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Citation: BLEED, C. and OCHOLI, M., 2003. Empowering women through sanitation activities. IN: Harvey, P. (ed). Towards the millennium development goals - Actions for water and environmental sanitation: Proceedings of the 29th WEDC International Conference, Abuja, Nigeria, 22-26 September 2003, pp. 327-328.

Additional Information:

- This is a conference paper.

Metadata Record: <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/28959>

Version: Published

Publisher: © WEDC, Loughborough University

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Empowering women through sanitation activities

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BOL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (BOLDA) is an NGO in Plateau State of Nigeria, whose main focus has been Community development, Reproductive health and income generation. In the last three years, BOLDA has been empowering community women through income generation. This involves skills development for economic activities like, Garri processing, Clay pot production, Pomade, Candle, Groundnut oil, and Soap making etc. Presently, BOLDA works with 8 Women groups in the above areas of income generation.

Evaluation of the project showed that the benefits of the economic activities were not maximized due to the fact that women spend about 50% of their time in search of Water, of very poor quality, and huge amount of their income on curative health, particularly for children. This informed the partnership with Water Aid in 2001.

BOLDA, in the bid to link its activities of empowering community women through skills development with water and sanitation project identified three women groups (Garri Women Development Association, Women In Health and Taroh Women Development Association) to stock and distribute sanitation materials to communities through Sani-centres.

The rationale for setting the Sani-centres are:

- Economic empowerment of the women groups managing the centres.
- Increase the skills of the women, which could be helpful to their own enterprises.
- Assist women to acquire technical skills in construction of latrine slaps.
- Empower women to spread the message of good hygiene practices in their various communities.

The concept of the women empowerment through sanitation activities is such that the Sani women stock and distribute sanitation materials to communities and generate income from the sales of the materials as a commission for the services rendered.

Some of the benefits are that the women are empowered economically as a result of the commission received thereby helping them to boost their income part of which could be used to develop other business ideas. Furthermore the income received helps to support their family members and children especially for women who are head of their households. It also provides a chance for women to learn about their health issues as well as participate in providing ways of improving the health needs for their communities

and other neighboring communities mostly in sanitation, hygiene promotion and safe drinking water.

Brief background of the Sani Centres

Mainstreaming gender in development projects specifically in activity involving women comes in different ways. Some of these could be at project identification, implementation, management levels, etc. However, BOLDA's involvement of women in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene promotion activities reflect a new dimension. This is because at the initial stage, the women were not involved as a specific group, but as part of a larger community, but later on they were singled out to manage a particular activity of the larger project, which is the management of Sani-Centres. In other words, they played a passive role at certain stage of the project but later their role was no longer passive rather it became significant to the success of the project.

The idea of women managing Sani-centres came as a result of the visit the management Team of BOLDA made to Benue in March – 2002. This visit was organized to help BOLDA who had just come into partnership with Water Aid to get acquainted with her ways of operation. The visit, which was to the Obi and Oju projects in Benue State, provided an opportunity for BOLDA to understand the concept of sani-centres and see it in operation. It was observed in the course of the visit that, local businessmen were used in the stocking and distribution of sanitation materials. What struck BOLDA was that, not only were the people receiving social benefits from the projects, but also economic benefits. The idea appealed to BOLDA Management Team. They saw an opportunity to further empower the women groups they have been working with by getting them involved actively in water and sanitation provision. It therefore selected three of its corporate Women Groups, to manage its sani-centres. The three groups selected are the Garri Women Development Association, Women In Health and Taroh Women Development Association. They were selected to stock and distribute Sanitation materials to BOLDA's project communities. Even though there were other corporate women groups with the potentials to equally manage the centres, the three groups chosen were the ones that met one key criteria used, that is that the corporate women groups should have existing structures where sanitation materials can be kept. The structure is also useful to either provide service or product. Added to this is that the groups already have a good record-keeping system from their existing activities.

Activities of the Sani Women

The Sani women as they are called in the project offer the following services, which are very critical to the success and sustainability of integrated water supply and sanitation in the communities.

- Stocking and selling of subsidized materials like cement and pipes to community members.
- Community members collecting equipments like shovels, wheel barrows, etc from the centre.
- Conducting training in the area of slab construction.
- Awareness creation on good hygiene practices.

The concept of women empowerment through sanitation activities is such that the Sani women stock and distribute Sanitation materials as a commission for the services rendered. The procedure is such that members of the communities pay a token amount of N100.00 or \$0.78 for a bag of cement to the Village Water and Sanitation Management Team (VIWASAT) and collect a card that is taken to the respective Sani centres to receive the cement for latrine construction. The token amount paid for the bag of cement (N100.00) is shared in two, one part is given to the women as an incentive while the second half is retained by VIWASAT. In the case of other materials like shovels, moulds for blocks, etc, the chairmen of the VIWASAT collects the materials on behalf of the communities. Money is not paid as at the end of the project BOLDA collects the materials back. However, documents are exchanged in the process.

The benefits the women derive from operating the Sani centres are;

- The women are empowered economically as a result of the commission they receive from the service they provide. This fund they receive helps to boost their income and part of it could be used to develop other business ideas.
- The income received helps to support their family members and children, especially where women are heads of households.
- It also provides an opportunity for the women to learn about their health issues as well as participate in providing ways of improving the health needs of their communities and other communities mostly in Sanitation, hygiene promotion and water supply.

Success recorded

Table 1 and 2 gives a picture of the achievement since the Sani Centres began operations.

Future training for Sani Women

As a result of the success achieved so far using women to operate the Sani centres, BOLDA has decided to provide some more training to the women to increase their capacity and widen the scope of their involvement in the Water and Sanitation project. Some of the areas training is being planned

Table 1. Latrine construction

S/N	Community	Pits Dug	Lined Pits & Slabs Made	Completed Latrines in Use
1.	Zamko	138	138	85
2.	Nacha	79	79	79
3.	Zamgwar	50	50	50
4.	Saogida	50	50	50
5.	Mban	100	100	100
6.	Pil-gani	133	100	100
7.	Kuyin	56	40	–
	Total	606	457	251

Table 2. Well construction

S/N	Community	Wells Dug and in Use	Wells Under Construction
1.	Zamko	–	–
2.	Nacha	4	2
3.	Zamgwan	1	1
4.	Mban	2	–
5.	Sagogida	–	–
6.	Kumi	4	3
7.	Pigani	3	2
	Total	15	8

include; operation and maintenance of hand pumps, slab construction for latrines and hygiene promotion.

Lessons from the Sani Centre

Some of the lessons learnt from this concept of empowering women through sanitation activities are;

- Women are anxious to learn and this has motivated BOLDA to propose further training for them.
- The Sani centre has helped to improve the lives of people in the communities economically and socially.
- It has proved that the involvement of all gender categories can produce an impressive result, which has bearing on the lives of the people.
- Insensitivity towards women in project management in the communities is gradually fading because the Sani Women have proved that they have the ability to manage projects as well as their male counterparts.

Conclusion

Water, sanitation and hygiene promotion play a key role in sustaining the lives of the people in the communities. Mainstreaming gender in this sector needs all key stakeholders to be involved.

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