

**Advance Africa Project
Best Practices Update: Improving Livelihoods through Women's
Networks**

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IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS THROUGH WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Women and men around the world have a need to learn essential skills that will lead to an improved quality of life. Among these are basic education and literacy, fundamentals of income-generation, and awareness of sexual and reproductive health (SRH). An effective mechanism to improve these essential skills for livelihoods is the creation of women's networks. Listed below are examples of programs that have successfully developed women's networks, with an emphasis on developing livelihood skills in microenterprise and health.

BEST PRACTICES HIGHLIGHTS

I. The 100 Women Groups

Case study: In 1996, CEDPA launched the 100 Women Groups (100 WG) program to motivate Nigerian women's NGOs to form proactive coalitions. The program engaged vocational training, capacity building activities, and a democracy and governance program to raise awareness and involvement of Nigerian women in such topics as reproductive health (RH), safe motherhood, girls' education, nutrition, sanitation, and income generation. The intervention helped women challenge the traditional gender roles that had historically prevented them from taking an active position within society at both the local and national level. As a result of the 100 WG program, over 105,000 women belonged to the WG networks in 2000, 43 female candidates were elected during the 1999 elections and women overall had an improved knowledge of RH and child health.

Key success factors: The 100 WG strategy facilitates information sharing between women at the grassroots level and collective strategic planning. Dialogue and negotiation proved to be effective strategies in overcoming barriers associated with traditional society.

II. Indonesia Midwives Loan Fund

Case study: As a part of USAID's PROFIT project, the Summa Foundation initiated the Indonesia Midwives Loan Fund in order to facilitate private sector involvement in family planning. The project created a revolving loan fund that provided loans to midwives for the establishment and expansion of private practices. A curriculum was designed to assist midwives with the loan process and in the identification of new markets for midwifery services, business plan development, and

family planning services. The maximum loan allowed was \$2,200 with a repayment period of three years at a 12.9% interest rate. Two percent of this rate was rebated to the borrower upon full repayment.

Key success factors: Six key elements led to the success of the Loan Fund: partner expertise and responsibilities, borrower criteria, loan terms and conditions, promotion of the loan fund, coordination of partners, and management of default.

III. Improving the Status of Disadvantaged Women in Small Scale Fishing Communities

Case study: In 1990, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of UNFPA began a four year project in the fisheries sector of the Philippines. It was the first UNFPA-funded project to take place in this sector that combined women's family planning and economic needs. With a community-development approach, the project integrated both social and economic components, including: group organization; provision of training in team building, organization, and communication skills; microenterprise management; credit use; FP and maternal and child health (MCH); savings mobilization and credit; MCH/FP information, education, and mobilization; and monitoring and evaluation. As a result of project interventions and the focus on life skills, contraceptive usage increased from 11% to 21% in Pangasinan and women's increased contributions to the family budget provided them with a greater voice in economic decisions.

Key success factors: The integration of FP into an economic development program using credit, training and savings programs led to an increase in trust between the project and the community, which was an essential ingredient to the project's success.

RESOURCES

The following key sources were used to gather these livelihoods and women's network practices:

- “Giving Women a Voice: The 100 Women Groups.” The ENABLE Project/CEDPA: New York, 2003. www.cedpa.org/publications/pdf/nigeria_100wg.pdf
- “The Philippines: Improving the Status of Women (Through Income Generation and Family Planning) in Small-Scale Fishing Communities in Capiz and Pangasinan.” Women and Micro-Enterprises: An Assessment of UNFPA Experience. UNFPA Evaluation Report No. 6. 1996.
- “Case Study: Indonesia Midwives Loan Fund: Can a revolving loan fund be used to encourage private midwifery practices?” Commercial Market Strategies: Washington, D.C., 1999.

ABOUT THE BEST PRACTICES COMPENDIUM

What Are the Best Practices Updates?

The **Best Practices Updates** are summaries of evidence-based best practices. Each update focuses on a specific topic within reproductive health. If you are interested in learning more about the above best practices or are looking for ways to implement successful programs, please search the **Best Practices Compendium**. The **Best Practices Compendium** gives you easy access to credible information regarding proven, effective, evidence-based practices and programs. The Advance Africa Project has, documented, reviewed, and compiled more than 300 evidence-based programs and practices in a concise format.

The **Best Practices Compendium** includes many of the best and promising practices from experiences with reproductive health, family planning, adolescent health, HIV/AIDS, and maternal and child health programs throughout the world.

What Is a “Best Practice”?

To be considered a **best practice**, documented evidence and evaluation must be provided to show that a given practice has had a positive impact and/or has successfully met its program objectives. A best practice must also be replicable, scaled up, and/or transferable to other settings. If a practice has all the foundations of sound programming, but is lacking evidence of success and/or does not show evidence of being transferable or replicable, it is designated as a **promising practice**.

The external and unbiased **Best Practices Review Board** reviewed and designated all Compendium

submissions as best practices or promising practices. In identifying best practices, a clear distinction is made between untested interventions and those backed by more experience and evidence.



Knowledge Sharing: A Primary Objective

Advance Africa welcomes knowledge sharing throughout the Best Practices community, including USAID cooperating agencies, the Best Practices Advisory Group, and the external Best Practices Review Board. Throughout the project's tenure, individuals and organizations were encouraged to share their practices in the Best Practices Compendium.

Using the Searchable Compendium

- Visit www.advanceafrica.org/bestpractices.
- **Search** by key word, country/region, technical area, or target population.
- **Request** the Compendium on CD-ROM or for more information, please send an e-mail to bestpractices@advanceafrica.org