

Giving Women A Voice: The 100 Women Groups

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The strength of the 100 Women Group is that we speak with one voice. When we want something, we can stand up and talk about it and take action.

Amina Kiru, UWA-Kano

The ENABLE Project



ENABLING CHANGE FOR WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



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Headquartered in Washington, DC, the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) is an international nonprofit organization that seeks to empower women at all levels of society to be full partners in development. Founded in 1975, CEDPA supports programs and training in leadership, capacity building, advocacy, governance and civil society, youth participation and reproductive health.

The Enabling Change for Women's Reproductive Health (ENABLE) project works to strengthen women's capabilities for informed and autonomous decision-making to prevent unintended pregnancy and improve reproductive health. Initiated in 1998, ENABLE seeks to increase the capacity of NGO networks to expand reproductive health services and to promote a supportive environment for women's decision-making.

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Acronyms

100 WG	100 Women Group
CBO	Community-based Organization
CEDPA	Centre for Development and Population Activities
CMO	Community Mobilization Organization
COCIN	Church of Christ in Nigeria
CONFED	Confederation of Osun NGOs
COWAN	Country Women's Association of Nigeria
CWO	Catholic Women Organization
D&G	Democracy & Governance
DEC	Development Education Centre
ELI	Engendering Legislative Issues
FEWA	Federation of Ebonyi Women's Association
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria
FP	Family Planning
IG	Income Generation
LG	Local Government
LGA	Local Government Area
MLGC	Model Local Government Council
NCRWA	Northern Cross River Women's Association
NCWS	National Council of Women's Societies

NGO	Non-governmental Organization
RH	Reproductive health
UNIVA	University Village Association
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWA	United Women's Association
OF	Obstetric fistula
WIN	Women in Nigeria

Executive Summary

In March 1996, with USAID/Nigeria funding, CEDPA/Nigeria launched its pilot *100 Women Group* (100 WG) Program. To support civil society, the program strategy was to harness the strength of Nigeria's vibrant women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) into proactive coalitions. The program goals were to increase the political participation and enhance the socioeconomic status of women, their families, and their communities. The pilot project built on CEDPA's ongoing democracy and governance program in Nigeria. As the 100 WG Program unfolded, Nigeria went through far-reaching political changes, as it moved from decades of military dictatorship to a democratically elected civilian government in 1999. The dramatic change in civil society helped to open doors for Nigerian women and the 100 WG strategy gave them a useful process to affect change.

CEDPA initially worked with a small group of partner NGOs—Development Education Centre (DEC), Women in Nigeria (WIN), United Women Association (UWA), Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN) and Confederation of Osun NGOs (CONFED)—to reach women throughout Nigeria. By 2000, CEDPA's *100 Women Group* strategy had proven to be a successful way to create political awareness, social mobilization, and political participation among women. The model is that each 100 WG is an assembly of women who represent 10 to 15 CBOs that came together to identify and address issues of common concern. The group, which represents the 100WG at the local government level, would then prioritize and act on agreed priority issues. If the need arises, the issues may be taken to the state or as far as the national level. Therefore, the final agenda reflected grassroots issues. In this process, the 100 WGs built consensus amongst women and proactive coalitions. In 2000, the networks had 105,568 members in 686 *100 Women Groups*. Of particular note is the self-perpetuating way that most of the groups developed. Many were not CEDPA-organized or-funded but learned of the 100 WG activities and adapted this specific strategy to meet their own needs.

The 100 WG strategy has been particularly successful in fostering the participation of women and women's groups in traditional, political, and legislative decision-making processes. Program activities have raised the awareness and involvement of Nigerian women in reproductive health and safe motherhood issues, girls' education, nutrition and sanitation, and income generation, and led many women to challenge traditional gender roles, run for elected office and win seats at the local and national levels. As one member stated, "The strength of the 100 Women Group is that we speak with one voice." Clearly this strategy has given women a voice to be reckoned with in Nigeria.

The program's achievements can be seen throughout Nigeria. In Bauchi State, the local government provided strong support to the 100 WG program to encourage girls' education; they gave the community a building for a girls' school and launched a campaign to persuade parents to enroll their daughters in classes. Where there are 100 WGs, women have become stronger and more active participants in civil society. In Cross River State, for example, the 100 WG succeeded in getting a bill passed that banned female genital cutting. By providing vocational training, the 100 WG program has helped women increase their income and build self-esteem.

By educating women on health issues, there is increased knowledge in the community on HIV/AIDS, reproductive and child health, and safe motherhood.

The *100 Women Group* strategy has generated interest from other development and donor organizations, including CEDPA's partners and USAID Missions in neighboring Senegal and Benin. Based on this interest and to inform future activities, a CEDPA evaluation team reviewed the activities, achievements, and experiences of a representative sampling of *100 Women Groups* in Nigeria. By providing a viable networking model in the *100 Women Group* strategy, women's strategic interests can be met and improvements can be made to their quality of life and that of their families and communities.

Introduction

In March 1996, under the auspices of USAID/Nigeria, CEDPA/Nigeria launched its pilot *100 Women Group* (100 WG) strategy. The strategy was used to harness the strengths of existing women's organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Nigeria in support of civil society. The goals were to increase women's political participation and enhance the socioeconomic status of women, their families, and their communities. The 100WGs used the country's traditional women's organizations—cultural, religious, economic, social, or professional—by having them join forces to become more successful advocates for women. These organizations were already known to deliver programs or support for women's programs efficiently in Nigeria. Moreover, the need for women's associations to extend their reach and capacity to respond to the changing dynamics of Nigerian civil society had stimulated alliances of umbrella organizations such as the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), Catholic Women Organization (CWO), International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN). Prior to the *100 Women Group* Project, these groups promoted separate, though similar, objectives, but had not yet come together to effectively promote common interests.

By linking these organizations in a shared framework, CEDPA's *100 Women Group* strategy has emerged as an innovative method to create political awareness, social mobilization, and political participation. It is particularly successful in fostering the participation of women and women's groups in traditional, political, and legislative decision-making processes. It continues to be successful. Group activities support women's awareness and involvement on issues such as reproductive health and safe motherhood, girls' education, nutrition and sanitation, and income generation. The 100 WG have led many women to challenge traditional gender roles and run for elected office and win seats at the local and national levels.

The *100 Women Group* strategy is now a recognized and respected approach to both women's empowerment and their participation in civil activity. This strategy has generated interest from other development and donor organizations, including CEDPA's partners and USAID Missions in neighboring Senegal and Benin. These missions have requested assistance in adapting a *100 Women Group* program to their environment. In response to these requests and to inform future programs, CEDPA undertook an evaluation of the activities, achievements, and experiences of a representative sampling of *100 Women Groups* in Nigeria.

This report presents the background against which the *100 Women Group* Project unfolded in Nigeria, highlights of the project's activities at the local, state and national levels, its achievements and results, lessons learned, and conclusions. Much of the information in this report was collected in 2001 by a CEDPA evaluation team. Although the funding ended in 2001, CEDPA/Nigeria staff provided 2002 project updates.

Background

Democracy and Governance in Nigeria

Since gaining its independence in 1960, Nigeria—Africa’s most populated country—has been mostly governed by a series of military dictatorships, with brief spells of civilian rule. With a civilian government elected in May 1999 in an historic and welcome round of democratic elections, civil society, including trade unions, women’s groups, civilian leaders, and the international community, marshaled efforts to support the 1999 elections.

When the democratic government took office, there were many pressing needs awaiting it, many of which stemmed from the repression of civil society under past military regimes. Good governance had been neglected—transparency and accountability, mechanisms for civic participation in government, civic education on citizen’s rights and responsibilities, and the inclusion of women in governance at all levels of decisionmaking were painfully absent from the civic arena. Nigeria’s civic leaders, elected officials, and the international community needed to address human rights abuses, years of economic mismanagement, and corruption at all levels of government.

At every level of civil society, government, and the private sector, Nigerian women had been denied equal access to decision-making, resources, and their rightful place and voice in Nigeria’s developing democracy. Women were often unaware of their rights and of ways to make their views known. Women cited a lack of information, political skills, resources and networks as major barriers to their participation. Various socio-cultural, economic, and political factors and the existence of dual male-dominated institutions—a patriarchal traditional system and a military culture—had inhibited women’s participation. Customary practices that defined familial and communal rights, duties, obligations, and privileges continued to affect women’s lives negatively and denied women equal rights and severely limited their recognition in the family, community, and nation.

Energetic and outspoken, Nigerian women remain the foundation of the country’s vibrant social and economic life. Though largely unacknowledged, women are also the pillars of the traditional, large, extended families that are common in all parts of Nigeria. Without access to the new democratic institutions, however, women remained powerless. Many Nigerian women continued to strive to improve their immediate conditions; many worked through women’s organizations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to achieve results.

The vibrant NGO sector in Nigeria works to fulfill development obligations to communities in health, education, youth, environment, law, social services, and democracy and governance (D&G). NGOs remain a crucial part of Nigerian society in their role in providing training, resources, and technical support to women who want to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

Several factors indicated that Nigerian women could bring about real change in civil society, given the right skills and advocacy structures. For example, traditional women’s groups provide an accessible structure that could be used to mobilize and empower women. Membership

in social groups and organizations is not new for many Nigerian women. The average Nigerian woman is a member of at least one organization—be it cultural, religious, economic, social or professional. Many grassroots organizations with strong constituencies delivered programs or support for programs for women. Historically, in pre-colonial times, women played a more active and visible role in their communities.

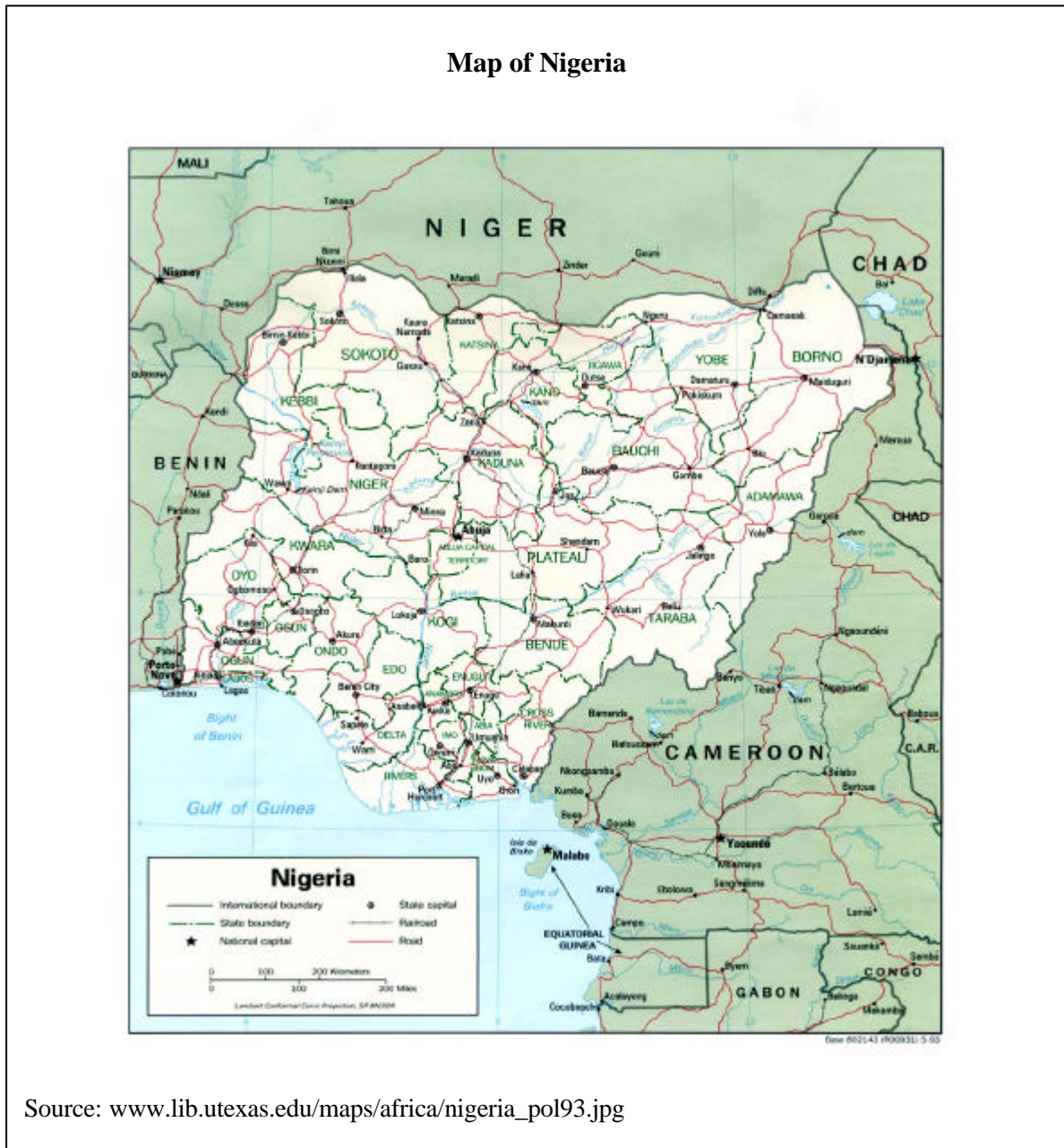
Following the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), CEDPA heard and responded to the recurring demand of women NGOs, leaders, and political hopefuls to establish enduring platforms to promote women's issues through networks, coalitions, and alliances that cut across social, ethnic, religious, and regional barriers. Democratic society could not be possible without women's full participation. As a result, there was a paradigm shift in CEDPA's programming: To go beyond addressing women's practical needs to explore ways and means to take care of their strategic interests as well. In other words, to use democracy and governance (D&G) programs not only to change women's conditions but also their status and position in society through increasing their participation in decision-making at all levels. It was within this framework that the Nigeria *100 Women Group* Program took shape.

The cultural and religious differences between the north and south in Nigeria would also need to be addressed in a D&G project that targeted women. The north of Nigeria is an Islamic stronghold. Its conservative leaders had severely limited women's role in society. In addition, unlike the South, the North lacked women Community-based organizations (CBOs) so new organizations would need to be developed and women leaders nurtured.

CEDPA's Work in Nigeria on Women's Rights Prior to 1997

With USAID funding, CEDPA has spearheaded efforts in Nigeria since 1996 to address the issue of women's inclusion. The CEDPA D&G program was originally conceptualized and designed to mobilize women for political participation. CEDPA has sought to strengthen civil society by increasing women's participation in development and political processes. CEDPA's interventions emphasized civic and human rights education, raising awareness, building advocacy networks, mobilizing NGOs and CBOs, and building coalitions and networks to address gender-related needs and concerns.

Figure 1.



The Evolution of the 100 Women Group Strategy

The concept for 100 Women Groups in Nigeria originated at a British Council workshop focused on women’s political participation in June 1996. The British Council wanted to organize individual, high-level professional women for political participation in groups of 100 at the state level. In August 1996, CEDPA/Nigeria designed a strategy that emphasized coalition

building of grassroots women groups. The emphasis on groups is the key ingredient and strength of CEDPA's approach.

The *100 Women Group* strategy was the foundation of CEDPA's D&G activities in Nigeria. With USAID/Nigeria funding, CEDPA/Nigeria launched its pilot *100 Women Group* (100 WG) strategy in 1996. CEDPA's strategy was aimed at renewing and nurturing Nigerian women's historical community activism. The 100 WG strategy was implemented at the grassroots (local) level, and then moved upward to encompass state, regional, national, and international activities. It connected grassroots communities with state, regional, and national stakeholders who were committed to promoting a women's agenda. The *100 Women Group* could be formed at the community, local government, state, across state (interstate), or national level.

A *100 Women Group* is traditionally an assembly of women, usually representing 10 to 15 CBOs, that has come together through networking and mobilization activities to address issues of common concern. The core group of 100 women includes representatives from each of the sponsoring CBOs or NGOs. The *100 Women Group* strategy uses the strength, resources, outreach, and authority of networks and coalitions to identify and articulate women's issues and to set a women's agenda in a democratic manner. The groups then collaboratively develop grassroots strategies to implement their agendas. Recently, the *100 Women Group* strategy evolved to include men and youth in a 100 family structure that represents communities of men, women, and youth. And while the name "*100 Women Group*" gives the impression that each group is made up of 100 women drawn from a number of CBOs or NGOs, in reality and from what was observed in the field, the number varies from 10 to 100 or more women per group.

After the *100 Women Groups* are formed, they are given an orientation to the D&G program (the program goal, objectives, strategies, and program management and evaluation) by CEDPA staff. They are given mobilization and networking skills training. Partners involved in the strategy are brought together once a year to share the achievements and strategies that they have used to address issues in their communities. It is also a period of sharing information on the type of problems prevalent in their communities. At the CBO level, sensitization and mobilization activities are conducted to sensitize CBO members on the need for collective participation to address community needs. Meetings are held intermittently to identify and discuss issues to be addressed by the group.

The *100 Women Group* strategy built on existing women's CBOs and promoted new CBOs where none existed, such as in the North. These already existing groups, energized through awareness creation, sensitization, and capacity building, with a focus on development;

Women's Groups in Nigeria

Despite increasing urbanization and migration, women living throughout Nigeria and those living abroad continue to organize and carry out their social and economic activities through women's organizations. Some groups are credit or economic associations, while some are social clubs that offer support to members in the organization of weddings, funerals or festivities to mark a community's cultural heritage. Occasionally, these groups may levy members to build schools, roads and sometimes, maternity blocks in the villages or small towns.

and more specifically, women's development, became the basic building blocks of CEDPA's *100 Women Group*. Through the *100 Women Group* Program, these organizations were converted into proactive groups for women and development action and successfully linked—bottom-up and top-down—through networking and coalition building. The objective was to build a critical mass of activists around identified issues who would then initiate programming activities. The needs-responsive mechanism also allowed for the assimilation of culturally appropriate responses. As a result, the groups developed approaches that mirrored the diversity of the organizations and cultures in the 100 WG program.

The 100 WG strategy became successful for two reasons. First, it built on local efforts at mobilization that were perceived as less threatening during the military era than national campaigns and less threatening to religious leaders. Second, rural women could quickly identify a unique solidarity rising from their shared economic and social conditions and realities. Using a grassroots focus, the *100 Women Group* can quickly identify and articulate shared needs and work together to develop strategies and action plans to address those needs.

Under the 100 WG Program, CEDPA has worked to develop the skills and capacities of female elected officials and those who aspire to run for public office. CEDPA's capacity building programs assisted elected officials at the local, state and national levels to develop a greater sense of responsibility towards their constituencies. Collaboration between NGOs, elected officials, traditional leaders, women's groups and youth groups supported conflict resolution and conflict management. CEDPA continued to support conflict resolution efforts in Nigeria's most strife-ridden regions by promoting non-violent mechanisms for citizen and community participation in governmental decisionmaking.

Through the successive four phases of the D & G program, CEDPA's program initiatives continued to build on previous successes while providing on-going technical assistance to its partners in grassroots, state and national NGO. Capacity building and training covered areas such as materials development, networking, citizen mobilization and advocacy.

CEDPA's partner program activities

**Model Local Government Councils Initiative
Jump Starts Local "Good Governance"
Models**

In February 2001, CEDPA Nigeria launched its Model Local Government Councils (MLGC) initiative in Asaba, Nigeria. Twelve LGAs in six states implemented the MLGC initiative on a pilot basis. The local governments that participated were: Ikom and Obubra in Cross River State; Ezza North and Ohaukwu in Ebonyi; Ondo West and Ose in Ondo State; Bauchi and Katagum in Bauchi State; Kura and Tarauni in Kano State; and Bokkos and Jos North in Plateau State. CEDPA's six NGO partners—Northern Cross River State Women Associations (NCRSWA), Calabar; Federation of Ebonyi Women Association (FEWA), Abakaliki; COWAN, Akure; Rahama Multipurpose Women Cooperative Society, Bauchi; United Women Association (UWA), Kano; and the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) Women Fellowship, Jos worked with CEDPA to implement the MLGC initiative.

The initiative was aimed at creating and catalyzing the emergence of a model for good governance at the LG level that promotes fiscal and programmatic accountability, transparency, civil society participation in processes, governance, and constructive engagement between the government and civil society.

included:

- Developing a legal framework around women’s rights;
- Developing model local government councils programs;
- Training female candidates for political office and supporting female incumbents;
- Supporting *100 Women Groups* programs; and
- Developing youth political empowerment programs.

CEDPA’s program initiatives built on its previous interventions while mainstreaming integrated strategies and mechanisms aimed at bridging grassroots’ needs and governmental action. Partnerships were created, fostered and sustained to ensure institutional pluralism, build organizational capacity to participate in formal and informal decision-making, and support good governance at all levels. This was critical to mitigating the disconnect between the needs of the citizenry and elected officials’ actions, having more inclusive decisionmaking, facilitating a more equitable distribution of resources, and promoting conflict prevention and resolution activities.

Grassroots activities were centered on town hall meetings, lobbying, draft legislation, negotiation, and partnership with the media. The strategies provided CBOs with the necessary mechanisms and interface to identify issues and create a civic advocacy and action platform. The strategies also ensured the necessary dialogue between decision makers and constituents and served to institutionalize mechanisms for broad-based participation at all levels.

In turn, NGOs provided training to citizens, elected officials and other bureaucrats to build capacity in promoting civic participation and good governance. Training focused on:

- Civic education on citizen rights and responsibilities;
- Advocacy and the creation of town hall forums;
- Grassroots-based mobilization toward appropriate law and legislation, especially as it pertains to women and youth and their issues;
- The creation of effective mechanisms for communication with elected officials; and
- Initiating grassroots’ action and raising public awareness around women’s issues and rights.

Partner organizations used training, training materials and technical assistance provided by CEPDA to engage elected officials and create heightened awareness around grassroots issues. Training provided the informational and technical base for advocacy and mobilization around grassroots’ issue-based initiatives.

CEDPA-supported networks and coalitions disseminated training and lessons learned to member organizations. This framework also allowed for an effective means of

CEDPA/Nigeria’s Pioneer Partners

CEDPA/Nigeria initially implemented the 100 WG strategy with five partner NGOs:

1. Development Education Centre (DEC) Enugu - southeast
2. Women in Nigeria (WIN) – northwest
3. United Women Association (UWA) – northwest
4. Country Women’s Association of Nigeria (COWAN) – southwest
5. Confederation of Osun NGOs (CONFED) –southwest

distributing information and capacity to the most fundamental levels of communities to support their participation. Through member organizations, grassroots issues were promoted at all levels of government.

By 2000, the 100 WG networks had a total of 105,568 members in 686 of the 100 WGs. Interestingly, most 100 WGs were not organized or funded by CEDPA, but learned of the groups' activities and adapted the strategy to meet their own needs. This phenomenon highlights the sustainability of the 100 WG strategy and the underlying (and unmet) need to promote women's needs and issues across Nigeria.

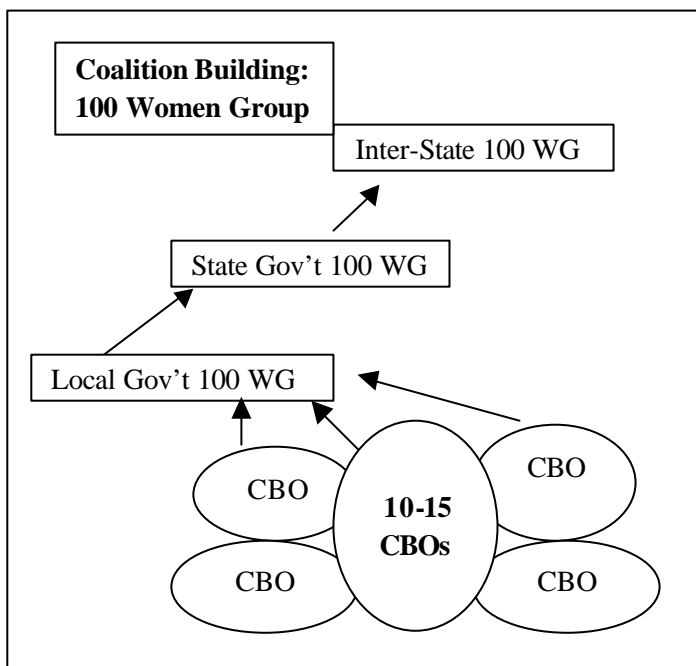
The strength of the 100 WG is that we speak with one voice. When we want something, we can stand up and talk about it and take action. It is a slow process and we must start at the lowest level and work our way up.

Amina Kiru, UWA-Kano

From the original organizing concept, several innovative and informative models evolved. Variations or adaptations were dictated by social, economic, or geographic factors. While it was easier to tap into more organized groups in the south such as the COWAN credit associations, in the north (as exemplified by UWA-Kano and WIN-Katsina) efforts had to be made to organize women from scratch into viable groups based usually on trade affiliations. This resulted in variations in results and impact from region to region.

Highlights of 100 Women Group Projects

While the 100 WGs in each region of Nigeria developed their own agenda and themes, poverty was an overarching problem that women from every region of the country clearly and loudly enunciated. Women cited poverty as a debilitating challenge they faced in their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters.



The key issues addressed by region were as follows:

Table 1.

Region	Key Issues
<i>Southwest</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic empowerment (poverty) • Reproductive health and rights • Political participation
<i>Southeast</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional harmful practices (widowhood rites/ female

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> genital cutting) • Human/civic rights
North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy • Economic empowerment (poverty) • Girl child education

For instance, in the Southeast, human rights issues informed the initial emphasis of programs. The *100 Women Groups* first concentrated on liberating women from the shackles of harmful traditional practices - notably, some forms of widowhood rites, female genital cutting (FGC) and other traditional and cultural practices that impinged on women’s freedom of movement, association, speech, and their dignity as human beings.

In the Southwest, the technique (incentive) for mobilizing women for political participation was through credit and loans associations for women; here the women identified economic empowerment as their priority need.

It is important to understand the dynamic nature of the grassroots organizations that make up the *100 Women Groups*, how they evolved as issues were identified, how their capacity developed, and how coalitions with other groups were formed. The women who participated in the 100 WG had a strong impact on other women in their community and at the personal, family, and civil society levels. As the concept has evolved, different models emerged that reflected the socio-cultural environment. The 100 WG worked at different levels of society, coalesced around common concerns, and used their strengths to complement those of other groups. Finally, the 100 WG produced results and continues to produce results that are consistent with CEDPA and USAID/Nigeria’s linkage of access to reproductive health services and women’s empowerment.

Get up; stand up for your right!

In October 1997, women groups in Osun State succeeded in acquiring about 50 acres of land from the state government to operate a market. They achieved this through the collective efforts of the *100 Women Group* and the Market Women’s Association, a CBO that worked in concert with other women’s organizations. In their own words, they used an “intimidation strategy”; it involved passive resistance, but no violence.

Unable to obtain the land through regular channels and empowered by 100 WG activities and solidarity, the women resolved as a body to act to achieve their objective. They went to the proposed market site and vowed not to budge unless the military administrator agreed to talk to them. Obviously, the markets could not operate that day! Shortly thereafter, the military administrator “graciously approved” their request for the establishment of a market as requested. A victory for the 100 WG strategy!

Local Projects

The COWAN experience highlights how the *100 Women Group* organizing concept was incorporated into an existing local structure. First, under the Reproductive Health (RH) program, CEDPA had plugged into the strength of COWAN’s expansive network of women’s credit associations as a channel for increasing access to RH services in under-served rural areas. COWAN members were trained as community-

We now know our rights. The women are united and we were able to get a women councilor elected.

~Chief (Mrs.) E.O. Omope, Ado Ekiti
Local Government, Ekiti State

based health volunteers. With the advent of the D&G program in 1996, COWAN was again a natural choice (as a pilot project) to mobilize women for participation in politics through the *100 Women Group Program*. COWAN was undoubtedly one of the more sophisticated groups and networks with its well-delineated credit associations at the community, local government, and state levels. It could readily organize to form the *100 Women Groups* at each level.

The UWA experience in Kano was completely different. In the absence of viable existing NGOs, the *100 Women Group* concept had to be implemented in stages. With no women CBOs in the region, CEDPA organized women who practiced the same trade into new CBOs. In some cases, a leader also had to be identified who was capable of acting as the catalyst for group formation and who had the right mix of qualities to keep the group together. The WIN experience at the Katsina State branch, another pioneer group in the North of Nigeria, was similar to UWA's. In the absence of viable existing NGOs, new CBOs were formed.

Through the *100 Women Group Program*, women established and strengthened links with policymakers on issues that affected women. Through their policy advocacy, the groups succeeded in getting support for their activities from policymakers, particularly at the local government level. For example, in Northern Nigeria local governments provided infrastructure such as building women centers, where the women received vocational training. They also provided training equipment. Local government officials acknowledged collaborating with the groups on issues such as girls' education, women's literacy, and poverty alleviation. For example, the Katagum local government donated a building in Azare for girls' education. Then it went further by embarking on a local enlightenment campaign to persuade parents to enroll their daughters in the program (see text box, right).

The University Village Association (UNIVA), another of CEDPA's partners in the southwest, provides health services and literacy classes to rural communities in the Oyo State local government areas (LGAs). To have women participate fully in program activities in the rural areas, UNIVA had to get the men's approval and have the men encourage the women to participate. UNIVA met a great deal of resistance as a result of inherent social, cultural and political beliefs. For instance, Muslims were reluctant to have women participate. In response to these constraints and in an effort to introduce the *100 Women Group* strategy in the communities, an

Rahama assisted through the 100 Women Group in the education of those who in one-way or the other could not have formal education. This has helped bring education to children who could not afford formal education and got them away from street hawking.

~Alhaji Bala Liman, Secretary, Bauchi
Local Government, Bauchi

It is clear that the Katagum government and the local government chairman support Rahama. We have donated a building for the girls' schools and helped to persuade parents to send their girls to school.

~Alhaji Shitu Ahmad Gamawa, Katagum Local
Government, Bauchi State

I was averse to new ideas, cultures and changes. But now ... I've been liberated from the shackles of ignorance and conservatism.

~Cecilia Nwankwo, Ebonyi LGA,
Ebonyi State

The 100 Women Groups provided loans to the "Poorest of the Poor." These people are very important in the 100 Women Group's main objective. The women who were empowered economically by the program become supporters of the women politicians.

~Chief Bisi Ogunleye, COWAN, Ondo
State

innovative variant emerged—the 100 Sample Family—that incorporated men, women and youth. In this variation of the 100 WG, the 100 Sample Family members include men, women and youths who are recognized as representatives of their respective families rather than as representing the CBOs to which they are affiliated.

Within the 100 Sample Family structure, participants received instruction and training in literacy, health and civic education. They then took that information back to their respective families, compounds, and wards. A People’s Forum was organized twice a month where the 100 Sample Family representatives met, identified problems, and sought solutions. In collaboration with UNIVA, the People’s Forum then organized meetings with community leaders, local government officials, and others who were able to help change the situation.

State Projects

As described above, issues are generated at the grassroots level and debated in a democratic manner by CBO/NGO members. A consensus is then reached concerning which issues to put on the agenda. The elected representatives of the community-level groups then take the selected issues to the local-government-level where the representatives make up the *100 Women Group*. The issues are again debated, prioritized and acted upon. If the need arises, the identified issues may be taken to the state level. The process is such that, by the time issues reach the state-level groups, an uncontested agenda emerges that bears the signature of the concerned women from the bottom-up.

As part of CEDPA’s D&G work in Nigeria to support women vying for public office, in the 1999 elections CEDPA leveraged past gains to inject women and a women’s agenda into the political process. CEDPA trained women and its networks quickly mobilized to connect grassroots agendas and the efforts of political aspirants. CEDPA broke through the old

perspective of top-down governance and created more political space for women in formal and informal decision-making as well as a base for continued grassroots action.

During the 1999 elections, CEDPA’s partners supported 145 female candidates for elective office; of these, 43 candidates were elected.

Regional Projects

Through the 100 WG mechanism, women addressed RH issues such as FGC, HIV/AIDS, family planning, maternal and child health and immunization, among others. Groups disseminated RH information

A Teacher With A Mission

Lami Abdullahi, 41, of Filisanji, Katsina State in northern Nigeria, with the WIN Katsina State chapter (CEDPA Partner), was initially involved in the D&G project as a CBO member—the *Kulikuli* (snack) makers association. Her CBO contributed representatives to the 100 Women Group.

She took the initiative to start a literacy program for CBO members at her home and later contacted the parent body, WIN, for assistance. Today, the school has 300 students—women of all ages—and classes take place three times a day to accommodate all who are eager for knowledge. The students do not pay fees.

“I found that a lot of women were not interested in sending their children to school. But I was sure that once the women were given the opportunity to learn and they become fascinated with learning and thirst for knowledge, then they will see the sense in sending their children to school. That was why I started the school in my home,” Lami said.

to create awareness and correct misinformation.

Membership to the 100 WG are from all parts of society, in fact, in the Southwest it was common to find that *oloris* (wives of traditional rulers) were 100 WG members. The traditional institution was the entry point for the *100 Women Group* in the community. The group often sought the support of traditional institutions on issues affecting the women.

National Projects

CEDPA embarked on a national training program for social mobilization and coalition building for effective advocacy on major social issues. CEDPA NGO partner networks implemented the programs. These NGO partners were selected based on their D&G experience, community relations, and present capacity. Program activities included civic education, issue-based social mobilization, and coalition building.

CEDPA provided partner NGOs with technical assistance in strategic advocacy and the development of effective methods for advocacy and community participation. Through training workshops and the creation of behavior change materials, CEDPA provided practical orientation. Partner activities included:

- Town hall meetings;
- Roundtable discussions with elected officials at the national level;
- Development of concerned citizens groups to monitor elected officials' activities and promote good governance; and
- Development of draft laws and legislation to assist in addressing issues crucial to grassroots communities.

On April 2, 2000, **Safe Motherhood Day**, for example, CEDPA funded a series of activities that involved its subproject partners as well as churches, mosques, and multimedia organizations. CEDPA's partners visited key officials at the local, state, and national levels to promote safe motherhood. Concurrently, a documentary entitled "Safe Motherhood: A Community Responsibility" was aired on several television stations across the country.

The 100 WG actively participated in a nationwide 1999 voter registration drive and mobilized 753,396 people to register to vote. This dramatically increased the total number of registered voters in Nigeria to 2.3 million.

Taking advocacy efforts beyond the national level to an international level, on April 7, 2000, World Health Day, the CEDPA/Nigeria Country Director, Dr. Enyantu Ifenne, called on the U.S. government to scale up its support and investment in family planning programs in

Political Actions Unite 100 Women Groups on a National Level

The 100 WG method of organizing was successfully deployed in the transition to civil rule activities, especially the voter education drive and the November 1998 Abuja Women's Summit/Rally to press for affirmative action (at least one-third representation of women in decisionmaking). Over 2,000 women from many *100 Women Groups* converged on Abuja for this rally to advocate for affirmative action for women. This common action linked women from all states together across social, economic, religious, and political interests.

Nigeria. She delivered this message at the White House to President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Madeline Albright, and other dignitaries.

Achievements and Results

The 2001 CEDPA evaluation team targeted 17 sub-projects (or NGOs) and interviewed 240 people who had participated in the sub-projects. Each sub-project had a number of different types of groups that included women's groups and political, philanthropic, community, teenage girls/school dropouts, and 100 Sample Family groups as well as youth clubs. The team selected the 100 WGs from among seven project site locations. The project site locations were as follows: North – RAHAMA (Bauchi State) and UWA (Kano State); East – NCRSWA (Cross River State), DEC (Enugu State), and FEWA (Abakiki State); West – COWAN (Ondo State) and UNIVA (Oyo State). At least one group in each of the three regions was to be among the 100 WGs established through CEDPA's support and at least one of the other two groups should have formed as an offshoot of an original 100WG, but need not have been formed by a CEDPA-supported group selected to participate.

The team selected groups to participate in the focus group discussions that reflected the urban, small town, and more rural distribution pattern of 100 WGs throughout Nigeria. The three groups selected for each zone reflected the diversity of group membership the nature of priorities/activities and advocacy approaches. At least one group selected in each zone was engaged in substantive advocacy/mobilization around FP and RH issues. The groups selected reflected various levels of organizational development and success in attaining their objectives. Both leadership and group membership had to demonstrate their interest in participating in the documentation activity.

For the women in the *100 Women Group* Program, one of the most profound and widespread findings of the 2001 evaluation was that of personal change or growth in two principal areas:

1. Enhanced self-esteem and confidence, and
2. New and or improved knowledge and skills in RH, income generation, and enhanced political participation and human rights awareness.

The *100 Women Groups* had a clear impact on their communities' lives, both in attitudes and practices and in tangible infrastructure improvements. The types of influence

Banning Female Genital Cutting (FGC) in Cross River State

Mrs. Kate Isanghe, a schoolteacher at Community Primary School, Ofumbongha, Obubra LGA in Cross River State, is an ardent campaigner against FGC, also known as female genital mutilation. She is also a member of a CEDPA-supported *100 Women Group* in her state. One of the *100 Women Group's* objective is the eradication of harmful traditional practices that impinge on women's rights. Through the *100 Women Group's* efforts in Cross River State, in collaboration with other women's organizations, a bill was passed banning FGC in the state.

Isanghe spoke of her excruciating FGC experience and how she lost her sister:

Before you take in the first pregnancy or before you are escorted to your husband's house you have to undergo this. I was 16 years old. My senior sister who died was 19 years old. She died from bleeding resulting from FGM. . . . So when women came and started talking about this thing, I became very interested because I lost my senior sister because of this very thing. I decided to join the others to go round the grassroots telling people about the effects of FGM.

and visible progress, however, varied according to the particular needs, challenges and interests identified by the women as most important to their wellbeing.

For many women participating in the 100 WGs, the program's impact could be seen at a personal level in greater income from economic activities, improved knowledge of RH or child health, greater personal confidence and community respect, increased interest in participating in politics, including running for elected office, greater awareness of corruption in government and election fraud, and the willingness and power to fight such corruption.

CEDPA Partner NGOs Mobilize Around Health Issues

CEDPA partner NGOs and their members were easily mobilized to participate in Nigeria's National Immunization Days (NIDs) and other health initiatives such as World Health Day and World AIDS Day. For the NIDs, the NGOs also involved other agencies (government and non-governmental), thus leveraging CEDPA's resources many times over.

Health Achievements and Results

The 100 WG Program produced results in a variety of health areas— family planning, safe motherhood, RH, and HIV/AIDS. The program promoted accessible and widely used health education programs that addressed HIV/AIDS, family planning and child health issues, participation in mobile immunization campaigns, received free radio airtime for safe motherhood discussions, and achieved bans on FGC in some states and decreases in forced and early marriages among young girls.

In particular, women from all regions revealed a much greater awareness on RH issues, including family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention. In the North, where religious leaders generally discouraged women from using family planning and denied the scope of the HIV/AIDS problem, women were candid about their use of modern contraception. Some in Kano State admitted that even young married couples had begun to use contraceptive methods so as to have the number of children that they could properly support.

As part of the 2001 evaluation, women were asked about their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and its prevention; the vast majority of women participating in the exercise stated emphatically that, due to the *100 Women Group* education interventions, they now knew about HIV/AIDS, its transmission, and prevention. Many recounted the types of education seminars that they had participated in because of the *100 Women Group* and the partner NGO's activities, they stated that those meetings had brought them a wealth of new information that they had shared with others.

Among all those interviewed, only one group in the Southeast revealed no HIV/AIDS knowledge. However,

Women must come in to partisan politics. It is not enough to sing and dance during campaigns, vote for whomever the husband has recommended, or lament women's marginalization. We must depart from these three things!

Mrs. Mahdi, Executive Secretary,
WRAPA, Abuja

I never knew that a woman could be respected by a man. A woman was always seen as not having any right – not even to discipline her own child. The man would always ask, "Who are you? Do you not know that you are only a woman?" Now women are going to school and holding important positions.

Elizabeth Nkpuma, Ezza North LG,
Ebonyi

another group in the Southeast stated that they now know about the modes of HIV transmission and safer sexual practices, and that their husbands were employing safer sexual practices by being more faithful (i.e., one sexual partner). Even with the more conservative religious context in the North, women there admitted that some husbands had even begun to use condoms for protection from unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

In addition to family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention, women also disclosed that they had begun to address traditional beliefs and practices that are harmful to a woman's health and that they were also more informed about general health and hygiene practices for their families. In the North, where early marriage is prevalent, women articulated a new understanding of obstetric fistula (OF). As one woman from Katagun LG in Bauchi State commented, "We didn't know how to deal with forced marriages and VVF patients. We now tell them [other women and men] that VVF has to do with the girl being too young and too small for childbirth." Similarly, *100 Women Group* members also expressed pride in their success at dispelling local superstitions surrounding the birth of twins. Now, instead of casting a woman out of a village for having twins, she is granted proper care.

In the Southeast, women were particularly successful in changing attitudes and behaviors related to FGC, a practice that is deeply entrenched in tradition and belief and remains an intractable problem in villages and communities across Africa. For their part, women of the *100 Women Groups* in Cross River State undertook educational campaigns, addressed local and religious leaders, and finally, took their arguments to the State Assembly where a law was passed making FGC illegal.

One woman, Kate Isanghe, is a tireless advocate on behalf of ending FGC. Since the law was enacted, Kate continues to educate communities on the dangers of FGC and enlists others to help her monitor enforcement of the law.

In the North, women interviewed said the *100 Women Groups'* successes revolved around raising awareness of RH, safe motherhood, and the importance of girls' education. The accomplishments of the 100 WG members were particularly significant because they often fostered new relationships between women's groups and local governments. In Kano State, for example, the safe motherhood campaigns conducted by UWA and its *100 Women Groups* resulted in local and state governments acknowledging the importance of women's reproductive health. In an interview, the Kano State health commissioner stated his concern over the unspeakably high maternal mortality rate. He then proudly announced his recent endorsement of a policy whereby all pregnant women would have access to free antenatal care at state hospitals. In a related RH victory, UWA and *100 Women Group* representatives talked extensively about HIV/AIDS during their Safe Motherhood Campaign. The speaker of the State House of Assembly was so impressed by the women's education efforts and the issues addressed that he called the Kano State Radio station and negotiated three months of free airtime for safe motherhood discussions.

D&G Results and Achievements

In the D&G arena, the *100 Women Group* Program worked on:

- conflict resolution;
- improving girls' and women's education;
- increasing girls' enrollment in school and maintaining better retention rates;
- promoting anti-corruption in money and voting;
- increasing recognition of good governance including transparency, accountability, and credibility;
- launching successful campaigns to repeal laws that denied widows their assets;
- poll monitoring;
- decrease election bribe-taking.

Similar to the *100 Women Groups* in Kano and their RH successes, Bauchi State groups, led by Rahama, were instrumental in garnering support for girls' education. Changing community attitudes towards the value of girls' education was the first challenge, and getting financial and material support for the schools was second. In the North, girls are often found on the streets hawking small goods for income rather than being in the classroom. Conventional thinking is that a girl will only take what education and skills she might have and, upon marriage, "give" those skills to her husband's family. This provided little incentive for parents to send their daughters to school. Members of the 100 Women's Groups associated with Rahama, however, said they now recognize the importance of their own education and of sending their daughters to school so that they may learn to read and write, conduct income-generating activities and learn about democracy. Women came together to discuss girls' education with their community members and leaders and were able to persuade them that girls should go to school. The local government played a key role, too, in encouraging fathers to send their daughters to school, and it provided new schools with benches for the girls.

In all regions, without exception, women related a new understanding of their human rights, formal political and decision-making processes, and their role as actors in civil society, including their responsibility to fight corruption, and their desire to see more women in elected office. In the Southwest, *100 Women Groups* were acutely aware of the importance of having women who were informed of their rights and who exercised their civic responsibility to participate in political processes. Several *100 Women Group* members who worked with University Village Association (UNIVA) mentioned that one motivation for joining the group was that it was viewed as an association that fought for women's rights and helped women to stand up for those rights. Under UNIVA's civic education and literacy programs, many women had been trained in voting procedures and what to expect during election campaigns. They told interviewers that they now understood the importance and power of their votes and that during the last elections they had not allowed themselves to be tricked or bribed by men into selling their vote.

COWAN 100 WG members were particularly active in campaigns for women to gain elected office or appointments to local government positions. Numerous women recounted stories of getting women councilors elected, other women appointed to cabinets of traditional

leaders, and even getting women elected to the State House of Representatives. For COWAN 100 WG members, the original *100 Women Group* structure evolved and expanded. Group members and leaders saw the need for greater solidarity and increased communication between and among LGAs and states in Nigeria. Thus, COWAN expanded the 100 WG strategy to include a parliamentary forum that included representatives who convened to discuss more regional issues and took more concerted political action on their members' behalf. In addition, COWAN's *100 Women Group* members (literally thousands of women) also make small monthly contributions to the Women's Political Participation and Development Fund. The money from this account goes exclusively to political action activities for female candidates.

And, finally, Ebonyi State women took on customary laws governing women's inheritance. Traditionally, a widow does not have the right to her deceased husband's property, which often left her penniless. With the grassroots support of its *100 Women Groups*, FEWA supported women's cases in local courts and successfully overturned these customary laws.

Discussions with women in the Southeast also demonstrated their keen awareness of human rights. While these groups did not discuss voting and elections as in other regions, they did have a clear understanding of the power that they held as actors in political processes. Most activities were designed to raise awareness on women's rights violations and harmful traditional practices such as widow abuse, FGC, other forms of gender-based violence, and forced and early marriages. Through their interventions, entire communities have ended these practices, and they have gained the support of local and state governments.

Even in the North, where women have particular constraints on their mobility and participation in public life due to the Islamic culture, there was a pronounced awareness on the part of women interviewed about how they can and must become more involved in decision-making processes.

- In Kano State, the UWA was instrumental in gaining male support for women to vote. UWA members mobilized campaigns and went to each of the 44 LGAs, talked to LG chairmen and *imams* (religious leaders) and convinced them that registered women voters could be potentially quite numerous. They pointed out that larger population numbers in the next state census might translate into larger national budget allocations for the state.
- Following this major victory, civic education classes that UWA and *100 Women Groups* conducted prepared women to screen candidates for election and taught them how to vote and what to expect at polling stations.
- During recent elections, when a woman contestant was seen as winning the race, some men attempted to remove a ballot box and hide votes; the women monitoring the polling stations were the first to cry foul and prevent election fraud.

One very visible D&G result was the number of women elected to office with the 100 Women Groups' support. Voters elected 43 women during the 1999 election with the 100 WG support. In addition, women were elected as councilors, appointed to the cabinets of traditional chiefs, and elected to the State House of Representatives.

Gains in Economic Empowerment and Infrastructure

In all regions, women stated that, because of their participation in the *100 Women Groups*, they now had new or improved skills in income generation and were able to engage in remunerated activities such as food processing, tailoring, farming, weaving, and knitting. There was also a rise in the number of small businesses (tailoring, weaving, farming, food processing) and community projects (bore holes for water) that were financed by micro loans through the partner NGOs and CBOs. Women were able to contribute to the health and enhanced economic status of their families. This brought the women a newfound self-esteem and respect from their husbands, family members, and communities, created new levels of communication between husbands and wives, gave women bargaining power in family decision-making, and raised women's status in their communities.

In the North, where many of the 100 WG members associated with UWA were widows, the enhanced skills and ability to earn a living taught women self-reliance, gave them a greater sense of pride in themselves, and improved their socioeconomic status. In a similar fashion, UNIVA assisted women to initiate soap making and cloth dyeing enterprises in their communities, the benefits of which attracted community members to UNIVA's literacy and civic education classes. In both regions, women revealed that men were more inclined to allow their wives to participate in *100 Women Group* activities once they saw the tangible monetary benefits that accrued to them and their families.

In the Southeast, the issue of greater income generating capacity was less pronounced. While a few women brought up the fact that *garri* processing machines were needed to improve the women's food output, the economic situation did not arise as a prominent concern among *100 Women Group* members.

In terms of infrastructure improvements, 100 WG members cited newly paved or graded roads, electricity, new schools, and coordinated waste disposal. Through the urging of a 100 WG in the Southwest, for example, the local government allocated space for a parking lot next to a market to reduce accidents involving children and delivery trucks and hired a guard to monitor the new parking regulations. In another community, women approached their local chiefs with their concerns about their children having to cross a busy highway to get to school. The chiefs took the women's case to the local Landlords' Association and then to the local government. Their combined efforts resulted in a new school on the community's side of the road, which made it unnecessary for children to cross the highway.

Community Support

Community members and traditional, religious, and local government leaders asserted that the 100 WG project had led to an:

- Improved understanding of gender inequities and the value of women's contributions to their communities,

- Increased respect and support for 100 WG members and their partner NGOs, and
- A desire for continued collaboration with civil society organizations.

On the whole, community and local government officials interviewed were very supportive of the work of the *100 Women Groups* in all three regions. Traditional chiefs and leaders expressed appreciation to the women, NGOs, and CEDPA for their support that had brought about so many community improvements, in particular, paved roads and reliable sources of electricity and water. For their part, the local leaders said that they were happy to assist women in taking their concerns and requests to local governments because they recognized the benefits to their communities. Many local government chairmen and other representatives expressed a new understanding of the value that women's contributions were making to the families in their communities, and they had increased respect for the NGOs sponsoring the *100 Women Groups*. The LG chairmen's universal lament, however, was that the local governments had little funding to further aid the women's group efforts. The LG representatives were quick to add, though, that they would continue their encouragement of and cooperation with the women and their activities. The Head of Department of Education and Social Development enthusiastically stated, "The days of women and girls being homebound are long past. Those ideas must change, and we are up to the challenge."

A woman from Ebonyi commented that:

For a woman to make modest contributions when men were talking was viewed as a very grievous offense for which any woman could be lynched. Now [because of the 100 WG], my husband respects my opinions when vital decisions are being taken."

Personal Empowerment

Across Nigeria and associated with six different partner NGOs, women overwhelmingly agreed that they felt more confident in their abilities to formulate ideas and have informed opinions. They also expressed comfort sharing those opinions in public forums, including *100 Women Group* meetings, discussions with husbands and community members, and meetings with local government leaders.

During interviews and focus group discussions, women consistently responded that they used to be "shy," but following participation in the 100 WG interventions, they learned that they could articulate their thoughts and had the right to contribute those thoughts and have them seriously considered. Women often said that prior to 100 WG membership, they lacked the personal self-esteem necessary to challenge traditional norms that silence women and keep them out of debate and decision-making. In most family and community situations in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, it is forbidden for women to take part in discussions and decision-making; only men can participate.

With their newfound concepts of self worth and value, both individually and as a group, the members of 100 WGs have begun to view themselves as partners in their family lives and community development. In addition, many admitted to considering elected office as not only critical to women's status, but as a career within their grasp.

In summary, the achievements of the 100 WG by region are as follows:

Table 2.

North	Southwest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>No existing CBOs – New CBOs for women were organized around trade affiliations</u> such as soap making, grain selling, traditional medicine, or hair weaving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Income-generating activities (IGA) and loans</u>: 100 WG train women in such vocations as weaving, pomade and soap making. The groups mobilized women for political participation by setting up credit and loans associations for women.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to work in Islamic culture to <u>remove certain taboos</u>: Through the 100 WG efforts, women were able to meet with other women outside the home, women were trained so they could run a market stall, and women were educated on HIV/AIDS and FP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Accountability, anti-corruption, voting for women</u>: Under its civic education and literacy programs, for example, UNIVA trained women in voting procedures and what to expect during election campaigns. COWAN 100WG members were particularly active in campaigns for women to gain elected office or to be appointed to local government positions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Girls’/women’s education was often the entry point for a 100 WG.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Parliamentary Forum</u>– COWAN started this innovative concept to achieve greater cohesion and results in the legislative arena. The forum includes representatives who convene to discuss regional issues and take more concerted political action on behalf of their members.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The movement against street hawking by young girls</u>: Girls are often found on the streets hawking small goods for income rather than in the classroom. Women came together to discuss girls’ education with their community members and leaders and were able to persuade them that girls should go to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Levies for revolving funds and to finance activities</u>: COWAN’s 100 WG members make small monthly contributions to the “Women’s Political Participation and Development Fund” and the money from this fund goes exclusively to political action activities on behalf of female candidates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Contribution of women to household incomes</u>: 100 WG trained women so they could produce an income through a micro enterprise/market stall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of funds and support for women candidates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Voter registration drive</u>: 100 WG were instrumental in registering new voters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Conflict resolution/dispute resolution</u>: 100 WG provided training in these areas.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Safe motherhood and FP</u>: Members of the 100 WGs educated women, men, and traditional elected and religious leaders on the dangers of FGC and its violation of a girl’s right to health. Their efforts resulted in entire communities ending the practice and passing a law making FGC illegal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>100 Family Structure, PIC/PAC – UNIVA – University Village Association</u>: When Muslims were reluctant to have women participate in the 100 WG, in response to these constraints and in an effort to introduce the 100 WG strategy in the communities, the 100 Sample Family concept developed that incorporates both men, women and youth. • <u>Literacy</u>: Many 100 WG started literacy programs for women. UNIVA assisted women to initiate soap making and cloth dyeing enterprises in their communities, the benefits of which attracted community members to UNIVA’s literacy and civic education classes.
Southeast	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FGC</u> - Groups disseminated RH information to create awareness and correct misinformation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Agricultural setting</u>: Focus on rural areas and needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Education</u>: 100 WG raised awareness of the importance of girls’ education, often forging new links with local governments as a result. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Women’s equality and rights</u>: 100 WG raised awareness of women’s rights and worked to end cultural practices that impinged on women’s freedom of movement, association, and speech and on their dignity as human beings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Forced/early marriage</u>: Women articulated the health consequences of forced/early marriage among young girls (i.e., obstetric fistula). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Safe Motherhood, FP, HIV/AIDS</u>: Groups disseminated RH information to create awareness and correct misinformation. Activities impacted on the lives of the women.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Widowhood rights</u>: 100 WG raised awareness on women’s rights violations and harmful traditional practices such as widow abuse. 	

Update on Performance

More recently, through advocacy programs on family planning, safe motherhood, and HIV/AIDS counseling programs, 100 WGs affiliated with COWAN and COCIN demonstrated increased women’s participation to support positive RH practices and rights.

Under another Democracy & Governance project, Engendering Legislative Issues (ELI), 100 WGs in Edo and Ebonyi states were organized by a professional women’s organization, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), to address issues affecting women through state-level advocacy and legislation action. In the 18 months of the ELI Program, 100 WGs’

achievements include the passage of legislation on: FGC, harmful widowhood practices, early age of marriage, girls' education, and women trafficking in several states in the Southeast and South-South regions of the country.

The 100 WGs' partners have sustained systemic change by demanding transparency and accountability from elected officials through town hall meetings. The groups have also stimulated other individuals and groups to become more proactive in negotiating for women. They have catalyzed grassroots groups to lobby various political institutions for women politicians. In the ongoing primaries for local elections in Ebonyi State, for example, FEWA advocated with 100 WGs' members to support the 22 women aspirants who are also 100 WG members; 12 out of the 22 women running won the primary election.

The groups adapted gender-sensitive strategies in their work to access economic rights with the local councils and elected officials. Group members also took the initiative to resolve communal conflicts through CEDPA experiential training in conflict mitigation.

The state-level 100 WG members engaged in state and national political discussions such as affirmative action for women's involvement in politics or governance process and in constitutional reform issues. The 100 WGs' members have been the bulk of CEDPA D&G participants in its core training/capacity building in conflict mitigation, candidate skill development, voter's mobilization/education, and election monitoring.

COWAN 100 WGs members in six states are providing ongoing advocacy on the 50/50 gender balance in elective and appointive positions for the forthcoming elections. Under CEDPA capacity building for women aspirants', COWAN provided training to 65 members and also supported 32 women aspirants who are 100 WG members across the six states with campaign loans from the COWAN political participation development fund.

The 100 WGs now provide an alternative platform for building leadership skills. In the last registration exercise for the 2003 elections, several partners' 100 WG members were selected as registration officers/monitors.

Lessons Learned and Conclusions

Lessons Learned

The many lessons learned from the 100 WG strategy include the following:

- The *100 Women Group* strategy is an effective organizing concept that facilitates information sharing between grassroots women and collective strategic planning, and provides avenues for participation in the decision-making process at the community, LGA, state, and national levels.
- Because grassroots groups and concerns drive the 100 WG agenda, it promotes sustained change towards women's empowerment.
- The D&G strategy is more effective when it is linked to economic empowerment.

- The internal democracies of partner NGOs need to be strengthened to serve as role models for civil society organizations.
- Even in very traditional societies, change is possible through dialogue and negotiation.
- Equal attention must be given to programmatic and financial aspects of the program.
- With a little training, non-health NGOs can be great assets in health promotion.
- While the *100 Women Groups* have remained largely informal, this feature has ensured their accessibility and their ability to address a wide variety of issues and cater for women's diverse needs.
- Initially conferring economic benefits, the 100 WG has been instrumental in persuading men and local leaders to accept women's growing activism.
- Each 100 WG derives its strength and vitality from locally adapted approaches as well as from links to regional and national networks.
- To survive, the 100 WG needs to have financial resources for the women and for group activities.
- Women's rights and dignity are key goals.
- Leadership comes in different forms.
- Personal empowerment and confidence can have an impact at the family/community and group/constituency levels.

Conclusions

A key strategy for achieving results was building cordial relationships with leadership from the community to the state and national levels. For many groups, this was a necessity to gain acceptability within the various communities.

Many women interviewed were ecstatic about the changes in their personal life resulting from their 100 WG membership. They noted that before their involvement in the groups they were shy and reserved, but as a result of capacity building and the exposure they have received, they can now speak in public and parley with traditional rulers and other leaders when they have issues to discuss. Interviews with traditional leaders and local government officials showed just how well the women had influence on leadership. In almost all regions, the groups had succeeded so well in their advocacy and lobbying efforts that the local leaders were very aware of women's issues. In some instances they showed their support by backing the groups morally and with financial and other resources.

The 100 WG could serve as a useful model to bring local issues to the state and parliamentary levels. The 100 WGs can also serve as early warning systems for conflict or potential conflicts.

Based on its success to date, the *100 Women Group* strategy can be described as:

- A generic network-building mechanism that can be successfully adapted to partner organizations with differing missions and programmatic activities to create civic awareness and promote women in decision-making roles and political office;

- A mechanism to leverage D&G tools to create enabling environments for reproductive health and safe motherhood;
- A flexible strategy that has been used to achieve a wide variety of basic needs and strategic interests of women, including increased reproductive and maternal health awareness and care, awareness of the harmful effects of female genital cutting, access to potable water, increased education for girls, and increased income for women; and
- A strategy that has, in some instances, gone beyond its original mandate to serve as a mechanism for conflict resolution in areas of ethnic discord.

Table 3.

Statistics of 100 WG Update	1999-2000	2001/2002 Update
1. COWAN	74-100 WG in 74 LGAs	85 D&G 100 WG in 85 LGAs
2. COWAN	4 state-level 100 WG	6 state-level 100 WG in each of the state –level group, men have been mobilized and admitted into 100 WGs. 120 male members have been documented or 20 per state.
3. COCIN	2 LGAs 100 WG	2 LGAs 100 WG
4. UNIVA	7 100 WG in 2 states, Oyo /Osun State without male members	7 state-level 100 WG with 140 male members and a total of 770 members.
5. Northern Cross-Rivers Women Association (NCRWA)	5- 100 WG	5 – 100 WG in 5 LGAs
6. RAHAMA	5 –100 WG	5-100 WG
7. FEWA, EBONYI State	100 WG IN 13 LGAs	100 WG in 13 LGAs
8. FAIWA, UYO.	100 WG in 8 LGAs	100 WG in 8 LGAs
9. FIDA EDO	2 LGAs 100 WG	2 LGAs 100 WG

In addition to the above list of CEDPA/Nigeria partners, there are an additional seven partners with 100 WG networks that CEDPA no longer supports; no updated information was available on their performance.

Next Steps and Recommendations

There are two potential pathways for the long-term prospects of the *100 Women Groups*. The first would be to formalize the 100 WG structures into a federated network that cuts across states and other geopolitical divides, without losing their community representation and internal democracy. This structure would enhance the groups’ effectiveness in political mobilization and provide a much needed, coordinated support for women candidates during elections. It could also provide a more legitimate role for participating in public deliberations at the state and national levels, thus increasing the groups’ utility and focusing their energies on more general women’s

issues. Most importantly, it would also make them more viable to receive outside funding, diversify their funding sources, and increase their sustainability.

The second way forward would be to maintain the loose informal nature of the 100 WGs and continue to support the wide variety of issues and strategies in different locations. In this manner, the 100 WGs would provide a platform for increased knowledgeable participation in decisionmaking at the LGA and state levels. Their participation in higher national decision-making efforts would remain through linkages with other national women networks, which can also provide a source of funding, technical, and organizational capacities. The risk here is in possible loss of ownership, of a community or grassroots voice, and of their representational quality.

Whichever pattern the organizational development of the 100 WGs takes the focus and activities of these groups should be geared towards greater involvement in decisionmaking and in the policy and legislative processes. This entails integrating the groups into engagements, dialogue, peace building, and conflict detection/management mechanisms at all levels. A programming challenge will be how to make the 100 WGs more acceptable within current decision-making processes and how to make these processes more receptive to grassroots initiatives, especially in policy, legislative, and program planning and design.

Suggested next steps for the 100 WG strategy include:

- Building the network by encouraging regional and national alliances;
- Providing a “best model” that other communities can adapt and implement (ongoing in Benin and Senegal);
- Delivering increased financial support for local projects, micro enterprises, and women’s political activities; and/or
- Continuing to transform women into change agents who can catalyze and sustain change at all levels of their lives.

Courageous activism can be fostered and, with relatively small investments, set in motion changes that can enhance life for current and future generations.

Some challenges for the ongoing sustainability of the 100 WGs are their ability to: maintain internal democratic procedures; raise funds; combat internal issues (i.e., jealousy); co-opt obstacles such as men and religious leaders in the North to make them more supportive of women; overcome cultural barriers to women’s development; link professional women with rural/grassroots women to their mutual benefit; and use the 100 WG as a framework and organizing strategy, not a project.

The strengths of the 100 WG strategy include its inherent flexibility, its utility as a communication link, the way it promotes the solidarity of women, and its sustainable infrastructure.

We can build on the solid foundation that you have laid for us. We can go even further by helping other budding organizations survive. We have dreams and visions, which can only come to full realization if we are adequately assisted.

~Augustina Item, Afikpo
Local Government,
Ebonyi State