe Council Ward were also visited. Still in Gwer LGA, Jato 1, Jato 2 and Mbam Market Square all of Mbabur Council Ward were visited, alongside LGEA Central School 1&2, Late Agua Num, United Hotel, Akpu Garage 1&2, Mbakine Road, Danko Guest House and Park & Garden Polling Unit all of Mbalagh Council Ward. In Gboko LGA, Ikyumbur Old Market, Lough Primary School and Vanam Polling unit all of Mbadim Council Ward were visited. In Konshisha LGA, Awajir Main II and Awajir Main I all of Iwarayam Council Ward were visited. Electoral irregularities were observed which included harassment of voters by unknown group of persons, late arrival of electoral materials in some polling units and in some cases there was no voting at all in some polling units. This is thought to have marred the credibility of the results of the elections. As a consequence, GERI has put in place a mechanism to actively engage all actors in the electoral process to see to it that irregularities in subsequent elections are reduced to the barest minimum.