



# PEACE BREEDERS

A compendium of impact stories

“System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism (SARVE) Project” in Kogi State.



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Anicetus Atakpu, ActionAid Nigeria Programme Officer takes The Chief of Staff to Kogi State Governor, Edward Onoja through the uses of various equipment in the livelihood factories donated by ActionAid SARVE project to Women and Youths in the state. Factories handed over includes; cassava processing, block moulding, maize milling, rice milling factories and a bakery, amounting to a total of N35.5 Million Naira.





# Foreword

Over 1.8million Kogi population fall between the age of 18 – 35years; although energetic, innovative and creative, a large number of them are unemployed, out-of-school and excluded from participating even in community governance which makes them vulnerable to violence.


ActionAid Nigeria understands that without a deliberate engagement with these youths, it will be difficult to achieve de-radicalisation and peace. It is in this light that ActionAid Nigeria leveraged on her experiences from the deployment of her Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) in Conflicts and Emergencies to enhance the capacity of youths for conflict analysis and response.

The System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism (SARVE) Project was funded by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and was implemented in Kogi state by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with her local rights partner, Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change in Development (PIBCID) to support communities to build resilience against violent extremism through enhanced capacity and structures to utilize available resources in preventing radicalisation, respond to, withstand and overcome impact of adverse violent extremism should it occur.

The 30 months project has addressed the fundamental drivers of violent extremism in five communities (Ofuloko, Okpakpata, Osara, Osaragada/Aku & Fulani) across two local government areas (Adavi and Igalamela/Odolu) in Kogi State and this publication highlights the achievements of the SARVE project.



**Ene Obi**  
Country Director.

The image shows two young girls in the foreground, dressed in traditional Ofuloko attire. They are wearing green and yellow plaid wrap-around tops and matching skirts with a decorative orange and yellow border at the bottom. They also have orange beaded headbands and necklaces. The girl on the left has a black tattoo on her cheek and is looking down with her hands clasped in front of her. The girl on the right has a black tattoo on her forehead and is looking down with her hands in a specific dance pose. In the background, other children and a metal structure are visible, suggesting an outdoor event. A text box in the upper right corner provides context for the scene.

Ofuloko children cultural troupe entertains guest during the commissioning of the livelihood support equipment provided by the SARVE project.



# Acknowledgment

**A**s we conclude the first phase of the SARVE Project, we look back in appreciation to all those who have made our work these past years impactful and memorable. The Board, Management and Staff of ActionAid Nigeria remains grateful to everyone who has played key roles in ensuring the successful implementation of the “System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism (SARVE) Project” in Kogi State.

First, we appreciate our funder, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), and applaud the energy and enthusiasm with which key officials of GCERF supported the implementation process throughout the life cycle of the project. We are indeed grateful for the technical skills and insightful advice during your field visits and report reviews.

We are quick to mention the roles of our esteemed partners: Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change in Development (PIBCID), Osaragada/Aku Community Development Association, and Ofuloko Community Development Association; whose commitment and contributions to the outcomes of the project are commendable.

To the government of Kogi State, we say thanks you for your support and cooperation, without which the sensitisations, peace walks, peace fiesta, conferences, summits, capacity buildings and new policy documents would not have been successful.

We equally appreciate all our community leaders and facilitators whose roles in this project have been extremely useful in achieving the gains recorded. Our various resource persons drawn from the Academia, Media, Civil Society Organisations and Security outfits have been remarkably wonderful and have contributed immensely to the attainment of the project goals and objectives.

We particularly appreciate our media friends who ensured continued publicity of various activities of the project in both print and electronic media and helped in garnering public support and acceptance for the project. We will not forget the technical advice of Gbenro Olajuyigbe and Ipoade Omilaju who successfully managed the project at different times.

Finally, as we look forward to next phase of this project in February 2019, we acknowledge the impeccable roles of our staff, especially the project Advisor, Anicetus Atakpu, who have worked tirelessly to keep the project on course within these 30 months. To all those who have played important roles and are not mentioned here, we are eternally grateful to you all.

**Tasallah Chibok**  
Director of Programme

# Introduction

August 2016, ActionAid Nigeria commenced an ambitious project to address the intrinsic issues of extreme violence spilling across communities in Kogi State, it was against this backdrop that The System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism, SARVE project was launched.

At the time, Kogi was on the radar; it topped the States with reports of the most vicious and violent attacks. It was an unsafe corridor for about 11 States of Nigeria. So, the choice for the project location was strategic because of the spill-over effect the impact will make on other adjoining States.

The crime record could almost match a war zone; people were kidnapped on almost a daily basis; highway robbery was regular and deadly; herdsmen/farmers clash was at its peak. Added was the biting issues of poverty; lack of minimal infrastructure; poor or complete absence of health and educational facilities. The people just lived; and died. There was little to inspire a good life.

The baseline conducted at the inception of the project also revealed disturbing findings: Only 3 to 8 percent of the community members are literate. The selected communities for the project are: Okpakpata, Osaragada/Aku, Osara, Ofuloko and the Fulani Community. The choice of the project communities was made because of the high incidences of violence and radicalisation in the region.

The project's strategy was designed as a methodical participatory approach to ending violence and radical extremism.

The following were identified as key drivers to violence and radicalisation of people in communities: Poverty, Illiteracy, Lack of Social Cohesion, Lack of Equal opportunities and Access


It also has three simplified initiative to reach its objective.

- a. The Youth and Peace Development Initiative
- b. The Women Inspirators
- c. The Community Livelihood Support Component.

The project therefore, developed an approach to building social cohesion in the communities, assisting government in enhancing and improving structures and systems for better efficiency. The project also focused on providing platforms for learning and sharing of opportunities especially in rural communities where people were economically and socially excluded. It focused on building the capacity of women and youth, by raising their self-awareness, providing exposure to relevant life skills and giving the communities a general sense of purpose.

The projects sufficiently addressed: Farmers and Herdsmen Crisis; Preventing Violent Extremism and Creating Alternatives to Youth Restiveness and Violent Extremism. These





formed the policy drivers for the project and the outcome has been almost a miracle. For instance; according to Leadership Newspapers: Kogi State recorded over 160 cases of kidnapping between January to June 2015, but no case of kidnapping was recorded between January to June 2018.

Record from the State Police and the local vigilante also attest to the drastic reduction of the rate of kidnapping. Umar Namatazu a 46, is the head of the vigilante group at the Fulani community. Namatazu does less sleepless night these days: “We only have one case of kidnap since this year and we were able to track the kidnappers and rescue the victim” he enthused.

The project identified types of drivers of conflicts and especially the position of extremists particularly in the Northeast part of the country, realising that if nothing is done to curtail the dangerous trend other parts of the country could be engulfed in similar scenario. Some of the contributory drivers of conflict as noted are poverty; unemployment; and hate speeches. Radicalisation to violent extremism cannot be sufficiently addressed without solving the problem of extreme poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. So, the project served essentially as a preventive intervention to a crisis which may occur if nothing is done.

Youths, Women and the Community are at the heart of the project strategies. If there is economic stability and cohesion in communities, there is greater likelihood that radicalisation and violent extremism will be reduced significantly.

ActionAid developed a system of addressing radicalisation by teaching people how to engage without violence, through a Community Action and Response Team (CART), programme which acts as advocacy and response team. CART have been instituted in all the project communities, this has helped to achieve cohesion between people and community, there is effective communication among communities, people and communities are now engaging the government to press their demands such as: electricity; water; and other essential things they lacked.

There is also a cultural dialogue present in the communities as a result of the project, town-hall meetings are held in all the project communities. There is an emergence of community critical mass that can inspire change.

The project has directly reached 12,985 youths, 4,230 women and 8,705 men. It has also sensitised about one-third of the 1.8million youths in the State through its regular radio jingle, peace walks and capacity development programmes.

One landmark success was the sustained advocacy which resulted in the passage of the Kogi State Youth Development Commission Bill. ActionAid supported the process from conception through different stages, making technical and financial inputs to the young people leading the call for the bill.

It supported a youth summit attended by more than 6000 youths across the State. It adds to the project a huge success and a mass population of people who can sustain and scale up the project to avoid reversal of the achievements.



Zubairu

## A SIGH OF RELIEF

Zubairu Matthew is an example of the real testimonial of the impact of social cohesion. Matthew's notoriety extended beyond his own community. In Osara community, no one dared him. He was 'ruthlessly stubborn' as described by one Haruna Nanah, who has known him from childhood. Although he wasn't physically abusive, he was rude, and he had influence among young people who followed his steps. Matthew was said to be brash and disrespectful and feared in the community.

The community has a large youth population; most of the young people here do not have employable skills, most have not been to secondary school; hence are faced with lack of options and equal opportunities to thrive. So, they become vulnerable and exposed to acts of thuggery and criminality.

But his story has not been all about his hard to bend stance and his notoriety in the community, he has also had a fair share of rejection from family and friends which has toughened him. He has watched a friend attacked and murdered in his presence by the violent herdsmen.

That experience never leaves him; it perhaps contributed to his anger with the world around him. "I watched the murder of one of my best friends – Mumuni, he was quiet and not troublesome. He was just trying to settle an altercation between a woman and the herdsmen, the woman was complaining of how the herds of cattle destroyed her crops. It was going to be a violent exchange as the herdsman vowed to beat her up, as Mumuni tried to settle the dispute, he was brutally attacked and left to die" he said with a misty eye.



“For some time now, I have observed that he has become calm...” Matthew chuckles as his friend spoke of him; he buried his face as he scribbles with the sand. No one feels at ease when his past is talked about. “I thought that it is his involvement in religion that has finally calmed him but I realised that it is his participation with ActionAid that has influenced his new behaviour.... I am learning from him and I am thinking of also participating in the programmes of ActionAid. His ways of life now influence me, he has helped me to build trust in people, he has helped me cooperate with others in the community, he is like a pastor to me now” Sanni said.



Zubairu

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## How ActionAid Intervened

His transformational journey is a shock to those who know him; they never believed that he could be calm and organised. “The journey to my new self began with ActionAid events. We had a forum in our community where for the first time I learnt about the dangers of violence, they taught us about how to cooperate with others in the community, they taught us how to develop our interpersonal skills. It was my first exposure” he said.

So, transformed by his first lesson with ActionAid, he began to turn his revengeful anger against the herdsmen who had killed his friend to a constructive engagement. “One of my biggest goals is to organise a meeting with the Igbira youths; most of them are not educated, they have no skills, I want to mobilise a forum where we can educate ourselves and share with them how engaging with ActionAid in the past 2years has improved my life and teach them to also do the same” He said.

Matthew is not just worried about his own needs, he works as a welder and that appears to be a good skill to earn an amoderate income in the community, he is more concern about dealing with the issues of unemployment in the community. “The rate of unemployment among young people is very high and that can lead to crime” he said, “though ActionAid empowerment programme has helped to reduce the rate of unemployment but there is still so much the government need to do to improve life for us”.



Enemi

## EMPOWERED TO EXCEL

**E**nemi Michael, 26, has a bag full of sad tales. She got married at 20, with no skill or education; she raised 3000 naira (8 USD), bought a handful of groundnut, gather used wine bottles and began her business. It was a difficult choice to sit and do nothing because her husband's farm was razed down by the herdsmen who invaded his farm. After the herdsmen attack on her husband's farm, he became the breadwinner.

When she got pregnant, she could not do much “It was a difficult pregnancy. I was between life and death, at that period we only eat from the farm, we had no money for anything” she retorts.

And when it was time for delivery, she borrowed everything from pads to the baby clothing. She couldn't even afford the hospital bill of 7,000 (19 USD).

She had to pay the doctor on an installment for 6 months after delivery.

“I just heard about ActionAid few months ago from my friend, when she told me some of the things they taught her, I became curious and wanted to know more” she said.

When told of the Cassava Milling Machine, she switched business. She now buys cassava in bulk, process it and makes it into its finished cassava flakes (Garri). “It is better than what I use to do before, if I get about 30,000 naira (82USD) to invest, I will be assured that I and my family will no longer suffer” she said.

Samuel Amana, 30; is an expectant father. He is excited about the prospect of fatherhood. As a subsistence farmer, he has enough food just for himself and his young wife but not enough money to care for other need of the expected child. “As for me I can manage to eat from the farm and sell some produce, but when you are expecting a baby you need money for many things” he quips.

Amana no longer need to worry for extra cash to care for the expected child, he was one of the young persons employed at the Okpakpata Rice Mill, there he earns to augment his income and save for his family.





Rebecca

Rebecca Samuel is the chairperson of the Okpakpata Women Maize Milling Multipurpose Cooperative. The cooperative has a membership of 40 women farmers. It was formed after attending the Basic Accounting for Cooperatives training facilitated by ActionAid. The women were once uncoordinated and unorganised, lacking synergy and cooperation.

The women have increased their productivity and yield because of the exposure they got from ActionAid capacity development programmes.

Rebecca and her team's first taste of learning was the exposure they got from the training sponsored by ActionAid, and they applied the lessons immediately. "We have learnt how to do things together with others, we have been thought about the power of togetherness and the culture of savings" she said.

Farmers have backbreaking experience processing their farm produce. It is one of the challenges of smallholder women farmers. "We travel Nine miles on motor bike to the nearest Mill processing Machine, on a patched road" She said. Aside the stress of travelling long road to Mill Cassava, the cost also adds up to the overall market price. "It cost 1,500 Naira to transport one bag of cassava. The journey is long and exhausting" she said.

At the inception of ActionAid peace building initiative in the community, like other communities, a baseline survey showed the link between poverty and violence; hence the need to include a livelihood component. The women requested for a Maize Milling Machine, so that the stress of traveling miles for processing and the cost can be cut.

With the installed Milling Machine fully operational, there is less stress for the women farmers, their productivity has improved, and they earn more revenue.

"At the root of our problem is illiteracy and idleness" said Godwin Alhassan, one of the youth leaders representing Ofuloko.

The educational infrastructure in Ofuloko is dilapidated. 6 mud-made classrooms sits about 400 children, cramped rooms with only two windows, the children learn sitting on cold floor. "Thanks to ActionAid for building new school blocks for our children and providing learning materials" Alhassan said.

Ofuloko, like many communities in Kogi State, lack the essential amenities to thrive, the youths are uneducated and without jobs, they become easy mercenaries for politicians who use them as thugs during election.

As observed, the high rate of unemployment and the level of illiteracy are main drivers of conflict in this community. But the presence of ActionAid has transformed their mindset and view about one another.

ActionAid encouraged formation of different groups within the community: The youth group and the women group.

These groups chose their own leaders, they meet regularly, they discuss issues affecting them and the community, they share job or skill building opportunities and they know themselves better. The people from the six sub communities are now better united, living the true meaning of Ofuloko: settled under the tree; the farming community is learning to live together in peace.

Unlike before, the community has not reported clashes; they say ActionAid programmes keep them busy. ActionAid built a factory which housed Cassava Processing Machine for the Women and a Maize Milling Machine for the youth group. So, instead of gathering to gossip, they gather to work together.

## How ActionAid Intervened

One of the first steps to ensuring equal opportunity especially for women is through advocacy to traditional institutions on the need to provide lands for women seeking also to persuade the traditional leaders to expunge the tradition forbidding women to own inheritance.

Land has always been a key factor of production and a determining factor for ending poverty. Hence; the lack of access to land has constrained women from advancing economically.

The issues of economic exclusion of woman is been addressed through ActionAid's direct engagements with the traditional institutions in the communities.

Also, the project's women action plan and livelihood activities assisted in the provision of empowerment programmes like: Cassava and Maize Processing Machine, Block Molding Machines and other direct impact programmes.

Women and youth cooperative leaders were also trained on Book Keeping and Financial Management.

# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH...

**M**ustapha Shaibu, 21; could hardly lift his face, he shrugs, scratch his head as he struggles to justify the reason for his addiction to hard drugs.

From childhood, Shaibu barely felt parental love. His father married 3 wives, had 9 children and never cared much about him. As early as 7 years old, he had already an experience in rejection, at home and at school. That experience followed him to Ofuloko Community Secondary School, where his full-blown rejection led to drug addiction.

Shaibu said he was bullied by his English teacher. "Each time he comes into the class, he will walk me out of his class. This continued for a long time and sometimes I miss class assignments". He recalled, telling a friend about his frustration when the friend told him the only solution was to get high on drugs. "I was initially scared but when I took a sip of the bottle, I could hardly drop it" he spoke of his use of tramadol, a ban substance.

The habit continued until he became addicted to the use of tramadol and other hard drugs. He later graduated to the use of marijuana. At this point his school teacher noticed his unusually bold stance and quit bullying him. For Shaibu, the drug met his purpose, but he was not ready to let go. He had become so physically abusive and a nuisance to the community.

"My father had to disown me, he chased me out of his house and I began to live on the street" he said he was only 14 when his father kicked him out of the house. Rather than make him sober, he became more vicious.

He started a drug cartel in the community; comprising boys of his age; they terrorised the community, the gang robbed to fill up their drug stock.

*Mustapha*





Monday Paul, 20; was also a member of the drug gang. Paul; still looking restive was a Fulani mercenary. "I fight a lot" he retorts; trying to build a fist to show how truly he fights. "People hire me to fight, that is my job. Oh! that use to be my job" he said. And he takes a fee depending on the kind of casualty that is envisaged, if there is going to be terminal casualty the fees are higher. For instance; he narrates: "I charge 5,000 naira (about 13 USD) if it's just a community fight, just to beat up someone for a client. But I charge more if am taken outside the community to fight" he said.

The herdsmen too, hire him; he earns 20,000 naira (about 55 USD) to help them attack farmers on a retaliatory mission. "I think taking drugs (hard drugs) is bad, it makes me get high that I don't recognise human being" he wiped his sweaty face, showing deep sense of remorse.

Paul and the gang are also used as political thugs. They always looked forward to being engaged by politicians because they earn between 100,000 to 150,000 (275 to 413 USD). Ballot box snatching during election is a big business. "The politicians take us very early in the morning to nearby bushes where election is taking place; we use to sleep around the place so that we can study the environment. As soon as we snatch the ballot box, we will take the box to a safe place and begin to thumbprint for the candidate or the party as instructed by the person that sent us" he spoke of his near death experience: "During one election in one local government, as I snatched the box, the police followed me, they pursued me until I dropped the box and escaped. I thought I was going to die that day because the police were shooting up (in the air) as the pursued me". Even now he heaves a sigh of relieve.

## How ActionAid Intervened

As part of SARVE priority programme, ActionAid focus on reduction of violent extremism and through strengthening systems and structures among high volatile communities has tremendously caused a drastic reduction in violence and visible forms of extremism. This is abundantly evidenced in Ofuloko community.

Shaibu and Paul are living testimonial. The boys who were notorious for terrorising the community are now themselves change bearers.

"I knew all along that I was on a wrong part, my father disowned me, my sibling avoided me like a plague, I was deep in drugs, I didn't know how to come out of the mess until I came intouch with one community seminar organised by ActionAid, we were taken to Lokoja where we participated in a 3 days seminar and workshop" he said that meeting was the beginning of his change of behaviour: "what they told us about how bad violence is really touched me, they taught us to become change agents too in our community and now I am proud that I am now changed and I am also talking to some members of the gang to quit drugs" Shaibu said.

Paul now rides commercial bicycle which he got a hire-purchase. He now assumes a sense of purpose and responsibility for himself and his community.

For now, he earns just enough to put food on his plate while he hopes for a better future. "I can't believe that I am still alive considering all that I have done, I thank ActionAid for organising that programme that changed my life" he said.



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a striped shirt, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a mobile phone to his ear with his right hand and looking off to the side with a slight smile. The background is a bright, outdoor setting with green foliage and a tree trunk. A blue banner with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## HOW SARVE CHANGED EVERYTHING

*Abdulahi*

**A**bdulahi Mohammed, 30; thinks that the world has been unfair to him. He was raised as a nomadic boy. At the age of 10, he was already in custody of 20 cattle. He takes them to grazing, combing the entire community for green pastures.

Mohammed had no chance for schooling; he does not have any form of education. His life is centered on his herds of cattle and he seemed satisfied because his father and his entire sibling lived in the cattle farm.

Then, he was robbed of his cattle. Cattle's rustling was very popular at the time; rustlers sack a whole community when they strike. Mohammed was a victim; he had his entire flock stolen. "It was a very painful experience" he lamented. Although still about 11 years old at the time, he wanted revenge by all means. Soon he got an opportunity to retaliate and he took the chance without blinking.

He joined the gang of cattle rustlers at 11, the youngest in a chain of criminal bandit which terrorised the country. In the gang, they have a group of 4 with each group consisting 20 people to form their own battalion; each of the group specialise in Kidnapping, Armed robbery; Highway robbery and Cattle rustling. It turned a deadly group.

"I never wanted to get into stealing but when I remember how my entire flock of cattle was rustled I told myself; I must get my own revenge. He belonged to the cattle rustling group, he learnt so fast that he became the ring leader at 15. "We rustled a lot of cow; I didn't want to stop until I get back my 20 cattle forcefully taken from me" he said his intention was not to kill but to recover his cattle and it appeared that he got them all back and even more.





Abdulahi

He belonged to the gang until he had fully executed his revenge mission. But it was difficult to leave; they were feared and vicious and took to the criminality as a way of survival. He never still took a break for lack of another means of sustenance “Everything I know is about cattle, that is the only way I know how to survive” he said. Rustled cattle are quickly sold in the market just in case the owner had put a mark on the body of the cattle.

At 30, Mohammed already has 2 wives with 10 children. Only one of them is in school. It was a tough fight for survival and he was left with the only option to rustle cattle.

Umaru Namatazu, 46 Mohammed's corroborates story. Namatazu is the Chief vigilante (a civilian security force in the community) his work is to scoop through the community to smoke out criminal persons or gang. “I know this boy, he was very troublesome” Namatazu also narrates how a 10year old boy was kidnapped and a ransom of 2million was demanded. We had to contact the Police and the Military; which assisted in returning the boy unharmed.

“We realised that it is information and intelligence that we work with, there is less force required when there is sufficient intelligence”.

The Fulani community now experiences such peace that other communities are reaching out to them to learn how they achieved peace.

## How ActionAid Intervened

Mohammed was nominated to attend one of the several peace building activities organised by ActionAid. It was the first time in his life to be in an organised setting. “I had never slept in such a big hotel that night. I was awake all night imagining how I came across such highly respected people: the commissioners were present, I was already getting tired of my lifestyle because whenever I leave my house in the morning, I know that I can kill or can be killed” he said.

ActionAid livelihood support for most vulnerable communities has also assisted in building and sustaining peace in the community.

“As the Chief vigilante security officer in this Fulani community, I can tell you that there has been significant improvement in the security of this area, it is no longer like before when herdsmen and farmers outrun themselves in gun battle. There is tolerance among the farmers and herdsmen, all thanks to the peace pact initiated by ActionAid” Namatazu said.

He said ActionAid has brought together a network of State security agencies which he collaborates with. “I was just informed of someone that was kidnapped last week, I immediately linked up with the security people in my network, they analysed and tracked the mobile phone used by the kidnapper and we were able to trace the culprit to a member of the family of the kidnapped girl” Namatazu said. one, I thank ActionAid for organising that programme that changed my life” he said.



# A NEW BREED OF WOMEN

**H**adizat Muhammed, 55, had no courage to speak up in public. Like they say; it is a man's world in Ofuloko.

The job of a woman was cut out: get marry; give birth to children; and stay at home.

It is no longer so. Hadizat is now a social mobiliser. She leads in various women group in the community. She said: We were blind, before ActionAid came to our community and opened our eyes” she speaks of self-awareness, not of physical blindness.

“They began to engage us through gender-based outreaches, we were learning a lot of skills and some of us for the first time travelled to other cities in Nigeria. It was the exposure that enlightened us and brought change to me and other women” said Hadiza with contagious confidence.

Seated on a bamboo made bench, she is surrounded by a bevy of admirers who watch her speak and often showers praises on her.

Hadiza is the women leader of the Olubo-Ojo Women Meeting. Women from all households are part of the group because of the economic and social benefit. When the women gather at their meetings, there is a set agenda, they have written rules and regulations and slams a fine on any member that breaks the rules. Part of the rule is to compel women not to physically abuse each other; the rule stipulates respect for their spouses too.

The meetings have turned out many change agents from the community to the admiration of the men, who have observed positive behavioural changes from their wives as a result of membership of the women group. A fine is slammed on women who engaged in domestic violence, such penalties include withdrawal of opportunity to receive small business loan. “We would not have known how to do all these without the intervention of ActionAid” she said.



Hadizat

# YOUNG, EMPOWERED AND FREE



*Abdul*

**A**bdul Abubakar is an active youth leader at Osaragada/Aku community. Youthful and lanky, he shoulders a lot of responsibilities in the community. As one born and raised in the community, he has seen the community emerge from absolute abandonment to a minimal improvement of infrastructure.

Abubakar's late father had the largest farm land in the community. Farming was the family business and as customary the first son would inherit the business, so he abandoned his studies after secondary school to join his father in the farm. He had to work in the farm to help raise school fees for his 6 younger siblings. It wasn't his wish to abandon school for farming, but he had to do it to support his family. "As a young boy, I was very troublesome; my father had to get me a wife in my teenage years and begged me to join the family farming business" he said.

The challenges at home and the community were so much, Abubakar wanted to make a difference but didn't know how to help improve his father's farm business or how to assist the community overcome its many basic challenges. The community lacked basic amenities: no portable water for drinking and not enough to irrigate the farm, they had to trek 25 minutes to fetch water and that experience had caused several casualties.

One Mommoh Jimoh, 45 now late was said to have died of snake bite while on his way to fetch water to wet his crops. The residents apply alum in water before drinking because of the same source of water is used for washing and their cattle too drink from the same.





Abdul

Other challenges are the lack of health care facility. He narrates a story of one Mallam Sunday, a man of about 60, who died on the way to the hospital.

For a community of more than 1000 persons with 4 other adjoining communities: Uro, Urukuochakoko, Inudo and Irapana, the lack of basic primary health care puts the lives of the people at risk.

The educational facility in the community is the LGA primary school, which is the only primary school in the community. The school has no chairs, no teaching aid and pupils rarely receive the least form of basic education because teachers are often absent; complaining of no pay.

## How ActionAid Intervened

“Before the coming of ActionAid to this community, we were our own government, we had no assistance from the State, there was no access to farm input, no farm tools, things were generally unpleasant” Abubakar said.

When the SARVE project commenced in 2016, ActionAid observed that the community requires urgent assistance in provision of clean water. That was the first task. ActionAid constructed a borehole which serves the community helping to provide clean water and a source of irrigation for their farms. This gesture also inspired the representative of the people at the Federal House of Assembly to upgrade the borehole with large overhead tankers.

Aside direct assistance by ActionAid, the people have become more aware of the power within them, they have become so enlightened that they now engage the government through paying advocacy visits to lawmakers and writing letters to government; making request for improved infrastructure in the community.

Abubakar recalled that the community once experienced a power cut for more than 10years, no one in the community did anything, they waited for the government, but nothing happened, until they learnt through ActionAid of how they can properly conduct advocacy and work with the government in improving their community.

“We have discovered that we have been sleeping for too long and that if we don't rise up the government will not respond to us because already they have a lot to do. I am so happy about coming in touch with ActionAid. We are taking on the government on some issues now and the responses have been good so far” Abubakar said.

The Cassava Processing Mill for women and the Block Molding Machine for men has also helped to strengthen communal cohesion. “Our young people are happy and engaged, although there is still much to be done, ActionAid has shown us the path to follow in order to get government attention.” He said.



## A BRAND-NEW EXPERIENCE

The baseline study conducted before the commencement of the project indicated a very low literacy level in all the project target communities. In Osara, Opkakupata, Osaragada/Aku only 3 percent of the population are literate, while Ofuloko has about 8 percent literacy level.

Educational facilities in all the communities are dilapidated; most of the classroom has rusty linking roofs, some of the wooden classroom windows are dangling or completely blown out, the floor of the classrooms is dusty from cracked floor, very few school has chairs and tables; where they have about 8 children are cramped into a long wooden bench. The condition of schools in the project communities is unimaginably appalling. The quality of teaching too is abysmal; unqualified teachers take classes, some are non-trained teaching volunteers employed by the community to assist. In some cases where government teachers were posted to the communities, they often abandon classes because of non-payment of salaries.

In Osaragada/Aku the principal of LGA primary school; the only primary school serving the entire community, practically shut down the school; he is owed salaries of 8 months.

There is obvious lack of equal educational opportunities for children and young people; this is a contributory factor to the rise in crime and poverty in the project communities. So, the advocacy component of the project has shown tremendous successes, some of the communities have attracted government infrastructure; such as road, bridge reconstruction, primary healthcare and rehabilitation and construction of classrooms.

Women from Ofuloko have learnt the advocacy skills and are putting it to work.

Zainab Yahaya, 35; graduated from Ofuloko primary school, her 3 children are enrolled in the same school. Yahaya spoke of the early days of the school which was built in 1980: “I



attended this school, it was a very good school, people come from other communities to attend the school during my time, but as you can see the poor condition now, no one can bring their children here, only poor people like us who cannot afford private schools will have no choice but come here” she said.

Like most facilities in the communities, the dilapidated buildings are home to reptiles and cattle. Children were withdrawn from the Ofuloko primary schools when pupils and teachers were chased out of classroom by scorpions “My son ran home one day, telling me that the entire school had been sacked by scorpion. I withdrew them immediately then but now that ActionAid has built us a new school, have returned them back to school” she said.

Amina Muhammed withdrew her 4 children in one day “The broken building is full of snakes and scorpions, children run from the class and it disrupts learning” she said. Although she could not afford to enroll her children into private schools, she had no choice but withdrew her children because of the poor condition of the building.

Thankfully; the case is now different. Although the old structure remains unused, the government through funding from the Universal Basic Education scheme has built blocks of classrooms at the instance of the community advocacy. This came by series of engagement between the government and the community.

“ActionAid has really helped us to enhance our skills, they have helped us build confidence in ourselves, we have been empowered with livelihood skills and we were taught how to engage the government and work with them to meet the need of our community” said Memuna Yahaya

Each of the project communities are now champions of advocacy. Through advocacy Ofuloko attracted brand new school building; Osaragada/Aku attracted a water project and got their electricity restored after 10years; Okpakpata got their broken bridge rehabilitated; Osara also got their electricity fixed. Each of the communities have committees that identifies the need of the communities and write letters to government and advocacy visits to put pressure on the government to have their concerns captured in the budget.

“This is what we have learnt from ActionAid: that we are partners with the government and in that partnership, it is a social contract, we vote for them to make our lives and communities better” said Yahaya.

## How ActionAid Intervened

Advocacy is a major component of the SARVE project, it's a leadership skill building exercise aimed at awakening the mind of community members on the social contract between them and the government.

Specialised training programmes at Lokoja and various communities are regularly held to empower the community on the rules of engagement between them and government. As already stated; such advocacy has recorded and still records overwhelming successes.

The community people now meet regularly in a town hall meeting facilitated by ActionAid, the meeting was deliberately instituted in order to ensure the sustainability of the project.

ActionAid directly built primary school classrooms with learning materials for the children.



Hon Ahmed Mohammed,  
Deputy Majority Leader  
and Lead Sponsor of the  
Bill.

## BLAZING THE TRAIL

### Kogi Youth Development Commission Bill

**N**ovember 14 was a remarkable day for the SARVE project in Kogi State. After more than 2 years of planning and advocacy, the Kogi State House of Assembly passed the Youth Development Bill into law. The Law will help to create job and increase economic development opportunity for youths in Kogi.

Prior to the Law records by the Youth Advocacy Cluster show that more than 70 percent of all forms of violence in Kogi State were led by young people. In the State, political thug was fashionable; it was a thriving business for young people. This much was admitted by Okwutepa Oseni, the coordinator of the Youth Advocacy Cluster Organisation.

Oseni, 30, began an issue-based campaign after the politically charged 2015 election in Nigeria. His organisation monitored the election and observed the role young people played in the entire political process. “We observed that young people are used during election period and then thrashed after the election” Oseni said.

“Young people were used as praise singers during election or political campaign. But since our campaign across the 21 local government areas, where we have volunteers and coordinators, we are experiencing relative peace in the State. About 32 members of our group were once political thugs and are now advocates against such actions” he said.



Hon Ahmed Mohammed,  
Deputy Majority Leader  
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Bill.



Determined to change that paradigm through massive youth enlightenment campaign, the Youth Advocacy Cluster reached out to ActionAid and Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change in Development (PIBCID) for technical support to drive the campaign.

It initiated the Kogi Youth Development Commission Bill to address the challenges affecting youth development. ActionAid provided support for an advocacy round table on the bill which brought stakeholders together to fine-tune the content of the bill.

The bill gathered support from about eight youth focused groups and has passed second reading in the State House of Assembly. The bill seeks to build capacity of the young people through its major pillars of: Agricultural, ICT, Sports Development; Entrepreneurship and Transition to work.

# COLLABORATING FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The Fulani community of Kogi State appears abandoned in terms of infrastructure like many other communities. Though located in the heart of a military barrack, the poverty induced crime soared. From 2015 to 2017, the security situation in Kogi State reached a disturbing dimension. It was a national concern. The rate of kidnapping, armed robbery, homicide and rape took a sharp rise.

ActionAid realised that the solution to the insecurity of the communities is not only by putting the boots down. There would be need to collaborate and cooperate with security agencies and other civilian security structures.

Like the police would say; Policing is not only for the police: inputs and intelligent sharing among stakeholders and the communities were enhanced and the strategy has yielded better result.



William Aya, 36, is the Police Public Relations Officer, in Kogi State. He speaks about the strategies of building partnerships with relevant stakeholders to improve policing.

The Kogi division of the Police is known for promotion of community policing approach and its collaboration with appropriate stakeholders has recorded a reduction in the incidences of crime in the State.

Available records by the Police showed that young people between the ages of 20 to 35 forms the cluster of people arrested for various forms of crimes.

The Police PRO said: “As we move into communities to stop crime, we also observe some drivers of criminalities in our society; such as high rate of illiteracy, most of the people are not educated, unemployment also, we believe that if some of these issues are addressed there would be reduction in crime rate”.

The community policing strategies appears simple, but it has recorded better achievement than the all-booth-on-the-ground approach. The division visits communities, engage market women, traditional rulers, artisans and the members of National Union of Road Transport Workers.

The visit is always carnival like, the State Police Boss; Mr. Ali Janga would address the crowd, cautioning them to stay away from acts of criminality and to partner with the police to rid the communities of crime. The police also engage the mass media in its Police Dairy Radio show and The Police and You Television programme.

“We believe that as an organisation which promotes service to humanity, ActionAid activities have assisted in making our work easier” the PPRO said.

He provides a tip of advice for young people who are easily trapped in crime “The youths should shun any act of political thuggery, they should not avail themselves to be used by selfish politicians” He cautioned.



# SYSTEM STRENGTHENING FOR IMPROVED SERVICES

One of the strategies to strengthen and sustain the SARVE project is through institutional capacity development, with focus on government agencies and ministries.

Working in the Nigerian civil service could be a tough job. Many jostle for civil service employment because of the perceived job security, but when faced with the harsh reality of some civil servants in a few States, with irregular pay, poor output, low morale, weak structural capacity to evolve and implement human interest policies, the enthusiasm to serve in government dampens.



Motunrayo

Motunrayo Babatunde, Director, Kogi State Ministry of Women Affairs thinks things can be done differently to boost public service morale and turn back the enthusiasm on the job: “I strongly believe that we are partners with the Non-Governmental Organisation, our work is similar; we have to continue to partner, collaborate and share knowledge and experience with NGOs CBOs and where we are deficient in terms of capacity, we call on them to assist” she said.

“In 2017, when Kogi State was invited for the review of the State Action Plan on Peace and Security of Women, a United Nations' Resolution, we turned to ActionAid for technical support and they assisted in the inauguration of an action plan committee, they facilitated a 4-day training to build our capacity to develop an implementable action plan for the State. Without this support, the document may still be hanging on the shelf” Motunrayo said.

Motunrayo Babatunde, a director at the Kogi state ministry of Women Affairs may not be smiling today, like many of her colleagues in the civil service, she still bubbles with the energy to do more but constraint by lean budget, the impact of government in communities has only become complimentary.

“Although we have evident constraint”, she tries to explain “ActionAid has given us the reason to want to go the extra mile” she said.

Government at all levels are drivers of policies, when asked about the plan of the ministry of women affairs to sustain the development and empowerment projects initiated by ActionAid, Motunrayo said “without the tools, we cannot achieve much”

True. No matter the inspiration and energy to drive a policy, if there are no funding and the right capacity, it will hit the rock. But encouraged by the consistent programs of ActionAid to reduce poverty, and empower women with essential life skill, the ministry is pushing new sets of policies that will sustain the gains already achieved “we know that government cannot do everything, NGOs too cannot do everything, so we are working as partners to sustain the various projects so that we do not reverse the progress already achieved” said the director.

Encouraged by testimonials from participants of ActionAid projects, especially the peer education project which has enhanced self-esteem of community women and has empowered them with skills acquisition and personal development, the women affairs ministry according to the director, hope to design a template that will be shared and implemented in all communities in the State.

“We have noticed reduction in violence against women in the communities, some of the women are now better engaged in profitable activities, the strategies of ActionAid is working, that is why we are partnering with them to finish up the job they initiated” she said.

Asorose Alice, Head, Women and Agriculture, Kogi State Ministry of Agriculture, adds: “My work has really improved; with the support of ActionAid, I have gone into interior villages where we never knew people existed, and my work at the office may not take me to such places because there may not be funds to facilitate. ActionAid has given me necessary exposure which has aided my work in the Ministry”.

# LEADING A NEW LIFE

The Fulani communities are tagged for all the wrong reasons: poor infrastructure, insecurity, spontaneous violence, crime, armed robbery and high child abandonment. Daudu Abdulahi, 83, does not like the clan to be so negatively tagged. So, at his age, he is still working hard at ensuring that peace is achieved and sustained in his community.

But washing off the tinge of perception that an average Fulani is given to impulsive violence is not going to take a one-off conversation to clean up. As the torchbearer for the Fulani community in Kogi State, baba Abdulahi, as he is fondly called is leading the frontline charge at peace. "The Fulani people are peace loving people, but they have been repressed and excluded in terms of development and advancement for too long" he quips. "It is this exclusion that makes them tend to fight and defend their territory" he maintained.

At the community, the 83 years old man is viewed like a just judge, hassled by all forms of complaints; from domestic matters to highly sensitive classified matters. He has lived so long to see the extreme forms of violence and he has developed the innate capacity to crack for peace.

At home with his two wives; he is almost revered. Sitting so roughly in his flowing traditional attire, he is served with a feast of assorted tea. "I love tea. That is why I am healthy and strong" he said, laughing so hard that he spilt a few drops on his hand-made rug. Abdulahi is head of the Fulani community in Kogi State; all the entire Fulani clan and communities in the State call him, Baba - father. They love him. They respect him too. His influence transcends beyond Kogi State.

He is sought after in any region where clashes exist between the Fulani's and other tribes. In 2017 he was a guest of Enugu State Governor where he had gone to mediate between communities ravaged by attacks of herdsmen which left more than one hundred people massacred in one night. "These killings make me sad! When I hear people killing their fellow human, as a person it makes me very sad" he said.







*Baba Abdulahi*

Many think he has the magic wand to calm the nerves of people who are already determined to go violent, but he says it is all about striking the right cord in dialogue. “In Nigeria, we are too quick to throw in the police and even the army to control internal crisis, I have told the government and some prominent security people that that approach will not work. I think government needs to learn from what ActionAid is doing, the strategy of ActionAid has helped us, it has saved lives, it has addressed issues of poverty and illiteracy, I believe these things are the major things that contribute to violence.” He said.

Baba Abdulahi's eye pierces with wisdom and counsel. “let me tell you' he whispers in pidgin English “Poverty and lack of education is the main problem” lifting his right thumb, making as if to swear, he assures that if government can focus on education and improve necessities in communities, there will be little or no violence.

Whenever he meets with representative of government, he presses on one single request – education. As one who missed the chance of getting education early in life, he said the only people that can be radicalised are people with no education or source of livelihood.

He believes that the Fulani clan has been unfairly used as a cover up for a gang of external criminal group that is rampaging different communities across the nation. “I have told the security agents that they should investigate those behind this attack because they hide under the name of Fulani” he makes case for the unfair classification of all Fulani's as trouble shooters. He said of himself: “See me now, I am a lover of peace, so is many of my people, the only problem they have is that there is no job and when there is no job, people from anywhere will do just anything to survive because the instinct of survival comes first” He said. Baba Abdulahi is determined to preach and maintain peace in all Fulani communities in Kogi State; he has instituted a community task force in all the communities to prevent all forms of violence. “Let me just say that sometimes you know the solution to a problem but when you are not properly organised, it looks as if you don't know what to do. What ActionAid has done for this community is to get us properly organised to be able to tackle our challenges. For me, I don't know any government but ActionAid, they have tried for us – the Fulani community” he said.

# A REWARDING EXPERIENCE



Oloruntoba Kehinde is the Kogi State Commissioner for Agriculture. The Ministry is one of the most important partners of ActionAid Nigeria.

On assumption of office, Kehinde was faced with the herdsmen/farmers clashes. The crisis worsened in Kogi State because of its border with other States where the crisis persists. So, when there is an attack in one neighboring State, Kogi feels the burn.

Another challenge that spurs violence in the State was the level of youth unemployment. "When youths are not engaged violence becomes an option" said Kehinde.

The ministry's policy is to encourage and engage young people in agriculture as a way of reducing extreme violence. In helping to promote this policy ActionAid has partnered with the ministry in building modular processing factories to aid reduction of wastes. Failure to add value to raw farm produce compels farmers to sell

off farm produce, this constitutes a disincentive to prospective farmers, but the modular factories help to process raw agricultural produce to finished product.

The commissioner says partnering with ActionAid has been one of the most rewarding experiences of the ministry: "ActionAid has been a very good partner, they have been very supportive. By collaboration with ActionAid, our farmers now add value to the primary produce, they make more money because they are no longer under pressure to sell raw produce and this has taken care of post-harvest losses" the commissioner said.

This intervention was timely; it encouraged more young people into Agriculture in the State and by implication reduced the incidences of crime for survival. The commissioner says the government will continue to adopt and sustain the model of ActionAid and replicate it across the 21 local government of the State: "We have taken ActionAid's programmes as a model to reach out to more people in our State, we now realise that we do not require too much money to make impacts in the life of our people. We want to sustain the programmes, we now own the programme because of the impact on beneficiaries" He said.

Already the livelihood support model has been integrated into the 2019 Budget.

"The partnership between ActionAid and Kogi State government has made positive impact on the society. We have not witnessed herders and/farmers clashes in a while in Kogi State because of the multifaceted that we are adopting, we are having more youths coming into agriculture and we hope to continue to sustain or strengthen our partnerships with ActionAid" he said.







Osara women jubilate and show off their local sieve during the commissioning of their cassava processing factory in July 2018





ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to further human rights for all and defeat poverty. We prioritize works with the poor and excluded, promoting values and commitment in civil society, institutions and governments with the aim of achieving structural changes to eradicate injustices and poverty in the world.

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