

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NIGER DELTA: A CASE FROM NIGERIA

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This case study describes the work of the Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre. Women Leadership and Political Participation is a priority in the Oxfam in Nigeria Country Analysis and Strategy 2011-2015; with a clear target to increase the space for women to assume leadership positions in social, economic and political spheres for female transformative leadership towards sustainable development in Nigeria. The overall aim of the project is to enhance the capacity of community women groups to promote quality service delivery in their constituencies, while also effectively building female political aspirants/candidates to run for the political office. The project also intends to change the tone of electioneering campaigns in the region while improving the capacity of the community women to hold elected officials accountable for election promises and sustainable community development projects.

This Case Study was a background briefing for Oxfam Novib's 2013 Annual Review, prepared in partnership with Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre, and describes the programme in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. Although it is not a formal evaluation it does consider lessons learned by both Oxfam Novib and its partner organisations.

These Case Studies are shared in the form in which they were submitted, often written by partners whose first language is not English, and have not been edited since submission. We believe that the meaning is clear enough, and the authenticity of the reporting and the availability of Southern Voices on development makes their inclusion in the Oxfam iLibrary worthwhile for sharing with external readers.

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**Programme Partner: Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre**

# AIM OF THE PROJECT

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## CONTEXT

### Larger country context

The return to civil rule in 1999 posed challenges that include political marginalization of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta in particular. These groups include women, physically challenged, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, the elderly and the youth, who are excluded from governance and democratic processes. Due to the dominance of men in the political and social arena, women and youth found themselves on the periphery of decision making and governance, policy formulation & implementation, budget processes, even when the decisions and policies concern them. Tradition and culture do not support women participation in decision making; and the Niger Delta region being very patriarchal has recorded very low women political participation. By tradition women do not question decisions taken by the all men decision making bodies, which explain the low and almost non-existent level of political engagement in the region. Therefore, women become the major marginalized group in the region. They are marginalized as people of the Niger Delta and doubly marginalized as women. They lack the capacity to conduct effective civic/political rights and responsibilities education and advocacy for political inclusion.

### Main actors

The main stakeholders in the project include the Local government authorities, Political Parties in the States, State Independent Electoral Commission, State Ministry of Women Affairs, the State House of Assembly, Traditional Institutions, Women politicians, and Market women groups, Women NGOs, Networks and Coalitions.

### Direct environment

The project is implemented in two states, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa by Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre in partnership with Oxfam Novib.

### Why did Oxfam Novib get involved?

The continued marginalization of women has affected development, especially at the local level since tradition does not encourage women leadership. It also affects the informal sector where majority of women operate and impact on their participation in electoral processes. The level of women participation in governance has been measured by the number of women in positions of authority, occupying political offices rather than in actual participation in democratic processes and political engagement. Little or no attention has been paid to specific initiatives to foster the participation of women in democratic processes beyond voting. While a lot of work has been done by civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Niger Delta on promoting gender sensitive budgeting; nothing has been done to get community women to understand budget, budget process and implementation. Most community women have neither seen government budget nor understood the contents and provisions. Community women groups pay courtesy calls to government functionaries to appeal for projects or programs that will address their concerns, whereas knowledge and skills on

government budgeting process would enable them to advocate for the implementation of budget provisions that concerns them.

## METHODOLOGY

Kebetkache reinforces its commitment towards achieving the desired outcomes of the project through:

- Sustained training and capacity building for the 50 democracy monitors in Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa states to better understand budget processes and be able to monitor implementation and engage stakeholders in a more professional and credible manner.
- Capacity Building and Leadership training for 24 female political aspirants drawn from the two focal states, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa.
- Leading Advocacy to Stakeholders and Encouraging community ownership of the initiatives through town hall meetings, advocacy to traditional institutions, political parties and the media for increased acceptance of female politicians among the electorate and political structures in the two states.
- Media Campaign and Awareness Creation for women's inclusion in the political process, increased number of women standing for election and greater numbers of women who voted and monitor (post) election governance.
- Partnership and Network building to further foster women's unity and building women's constituencies, common women's agenda across ethnic and linguistic divides.
- Research and documentation of the experiences of the beneficiaries through a feedback forum established by Kebetkache.
- Evaluation activities: Interviews with selected project participants; survey of media reports and attitudes of stakeholders and community members.

## RESULTS

The project is envisaged to contribute to:

- OI 47 programme 5: - No. of women showing more leadership in their sphere of influence (local and/or national politics and /or national government)
- Nigeria Country Strategy - Niger Delta programme - By 2015, Women in the Niger Delta will play a larger role in peace building and politics at local government and state level
- Nigeria Country Strategy – Female Leadership - By the 2015 national and state elections, the percentage of elected women will increase to a minimum level of 15% at both levels.
  - a. One of the outcomes envisaged was the formation of a critical mass of democracy monitors in the project states. This concept was initially to monitor pre-election, election and post-election periods in the various constituencies of the project states. The focus was expanded to include monitoring of the entire electoral and governance processes in the project states. This was also borne out of Kebetkache's idea of promoting women participation in governance processes beyond voting and being voted for.
  - b. With this concept in mind, Kebetkache built the capacity of the 50 democracy monitors and mobilized them to undertake field activities which include: monitoring of governance processes in the communities and local government areas, leading advocacy visits to stakeholders (local government authorities, traditional institutions, political parties and the media), monitoring government projects+ budget implementation and local government politicking and elections.
  - c. The inauguration of democracy monitors has demystified government budgeting process among community level women and development activists.
  - d. Democracy monitoring has created the enabling environment for increased civic engagement at the local level as well as promotes increased women participation in governance.
  - e. A more positive environment to increase the political participation of women is being built through Democracy Monitoring. Community women are breaking barriers of political marginalization and are asking questions about government programs and projects that

concerns them. It is hoped that there will be increased engagement between political candidates and community members, particularly women to understand the development as well as gender agenda of candidates as part of the processes leading to the 2015 general elections. Democracy monitors will set a different tone in their constituencies come 2015.

- f. The democracy monitors inaugurated advocacy clinic, which will engage with the election management body to understand processes towards the 2015 general elections and obtain due accreditation to engage with the electoral body during the 2015 general elections.
- g. Through the activities of Kebetkache, marginal results have been recorded towards achieving planned outcomes. In Bayelsa state 2013 local council election, 3 female local government chairpersons, 27 female councilors and 3 female Vice Chairpersons emerged.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The implementation process of the project highlighted opportunities and challenges and provided key lessons for Oxfam Novib as a learning organization in the following:

- a. The establishment of democracy monitors has opened up the space for community women to participate in governance in the Niger-Delta. It created a sense of belonging and ownership among community members that governance is a collective responsibility. The monitors have become more assertive in their constituencies and have become key stakeholders in their constituencies.
- b. Democracy monitoring promotes participatory governance and accountability. This is a good model that can be replicated in other states in order to sustain the process and expand the governance space in the Niger Delta.
- c. Increased awareness on the intersection of women participation in politics and good governance.
- d. Timeliness remains a critical success factor for all programs geared at women's political empowerment in Nigeria. The very sensitive nature of women's political empowerment demands ample time for strategic negotiations and actions.
- e. The political terrain in the Niger Delta is complicated and violent. A consistent building and strengthening of the political consciousness is needed to change mindsets and yet promote accountability.
- f. Inclusive governance is critical particularly for the marginalized community women. Hence, it is expected that the women monitors will in future become political candidates in their constituencies. By then they must have become so empowered to function in a political office for the development and advancement of their people.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre is a well known women NGO in the Niger Delta region working to promote the human rights of women and girls with the mission to contribute to the achievement of good governance, sustainable development and reduction in maternal mortality through capacity building, advocacy for quality health, respect for women's human rights, peace & security, equal opportunities and environmental justice. Kebetkache adopts a "bottom up" approach in its work, having started as a volunteer organization mobilizing community women in one state resulted in various local campaigns making the public and local government aware of women's rights. One example is the women campaigning against climate change and forming 'Women against Climate Change Network (WACC).Kebetkache belongs to relevant civil society networks including Gender for Affirmative Action (GAA), National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA). Kebetkache lead the advocacy work on the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill on behalf of NCAA through its branch in Rivers state. The organization is well known and has received support from amongst others USAID (ENCAP 2010- 2014), UNDEF (2011-2012), The Global Fund for Women (2009 - 2011), Stakeholder Democracy Network (2007-2009) , later through NED and Action Aid (2006-2010). OxFam Novib's partnership with Kebetkache is poised more than ever to empower women to participate from the community level, to the local government level, state level and subsequently to the Federal level by building their capacity to become democracy monitors and effective political aspirants/candidates through which they can understand the art of governance, the intrigues and intricacies of governance and political processes.

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This case study was written by Chioma Ukwuagu and prepared with the support of the Oxfam Novib partner Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail [info@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:info@oxfamnovib.nl)

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