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LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME

STORIES **OF** IMPACT

DELTA
STATE
NIGERIA



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ACRONYMS



AAN — ActionAid Nigeria

ENVIRUMEDIC - Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre

LRP – Local Rights Programme

WHDC – Ward Health Development Committee

DESOPADEC – Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission

SWOFON – Smallholders Women Farmers of Nigeria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of ActionAid Nigeria, it is with deep gratitude and immense pride that I present this compendium of impact stories; real stories from real people testifying to what is possible when communities are inspired to lead their own development. For over 16 years, the Local Rights Programme (LRP) has touched lives across Delta State, proving that when power is placed in the hands of the people, transformation becomes not just possible but inevitable.

This journey would not have been possible without the steadfast commitment of the Board and Management of ActionAid Nigeria, whose visionary leadership continues to keep our mission focused, and people centered. We are equally grateful to the Senior Management Team; Suwaiba Muhammad Dankabo, Collins Chinyere, Nkechi Ilochi-Kanny, and Funmi Olukeye for providing strategic oversight and ensuring that the LRP remained aligned with our core values throughout its implementation.

To the Delta State Government, the various Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, as well as the Local Government Authorities, we thank you for your collaboration, receptiveness, and growing commitment to sustainable community-led development. Your partnership gave life to the demands of our people. We sincerely appreciate our dedicated implementing partner in Delta State, Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC), whose relentless work and deep-rooted presence in the communities have been pivotal to the LRP's long-standing success.

The LRP intervention was implemented in 13 communities across three Local Government Areas in Delta State: Emonu, Ebor, Ugono, Arhavwarien, Otegbo, Egbo-Ideh, Okwemor, Otutuama, Esaba, Ophorigbala, Abuator, Obikwele and Ossissa

Across these communities, we have witnessed powerful stories of change, children moving from learning under trees to furnished classrooms, women transitioning from silence to leadership, and farmers embracing agroecology to reclaim control over their livelihoods. We especially honour the LRP team at ActionAid Nigeria, whose technical guidance and mentoring made this work possible. Your names deserve to be remembered for the seeds you planted and nurtured: Kehinde Arowosegbe, Hajara Opaluwa, Osamudiamen Owen-Akinwale, Ugochukwu Onuoha, Etcheri Bassey, Usman Abdulaziz, Tomi Adeyeye, Uchechi Ugorgi, Deborah Bankole, Musah Hassan, Oluwole Olusanya, Tersur Tseror, Adedeji Ademefun, Victor Oriabure, Fidelis Onyeulor, Oluchukwu Daniel and Ogheneovo Aisiri. Your dedication, year after year, in walking alongside communities, facilitating learning, and strengthening our partner's capacity is what transformed the LRP from a programme into a movement.

Our gratitude also goes to the ActionAid Nigeria Communications Hub, led by Oluwakemi Akinremi-Segun, whose leadership and creative direction helped capture these stories not just in text, but in voices, visuals, and memory. We equally commend Anastasia Duru, whose storytelling expertise brought to life the heartbeat behind these impact stories, and Emmanuel Opara who brought these stories to life through visual illustrations.

Finally, we deeply appreciate the unwavering support of our funding affiliates ActionAid UK and ActionAid Italy whose commitment and belief in people-powered change made this long-standing partnership possible. As we close one chapter, we open another driven by the stories told here. These stories are not just reflections on what has been done. They are calls to continue organising, mobilising, and amplifying the voices that too often go unheard. The power in people remains the most renewable resource in development, and with that power awakened, the journey continues.

We invite policymakers, donors, civil society partners, and citizens to draw inspiration from these stories and to continue walking alongside communities as they claim their rights, demand accountability, and build a more just, equitable, and sustainable Nigeria.

In solidarity,

Andrew Mamedu

Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Local Rights Programme (LRP) represents one of ActionAid Nigeria's most enduring commitments to community-led development and social justice.

In 2003, the programme was initiated after a comprehensive baseline survey revealed an urgent need to address the challenges associated with poverty in thirteen communities. Uniquely designed to unleash the potential of community members, LRP has enabled them to play pivotal roles in decision-making processes that affect their lives and collective well-being. Through continuous capacity building, local rights programme strengthens community members to confront prevailing challenges head-on, transforming them from mere onlookers to active responders in developing their communities.

Over the last 16 years, the local rights programme in Delta State implemented in partnership with Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC) has worked across 13 communities in Ughelli North, Ughelli South, and Ndokwa East Local Government Areas. Together, these communities have been part of a transformative journey that shifted them from invisibility to influence. They have organised, advocated, and built social structures that now serve as engines for sustained development.

Through this programme, children moved from sitting on bare floors to sitting at desks under solid roofs. Women who once had no voice in community decision-making are now leaders in cooperatives and social audit committees. Health centres that were once abandoned are now functional. And most importantly, community members are no longer passive recipients of aid, they are active participants in shaping their futures.

These outcomes were made possible through a unique blend of community sponsorship funding, technical support, strategic advocacy, and deep partnerships. Through the generous contributions of our funding affiliates, ActionAid UK and ActionAid Italy, the LRP has demonstrated how long-term, flexible funding can deliver profound change.

As a strategic unit within ActionAid Nigeria, the LRP intervention has not only focused on service delivery but also on building people's agency. Through a combination of capacity building, rights awareness, movement building, and systems strengthening, the LRP contributes directly to ActionAid's ten-year strategy aimed at deepening democracy, achieving gender justice, and advancing sustainable development.

This compendium captures those stories, the stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things when given the space, tools, and trust to lead. It showcases the very essence of what the LRP stands for: that power truly lies in the people

As we reflect on the journey in Delta State, we are reminded that this is only the beginning. The lessons, structures, and spirit built through the LRP will continue to guide communities long after formal programmes end. And ActionAid Nigeria remains committed to supporting the next generation of people-powered transformation wherever justice calls.

Suwaiba Muhammad Dankabo

Deputy Country Director/Director of Programme and Policy
ActionAid Nigeria

ABOUT ACTIONAID NIGERIA

ActionAid Nigeria was established in 1999 and registered with Corporate Affairs Commission in 2007. We are a national non-governmental, not for profit, non-partisan organisation and an affiliate member of the ActionAid International Federation which is registered as a non-profit in the Netherlands with footprint in over 70 countries across the world. Federation members maintain strong relationships of interdependence and mutual accountability, ensuring a strong balance between self-rule and shared rule.

We collaborate with state and non-state actors (government, CSOs, movements, networks, allies, and other relevant stakeholders) and this collaboration works towards shifting power to the people, promoting equality, and redistributing wealth and power through a multidimensional, human-rights-based approach to development. We mobilise active agencies of people to confront unequal power relations that exclude them or others from decision-making and limit their access to and control over resources and opportunities.

ACTIONAID VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



Vision

A just, equitable and sustainable world in which every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity, freedom from poverty and all forms of oppression.



Mission

To achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication by working with people living in poverty and exclusion, their communities, people's organizations, activists, social movements and supporters.



Values

We are driven by a passionate commitment to organisational values. These values define our work and relationship with our communities, partners, supporters and other stakeholders:

- **Mutual respect:** requiring us to recognise the innate worth of all people and the value of diversity.
- **Equity and justice:** requiring us to ensure the realisation of our vision for everyone, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, , ethnicity, caste, class, age, HIV status, disability, location and religion.
- **Integrity:** requiring us to be honest, transparent and accountable at all levels for the effectiveness of our actions and our use of resources and open in our judgements and communications with others.
- **Solidarity:** with people living in poverty and exclusion will be the only bias in our commitment to the fight against poverty, injustice and gender inequality.
- **Courage of conviction:** requiring us to be creative and radical, bold and innovative – without fear of failure – in pursuit of making the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty, injustice and gender inequality.
- **Independence:** from any religious or party-political affiliation.
- **Humility:** recognising that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and injustice.
- **Climate consciousness:** requiring us to promote behaviours that protect the environment.

LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME'S OVERVIEW

ActionAid Nigeria's Local Rights Programme (LRP) is a flagship initiative that embodies the organization's core commitment to a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to development. At the heart of LRP is a deep-seated belief that lasting development is only possible when poor and excluded people are empowered to challenge and transform the unjust systems and structures that keep them in poverty. The programme mobilizes individuals and communities to confront unequal power relations, question oppressive norms, and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives.

The LRP was established in 2002 as a strategic platform for realizing ActionAid Nigeria's vision of a just, equitable, and sustainable society. Initially known as the Partnership Against Poverty (PAP), the unit was a response to the widespread socio-economic deprivation in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. In 2012, with the restructuring of ActionAid Nigeria, the unit was renamed the Partnerships & Local Rights Programme (P&LRP). This restructuring expanded its mandate, making it the focal point for all partnership management within ActionAid Nigeria while continuing to oversee the LRP implementation across supported communities.

At its core, the LRP aims to improve the socio-economic conditions of poor women, men, and children in participating states by implementing a three-pronged approach:

01.

Empowering grassroots communities through rights consciousness:

This involves raising awareness among the people about their rights and the obligations of the state and other duty bearers. Through training, sensitization sessions, and community dialogues, LRP communities are supported to understand their entitlements and engage duty bearers constructively and assertively.

02.

Supporting locally initiated development projects:

Recognizing that communities understand their needs best, LRP supports projects that are locally identified and led. These projects range from education and health interventions to sustainable livelihoods, especially those that benefit women and children directly.

03.

Capacity building of local institutions and advocacy:

The LRP strengthens the capacity of local organizations, community-based structures, and citizen groups to organize themselves, monitor service delivery, and advocate for policy changes that promote equity and justice. A key component is ensuring that the voices of people living in poverty are heard and that their rights are respected in both local and national development processes.

A distinct and critical aspect of the LRP is its deliberate focus on gender justice and women's rights. The programme does not only seek to improve access to basic services but also actively challenges the patriarchal systems and cultural practices, both formal and informal, that perpetuate gender-based inequality. ActionAid believes that confronting these issues is central to the realization of social justice for all. Thus, the LRP supports women and girls to claim their rights and equips communities to dismantle discriminatory norms and practices.

Since its inception, the LRP has made a tangible impact across Nigeria. It has operated in over 235 communities spread across 44 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in 17 states, including Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Delta, Ebonyi, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Gombe, Kaduna, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Ondo, Ekiti, Cross River, Yobe, Enugu, Niger, Jigawa, and Lagos. These communities have been supported primarily through the Community Sponsorship Fund, a mechanism that allows everyday individuals to support transformative work at the grassroots level.

While some states, such as Akwa Ibom, Ondo, Bauchi, Kogi, Kebbi, and Ebonyi, have been phased out over the past two years, the legacy of LRP's intervention continues to shape local development outcomes. The phasing out process often follows a strategy of sustainability, where community structures and partner organizations are equipped to continue advocacy and development work independently.

LRP communities are not just beneficiaries; they are co-drivers of development. Whether it is through women-led cooperatives challenging economic exclusion, youth groups demanding educational reform, or traditional rulers supporting the abolition of harmful practices, the LRP has nurtured a new generation of active citizens who are determined to transform their realities.

In conclusion, the Local Rights Programme stands as a testament to ActionAid Nigeria's unwavering commitment to people-centered development. It operationalizes the belief that development must be rights-based, participatory, and inclusive, with particular emphasis on challenging structural inequalities, including gender injustice. Through its presence in communities, strategic partnerships, and unwavering focus on rights and justice, the LRP continues to create pathways for millions of Nigerians to live with dignity, claim their rights, and build a better future.



FROM STRUGGLE TO STRENGTH: HOW EMUNU-OROGUN BUILT A HEALTH CENTRE AND A MOVEMENT

For years, the people of Emunu-Orogun lived on the margins of the health system. With a population of over 50,000, the community had no health facility of its own. Pregnant women, like Prisca Efe, often trekked two to three kilometers over rough, flood-prone roads just to access basic healthcare. Some never made it in time.

Prisca remembers the long, painful walks during her first three pregnancies, uncertain, dangerous journeys taken not out of choice, but desperation. "I worried about transport money. I worried about losing my baby," she says. "Some women never made it back." Many relied on Traditional Birth Attendants who lacked the training to handle complications. Others, like Ebor Roseline, lost pregnancies altogether. "I lost two children," Roseline shared. "It wasn't just bad luck. It was the road. It was the absence of care."

That reality began to shift in 2007 when the Local Rights Programme, implemented by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, arrived in the community. The need was clear: healthcare.

With support from the programme, the community constructed its first health centre, drilled a borehole, and renovated a dilapidated building for medical use. But beyond infrastructure, they were trained in rights-based advocacy. They learned to ask the right questions, to demand accountability, and to speak as one.

Together with ENVIRUMEDIC, they lobbied local and state governments. Their advocacy secured beds, essential drugs, and medical equipment. In 2011, the Ward Health Development Committee (WHDC) was established, composed of community leaders, youth representatives, and volunteers to monitor services and ensure the health centre stayed functional.

Chief Ebor Kingsley, a facilitator and now Traditional Prime Minister, played a key role. "The coming of ActionAid and ENVIRUMEDIC was a dream come true," he said. "Before their intervention, our women suffered. Many died. Today, that reality has changed."

For Prisca, it changed in the most personal way. She gave birth to her fourth child inside the new health facility safely, calmly, just steps from home. "I don't have to fear anymore," she says. "My child is safe. I am safe."

Not all stories ended in joy, but now they are no longer hidden. Community members speak openly about past losses, and roads

have been improved. Access to healthcare has become more reliable. Women attend prenatal appointments, babies are born in clean conditions, and the cycle of silence has been broken.

Prisca now shares her story with younger women, helping them understand the power of advocacy and the value of care. “There’s still work to be done,” she says. “We need more nurses, more supplies. But we are not where we used to be. And that gives us strength.”

In Emunu-Orogun, a health centre was built. But more importantly, a community found its voice



THE DAY OTUTUOMA OPENED ITS TOWN HALL TO WOMEN LEADERS

For over six decades, the town hall in Otutuoma stood as a symbol of power and exclusion. It was a sacred place, reserved for men only. The very idea of a woman stepping inside, much less speaking during a meeting was not just unthinkable; it was punishable. Cultural norms labeled such actions an abomination, enforced by a council of elders who guarded tradition with unwavering force.

Women were excluded entirely from community decision-making. They lived the outcomes of those decisions but were denied any say. That began to change in 2008 when the Local Rights Programme (LRP), led by ENVIRUMEDIC with support from ActionAid Nigeria, came to the community. Rather than confronting the culture head-on, the LRP began with respectful, consistent dialogue. Through sensitiations and community meetings, the team engaged traditional leaders, elders, women, and youth. Gradually, mindsets began to shift.

Women also received training in agroecology, cooperative formation, and income-generating activities. As they became more active economically, they grew bolder in demanding space in governance

The turning point came two years ago when Otutuoma elected two women into its executive council, an unprecedented step. For the first time, women didn't just enter the town hall; they sat at the table and spoke. Council meetings changed. There was less chaos, more thoughtful debate. Women brought new perspectives and calm to the room.

Martha Jirhaye, now the financial secretary of the council, is one of them. Inspired by the women facilitators from ENVIRUMEDIC and ActionAid, she stepped into a role no woman had ever held before.

"There was a time we couldn't even stand near the town hall," Martha said. "Now we help shape what happens in it."

Hon. James, a longtime council member, reflected on the shift: "I never thought I'd see this day. But women bring value. They contribute meaningfully. And we are better for it."

Since then, a law has been passed banning harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation. Cultural norms are changing. Women are more aware of their rights. Girls are growing up with new possibilities.

Otutuoma's transformation didn't come from force, it came from dialogue, exposure, and a willingness to grow. The town that once silenced women now listens to them. And that, more than anything, marks a new era.



ROSELINE'S JOURNEY FROM ONE CROP TO MANY

In the quiet village of Otutuoma, nestled within Ughelli South of Delta State, Roseline Edirin had long accepted her fate: a farmer of cassava and a mother of six, struggling to make ends meet in a community where women rarely stepped beyond their traditional roles.

Before the Local Rights Programme arrived, her life moved in a slow, predictable rhythm. Roseline's farm was limited to cassava, year in and year out. Her earnings were meagre, barely enough to feed her children, let alone plan for the future.

There were no cooperative groups, no government support, no training on how to maximise the land or diversify income. Just one woman, one crop, and a life of uncertainty. But change often begins with a single question: what if there's more? In 2011, Roseline joined a gathering organized by ENVIRUMEDIC and ActionAid Nigeria. It was her first encounter with the Local Rights Programme (LRP). The facilitators spoke about agroecology, mixed cropping, farm spacing, and how women could lift themselves from survival to sustainability. She listened. She learned. She dared to try.

Roseline returned to her plot and began applying what she had been taught. She introduced okra, pepper, and maize onto the same land she once used for only cassava. For the first time, her farm began to yield not just food, but potential.

In 2017, Roseline joined a women's cooperative formed under the LRP intervention, which became a lifeline: a place where knowledge was shared, voices were heard, and access to resources was made possible. Through collective advocacy, the cooperative received palm kernel trees from the Ministry of Agriculture. When the group processed and sold the produce, Roseline earned 25,000 from her share, a sum that went directly into feeding her family, paying school fees, and expanding her business. That money changed her not just economically, but emotionally.

"I was married into this community," Roseline reflects. "And when I came here, I was struggling. I couldn't help my husband. But now I can. Now I call myself a businesswoman."

Roseline's story is no longer about cassava alone. It is about a woman who found her footing, who discovered that with the right tools and support, she could build something greater than what she was handed.



THE QUIET REVOLUTION OF OPHORIGBALA'S WOMEN-LED UFUOMA COOPERATIVE

When floods hit Ophorigbala, they didn't just destroy farmland; they erased livelihoods and left families in silent despair. The river that once sustained the community had turned destructive, and oil spills further poisoned the environment. Faith Egbo, a mother of five, was already struggling as a small trader with no land, no support system, and no say in community decisions. Like many women around her, she bore the weight of family responsibilities without the means to change her situation.

That began to shift when the Local Rights Programme (LRP), implemented by ActionAid Nigeria and ENVIRUMEDIC, arrived in Ophorigbala with a different message, one of possibility. Women were invited to participate in meetings and trainings on agroecology, mixed cropping, farm spacing, and climate-conscious farming. Peer education followed, covering leadership, hygiene, parenting, child spacing, and most importantly, women's rights.

Faith became one of the first members of the Ufuoma Multipurpose Cooperative, which began with ten women contributing N500 each. As more women began to see the potential, membership grew. As interest grew, contributions increased to N1,000, and members began accessing loans up to N100,000 to invest in farming and businesses.

With her first loan, Faith expanded her business to include timber sales and provisions and also cultivated cassava using the new farming techniques. The change was visible. Where she once bought Garri from the market, she now produces her own, with better yields and improved quality. Her family no longer scrapes by.

Faith has also found her voice. Once quiet, she now speaks at community meetings, leads within her cooperative, mentors' younger women, and plays an active role in household decisions.

"My husband used to be the only one providing for the family," Faith says. "Now, I stand beside him. I pay school fees, buy food, and I support our daily needs. I am no longer just a woman in the background. I have become a pillar in my home."

Faith is not alone. Over 50 women have followed her path, joining the cooperative, applying new skills, and changing their families' futures. The once-silent women of Ophorigbala are now farmers, entrepreneurs, facilitators, and decision-makers.

Floods and oil spills remain a threat, but women like Faith have learned to adapt and lead. They are building resilience and helping others do the same.



"It is important for women to be empowered," Faith says. "If you don't have money, a man can treat you anyhow. But now, women in my community have found their voice. We are enjoying our homes and our lives."





HOW HOSANNA MOVED FROM SILENCE TO LEADERSHIP AND NURSING SCHOOL

In the riverine community of Ophorigbala, where women were expected to stay home and leave financial and leadership matters to men, Hosanna lived quietly. She was a mother and a wife, fully dependent on her husband's income, which was often unstable due to his frequent travel in search of work. Though she wanted more for herself and her children, she had no income of her own and little influence in her home or community.

When the Local Rights Programme (LRP), led by ENVIRUMEDIC with support from ActionAid Nigeria, began in Ophorigbala, Hosanna attended one of the early women's meetings, and the facilitators asked for volunteers to be trained as community educators. The idea of having community educators was to lead the peer education sessions. Women would be taught about rights, leadership, reproductive health, child spacing, and economic empowerment, then return to educate others. Hosanna raised her hand. She was selected and trained to train others. Soon, she was standing before other women sharing what she had learned. That experience motivated her to set goals for herself, including enrolling in a two-year auxiliary nursing programme.

Alongside her studies, Hosanna joined agroecology training facilitated by ActionAid and ENVIRUMEDIC and adopted new farming practices. She began planting okra, maize, and pepper in addition to cassava. Her new farming methods meant more food for her household and a surplus she could sell. With each step, Hosanna's world expanded. So did her confidence.

Her improved earnings allowed her to meet her children's school needs, including new sandals, uniforms, and school bags. She also became more involved in household and community decision-making, mentoring others and supporting more women to participate in trainings and cooperatives.

"Before, women here didn't know they could speak up," she says. "Now over a hundred of us have benefited from the LRP through peer education, cooperatives, and training. We no longer wait for permission to act."

Hosanna's story reflects the progress of many women in her community who, like her, are finding their voice through access to knowledge, income, and peer support.



THE POWER OF LOCAL VOICES IN OPHORIGBALA'S RECOVERY

There was a time when Ophorigbala was a humming center of trade and activity. Boats floated in daily from riverine neighbors, artisans sold woven mats by hand, farmers filled the air with the smell of roasted cassava, and traders packed the market by the riverbank. But over time, the hum grew quiet.

Floods swallowed the roads. Oil spills bleed or flow into the sea, suffocating the fish and stealing the only means of income for many families. Farmlands sank underwater, and the market thinned out. Schools decayed, infrastructure crumbled, and people began to leave.

By the time ActionAid Nigeria, through its Local Rights Programme (LRP) in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, arrived in Ophorigbala in 2007, they met not just poverty but silence. A once vibrant town had been reduced to quiet endurance. What followed was not a donation or miracle, but a process of awakening.

The local rights programme started with rights awareness, training, and dialogue. The community was eager, though unsure where to begin. Through advocacy training, leaders gained the confidence to engage local authorities. They wrote letters, recorded documentaries, and shared their stories in the media. Issues once whispered were now public. One issue stood out more than the rest. For more than forty years, Ophorigbala had petitioned the government for a secondary school. Children crossed dangerous waters just to get to class in neighboring towns. When the tide rose too high, their education stopped.

With renewed strength, the community advocated, this time with structure, strategy, and support. By 2023, their voices were heard. A new block of six classrooms was built. Approval for the renovation of other school structures followed. A science laboratory soon emerged. It was the first time in decades that children in Ophorigbala could learn safely and within reach.

Education wasn't the only frontier. As ActionAid Nigeria deepened its reach through LRP, the community achieved what once seemed impossible. A borehole was installed which improved water access. Cassava stems and other farm inputs were distributed to women farmers, which also revived agricultural activity. Teenage pregnancy rates fell, thanks to peer education programmes focused on reproductive health and gender rights. Oil spillage cases were documented and reported, leading to cleaner waterways and renewed dialogue with companies.



These achievements were not gifts. They were the results of coordinated advocacy, consistent engagement, and community re-learning how to demand its rights.

One of the most vocal expressions of gratitude came from the former chairman of Ophorigbala, who stood before his people with joy. “For years, we were told to accept our fate. That we were too small, too far, too forgotten,” he said. “But through this programme, we’ve realised that even a river community like ours can speak and be heard.”

He thanked ActionAid Nigeria and ENVIRUMEDIC not just for what they brought, but for what they taught. The transformation wasn’t just physical; it was psychological. “We used to think help must come from outside,” he said. “Now we know it starts with us.”

Today, Ophorigbala is once again bustling, not in noise, but in motion. Markets are growing. Children are in school. Women are farming. The river still runs wide, but it no longer separates the community from opportunity. It carries the sound of people who have learned to believe again



THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY AND TRAINING IN OTEGBO'S COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS

Otegbo is a farming community in Ughelli South, Delta State. For many years, residents faced poor infrastructure and limited support. Roads were in bad condition, electricity was unavailable, water came from unsafe sources, and annual floods destroyed farmland. Women were excluded from decision-making processes, and children often missed school due to impassable roads during the rainy season.

In 2007, the Local Rights Programme (LRP), implemented by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, began working in Otegbo. The approach focused on dialogue and community engagement rather than distributing aid. Women were included in spaces they had previously been excluded from, and sensitisation sessions addressed long-standing inequalities. This was followed by training in agroecology, farm spacing, mixed cropping, climate resilience, and advocacy.

As a result, farmers began using better farming techniques, supported by extension workers connected through advocacy to the Ministry of Agriculture. Improved yellow cassava stems were introduced, starting with women farmers.

A cassava processing machine was installed to reduce the burden of traveling long distances for cassava processing. Though the first machine was damaged by flooding in 2012, the community repaired it. In 2022, a new machine was provided by ActionAid Nigeria and ENVIRUMEDIC.

Further improvements followed. Roads were repaired, allowing easier transport and trade. Electricity was restored, and a new water system reduced illnesses and improved hygiene all through advocacy to the state and local government. These changes also reduced household expenses.

Women began participating actively in town hall meetings and decision-making processes. They now contribute to discussions on community development alongside men.

Among the many who have been transformed is Job Waya, the treasurer of the Otegbo community. Born and raised in Otegbo, Job is visually impaired. Before the LRP intervention, he lived from hand to mouth, his disability making life more difficult. But the programme supported him. He was trained in regenerative farming, given yellow cassava stems, and introduced to inclusive farming practices. Today, Job runs a productive farm, speaks at community meetings, and is training his only son to inherit the business.



"I used to believe I had nothing to give," Job says. "But now, I have land, I have skills, and I have dignity."

Otegbo's changes have not come through handouts but through coordinated training, advocacy, and inclusion. Community members now speak up, plan together, and take part in shaping their own development.





WOMEN LEADING CHANGE THROUGH REGENERATIVE FARMING IN OTEGBO

Endurance had seen many failed promises in her community of Otegbo. She had farmed cassava for years using traditional methods - planting densely, harvesting modestly, and earning just enough to survive. When she first heard about a new training session under the Local Rights Programme (LRP), she was not interested. She assumed it would lead to nothing, as with past initiatives. Eventually, she decided to attend.

The training introduced her to regenerative farming. It covered topics such as proper crop spacing, organic fertilisation, climate-smart practices, and the use of improved cassava stems. The training lasted seven days. Afterward, she applied the lessons on her farm, including mixed cropping with okra and pepper, and improved spacing. The results were significant. Where she had previously harvested less than four bags of Garri from a 10-plot farm, she now harvested 26 bags.

Word of her success spread across the community and nearby villages. Many women visited her farm to learn from her. Endurance began to informally train over 80 women on crop spacing, early maturing cassava varieties, and improved farming methods. As more women applied these practices, old farming habits in the community started to change.

The income from her improved harvests allowed Endurance to diversify. She bought three wheelbarrows and began renting them out. By 2024, she had increased the number to seven. This provided additional income and marked the beginning of a small business.

Previously, Endurance did not participate in household decision-making. Today, she manages her own resources, contributes to family expenses, and plays an active role in family discussions. She said,



“Before this programme, I had no say in my family. Now, I train women. I own equipment. I support my husband. I am respected. They have made me a madam. Who would have thought I’d own seven wheelbarrows and teach other women to farm?”

While Otegbo still experiences annual flooding, support from LRP intervention, implemented by ENVIRUMEDIC with support from the Ministry of Agriculture introduced early maturing crops and highland farming techniques. These changes have not eliminated the threat of floods, but they provide farmers like Endurance with better options to protect their work. Endurance is now recognised in her community as a resource person. Women seek her guidance on farming practices and business ideas.



FROM FISHERMAN TO GOVERNMENT ADVISER – BAYAN'S STORY

...and it all started with that first training

When Bayan Godwin was younger, he knew how to catch fish, not how to make laws. He lived and worked like many others in Ophorigbala, a quiet riverine community in Delta State where fishing and survival were often one and the same.

He didn't speak at meetings. He didn't organise rallies. He didn't know that access to good roads, electricity, and health care were not privileges, but rights.

But in 2007, the Local Rights Programme (LRP) arrived in his community and nothing in Bayan's life would remain the same.

It began with a meeting in the community square. Representatives from ENVIRUMEDIC and ActionAid Nigeria were there, talking about something unusual human rights, advocacy, and government accountability. The words felt strange in Bayan's ears. For most of his life, such ideas belonged to other people in cities, people with power.

But as he listened, a quiet spark ignited. Could someone like him really make a difference? He volunteered to become a facilitator with the LRP. He was selected and sent to Warri for training. It was his first formal experience outside the community. He learned about advocacy, lobbying, community organizing, and how to hold duty-bearers accountable. When he returned, he carried not just knowledge but responsibility.

Bayan stepped into his new role with quiet consistency. He helped establish advocacy groups, coordinated meetings, and served as a bridge between the community and the LRP team. Women and men farmers were trained in regenerative farming. Bayan led efforts to revive cassava farming using better planting techniques. He encouraged young people to attend training and older residents to speak up.

He didn't seek the spotlight, but the spotlight found him. Because in every household where a child went back to school, in every farm that produced more food, and in every meeting where a woman spoke for the first time Bayan was there. He became the one everyone turned to when something needed doing. A voice of reason. A quiet mover. A community steward.

In 2010, the community officially appointed Bayan as its LRP facilitator. For 13 years, he served faithfully, growing not just in responsibility but in visibility. He represented Ophorigbala during advocacy visits to government offices. He spoke before local councils, held dialogue with ministries, and helped navigate the bureaucracies that once felt impossible. Then came a moment no one expected.

Based on his consistent leadership and community results, Bayan was nominated and later appointed as Special Adviser to the Government of Delta State on Community Matters. A fisherman turned facilitator, now sitting in rooms where state decisions are made. Bayan's appointment sent a message across Delta communities: grassroots leaders' matter.

With his new position, Bayan began supporting not just Ophorigbala, but neighboring communities too. He became a mentor to others, helping them understand how to advocate, organize, and engage. He used his position to open doors that had long been shut.



"I never thought this would be my path," he says. "Before, I couldn't even speak in front of people. But now, I talk to government officials, I address meetings, I influence policy. And it all started with that first training."



THE LAND WASN'T MEANT FOR HER UNTIL SHE TOOK IT

Grace knew the traditional rules, but the LRP intervention strengthened her boldness to demand her right. In her community of Emunu-Orogun, like in many others, land was passed from father to son. Daughters were not considered, and women did not ask questions. And when a father died, his legacy went to his sons, while his daughters were expected to return to their husbands, empty-handed.

For Grace it was the case until 2007 when the Local Rights Programme (LRP) arrived in her community, led by ENVIRUMEDIC with support from ActionAid Nigeria. Like many others, Grace joined out of interest in the agricultural training sessions. She was a seasoned farmer, eager to increase her yields. What she didn't expect was to learn about something far more radical: her right to own land.

Through the peer education programme, she gained more than skills, she gained vocabulary words like inheritance, gender equality, land rights, unpaid care work, and voice. She joined a cooperative and soon rose to become the coordinator of the Smallholder Women Farmers of Nigeria (SWOFON), Delta Chapter.

She was no longer just farming, she was advocating. Grace attended training sessions in Akure and Abuja, where the conversation went deeper. Women shared their stories, some wept while others spoke about standing up to brothers and uncles who had taken land and property meant for them.

The message was simple, but new: women can and should inherit, women can speak up and women can own land. Grace returned home carrying this fire in her chest. At the same time, her own family was facing a turning point. Her parents had passed on. Her brothers without discussion were preparing to divide the property amongst themselves while leaving her and her sister out of the process entirely. It was expected because it was tradition, but this time, Grace said no.

Armed with what she had learned, Grace challenged the silence and spoke up to the family. She approached the chief of the land and called a family meeting to deliberate on the issue, first in the history of her community. This time, Grace argued not with anger, but with knowledge with support from other women. She didn't expect to win. But she needed to be heard.

One week later, the family called a meeting. For the first time in her life, Grace was handed a portion of her father's property to share with her sister. Though it was not equal to what the men received, but it was a great start in the lives of women in that community.

Grace didn't stop there. She continued speaking at community forums, training sessions, and women peer education circles. She led discussions on land rights and gender justice and guided young girls and boys to understand that equality must start with the everyday things like who owns what, and who gets to decide.

She is now known across Emunu-Orogun and beyond as a land rights advocate, a coordinator, a trainer, and a voice for rural women. Her life is a testimony that when women are equipped with knowledge, they do not just survive, they transform systems.



Her Words: "ActionAid and ENVIRUMEDIC are lovers of the rural people, they taught us that our land is our right. If not for them, my sister and I would have nothing to our names. Today, I can speak, I can teach, and I can own land."

Grace did not just inherit property; she inherited courage and passed it on.



BECOMING PATIENCE: FROM SCHOOLGIRL TO COMMUNITY CHAMPION

When Patience ran to the palace that day in 2009, she wore her school uniform, dusty from the playground and slightly wrinkled from rushing out of class. She was 16 and curious, the kind of girl who wanted to see what was happening rather than wait to be told. The buzz in Emonu-Orogun was about visitors, some groups that came with talks about teenage pregnancy, HIV, and abstinence. Most of the girls her age didn't think much of it, but Patience went. She didn't know that the visit would change her life.

The visitors were from ActionAid Nigeria and ENVIRUMEDIC, and they spoke about things no one had really addressed in public before: the dangers of early pregnancy, the consequences of unprotected sex, and the reality of HIV/AIDS. In a community where over 80 percent of teenage girls were already pregnant by classmates or older men, the conversation was radical. Patience listened and raised her hand to ask questions.

Her enthusiasm and intelligence caught the facilitators' attention, and soon enough, she was selected to represent her peers at a series of training courses in Asaba, Warri, and other parts of Delta State. For the first time, Patience left her community not to escape but for empowerment, and the experience lit something in her.

With each training, her confidence grew. She learned how to speak publicly, how to design awareness campaigns, how to guide other girls in understanding their rights, their bodies, and their futures. At home, people began to call her "Madam English," a teasing nickname that carried both admiration and mockery. Some laughed at her, others dismissed her as too ambitious, but Patience stayed focused.

She wasn't just attending meetings; she was facilitating them, speaking at forums and educating her peers on topical issues. What started as one teenager's interest turned into a community-wide shift in consciousness.

Before the Local Rights Programme took root in Emonu-Orogun, many girls never made it past Junior Secondary School. Teenage pregnancy was normalised; girls disappeared from class and reappeared months later with babies on their hips. But Patience and a small group of trained peer educators began changing that. They held community dialogues, shared personal stories, and encouraged girls to stay in school. The results were undeniable.

Teen pregnancy rates declined. School attendance increased. More girls began to speak up, and fewer dropped out. Fifteen percent of the girls trained through the programme went on to become peer educators themselves, creating a ripple effect that the community still feels today.

Now in her mid-thirties, Patience is an entrepreneur, a teacher, and a respected facilitator in Emonu-Orogun. She speaks at town hall meetings, leads awareness campaigns, and still carries the spirit of that 16-year-old girl who once ran to the palace, eager to listen and ready to lead.



"I may not be where I want to be yet," she says, "but I'm not where I used to be. I am confident. I speak with purpose. That training brought something alive in me."





EBOR-OROGUN RECLAIMS ITS FUTURE: A COMMUNITY ONCE FORGOTTEN, NOW UNSHAKEN

The people of Ebor-Orogun once lived beneath the weight of neglect.

Before 2006, Ebor-Orogun faced several challenges. Flooded roads limited access to nearby towns. Schools had leaking roofs and inadequate furniture, forcing children to sit on bare floors. Women lacked access to health care and carried farm produce across swamps and bush paths. The community was often excluded from government interventions.

In 2006, ActionAid Nigeria, through the Local Rights Programme (LRP) and in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, began working in Ebor-Orogun. The work started with a community needs assessment focused on understanding what people already knew and what they needed. Three priorities were identified: roads, education, and health.

Rather than providing direct solutions, the programme offered training in rights, advocacy, participatory governance, and community mobilisation. As residents learned how systems worked, they began to organise around the issues affecting them.

At the time, Ebor-Orogun had a health centre that was not functional. It lacked staff, equipment, and medicine. With support from the LRP and sustained advocacy to the Ministry of Health and the Local Government Council, the clinic became operational. Three full-time staff were assigned, and medical equipment and supplies were provided. Women could now access healthcare within the community. A Ward Health Development Committee (WHDC) was formed to monitor the clinic's performance and ensure accountability.

The only school in the community had insufficient teaching staff, no learning materials, and a damaged roof. Following the LRP training, community members wrote letters and engaged local education authorities. Their efforts led to the supply of 100 desks and writing materials. Student attendance improved as learning conditions became more conducive.

The road leading to Ebor-Orogun was in poor condition and nearly impassable during the rainy season. This has affected trade, movement, and access to services. With support from ENVIRUMEDIC, the community began advocacy visits and submitted petitions to the State Ministry of Works and Housing. As a result, the road was rehabilitated. Movement became easier, farm produce could be transported, and economic activities resumed.

Additionally, a cassava grinding machine was installed to support women's livelihoods. Improved access allowed more products to reach the market, contributing to household income. The changes across health, education, and infrastructure restored functionality to the community and encouraged self-reliance.

Meshack Isipedo, a community facilitator, summed it up: "Before the LRP intervention, we were sleeping under a rock. We had zero knowledge about our rights to health, education, and good roads. But when ActionAid and ENVIRUMEDIC came, they taught us how to fish. Today, we are fishers of development."

Ebor-Orogun did not rise because someone saved them; they rose because someone reminded them that they could save themselves with the power they had within.





EDUCATION SUPPORT IN EBOR-OROGUN: OBEDEKE'S STORY OF CONFIDENCE

When Obedeke Oke was seven years old, he didn't speak much. He sat at the back of his classroom in Ebor-Orogun community school, rarely raising his hand or barely meeting anyone's eyes. The school building leaked when it rained, the floors were dusty, and the desks were few. And like many children in his community, Obedeke had grown used to making himself small.

He didn't know how to read, writing was a struggle, and his confidence was low. But things began to change in 2017 when he was selected to be part of ActionAid Nigeria's child sponsorship programme. Obedeke didn't know what sponsorship meant at the time, but he understood what it brought. Through the programme, he received books, school sandals, writing materials, and a school bag, items many of his classmates did not have. These supplies gave him not just comfort, but dignity. He no longer sat quietly at the back of the classroom; he began to speak, ask questions, and respond in class. Beyond the sponsorship, the Local Rights Programme was also improving his learning environment. With continued advocacy and community mobilisation, his school received full renovation.

The once-leaking roof was fixed, the crumbling building was replaced with nine blocks of new classrooms and fans were installed making way for the arrival of proper desks. Teachers received training even during the COVID-19 pandemic. School was no longer something to endure, it became a place to grow. For Obedeke, this meant everything.

Now 15 and in Senior Secondary School 2, Obedeke is no longer the boy who kept quiet. He reads fluently, speaks with confidence, teaches his younger siblings how to read and write, and passes on the same knowledge that once seemed out of his reach.

The journey to school has also improved. What once took hours, trekking along poor roads, now takes just 15 to 20 minutes, thanks to improved infrastructure driven by the same LRP advocacy efforts. Obedeke balances schoolwork with farm support at home, but he does it proudly, knowing education is no longer a luxury it is his future.

Now in secondary school, Obedeke represents what happens when a child is supported. He rarely talks about where he started. Instead, he focuses on what he's learning, what he teaches his siblings, and what he hopes to become. He says he wants to help others one day, just like someone helped him.



CASSAVA MACHINE DRIVES ECONOMIC CHANGE FOR WOMEN FARMERS IN EBOR-OROGUN

In Ebor-Orogun, farming is the main source of livelihood for most women. For Mary Esewan, however, it came with challenges. Though her cassava farm yielded enough, processing the cassava into Garri was difficult. There was no processing facility in the community, so she and other women had to transport their cassava to neighboring towns. They either walked long distances or paid for transport on bad roads.

“We used to take our cassava to other communities to process. It was stressful. Sometimes we wouldn’t even make enough money to pay for transport back,” Mary said.

At times, the distance discouraged her from harvesting. In 2007, ActionAid Nigeria, through its Local Rights Programme (LRP) in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, began working in Ebor-Orogun. Community consultations and training were introduced. For Mary, the biggest change came when a cassava processing machine was installed. She was one of the first women trained to use it.

“I was among the first people trained to use the cassava machine,” she said. “It helped me so much. I didn’t have to leave home for days anymore just to grind my cassava. I could process it right here, faster and cheaper.”

With processing now easier and free from transport costs, Mary began to expand her farming. She attended sensitisation meetings and trainings for women. She now owns multiple cassava farms. She sold one of her farms for N650,000 and is planning to sell another for N800,000. Before the trainings, she harvested 10–15 bags of cassava. After the training, she now harvests 30–40 bags.

Her earnings now allow her to pay her children's school fees, including one in university, feed her household, and support her husband. She also bought a motorcycle for business purposes.

From selling Garri, she expanded her farming activities and began planting other crops. Her success began to influence other women in the community, particularly those balancing farming with family responsibilities. She began training other women in her cooperative, encouraging those unsure about adopting new methods, and guiding them in cassava processing and sales.



"Before, we only worked to eat," she said. "Now, I work and save. I've started training other women. I want them to see that they can earn more and stress less."

Mary's progress reflects wider changes in Ebor-Orogun. Through the Local Rights Programme, more women now have access to tools and training that improve productivity and reduce waste. The cassava machine has eased the physical and financial burden on women, enabled business growth, and boosted local confidence.

Mary continues to manage her farm, train others, and supports her family.



"I never thought things would change like this," Mary reflects. "That something so small a machine could give me time, money, and rest. I used to suffer, but now, I work with ease."





ABUATOR SECURES ELECTRICITY, ROAD, AND A BRIDGE THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

Abuator is one of the most remote riverine communities in Ndokwa East LGA, Delta State. With no roads, no electricity, and no basic infrastructure, the community had been cut off for decades. The only drinking water came from the same river used for bathing, fishing, and waste disposal. Schools had no roofs or furniture. Children often studied by candlelight. Women fanned themselves at night with doors wide open, inviting mosquitoes in and sending malaria cases soaring. Farmers and fishers, mostly women, had to swim across rivers to get their produce from the farm. Despite its location within an oil-producing territory and its ties to AGIP, the community had nothing to show for it. Women had no space in community leadership, and young people were idle.

In 2007, ActionAid Nigeria, through its Local Rights Programme (LRP) in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, began working in the community. The intervention, which started under the Partnership Against Poverty initiative, focused on rights awareness, organisation, and community-led development.

The first major effort was a borehole, but high iron content made the water unsafe. Rather than stop, the community began building structures to support their own development: peer education groups, cooperatives, and a social audit committee. These platforms became the community's backbone, giving ordinary people the skills and courage to speak up.

Through collective action, the community approached the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC), which responded by providing electric poles. But when the commission failed to complete the electrification project, the people didn't give up. Instead, they turned to one of their own, Kingsley Abuor, a prominent son of the soil who donated a transformer and covered the cost of wiring. Today, for the first time in its history, Abuator has electricity.

Electricity led to other improvements. With support from ENVIRUMEDIC, the community relentlessly advocated for road construction. A functional access road was built, which opened up trade, eased movement, and improved access to schools and health facilities.

Before the LRP, children learned under makeshift structures and few teachers were available. Rain often disrupts learning. Today, the school has proper classrooms and more teachers deployed by the government following community advocacy.



"We had no school," recalled Ngozi, a member of the social audit committee. "Children sat on the ground, and we used cement bags to divide classes. But now, our children sit in proper classrooms. They can read at night at home. We can charge our phones. There is light everywhere."

Perhaps the most powerful change in Abuator wasn't physical, it was cultural. Women's participation in leadership had previously been excluded. Through training and peer education, women organised and identified the need for a bridge to their farms, as they had to swim across the river carrying produce.

They presented their request to the elders. Although there was initial resistance, the women persisted. Using what they learned from peer education sessions and applying collective pressure, the elders accepted the request and levied each household to contribute N400. The bridge was built, connecting the community to their farmlands.



"Before, we swam with cassava on our heads," said Patricia, a community member. "Now we walk across a bridge. We are part of decision-making. Four women now sit on the social audit committee."

As a result of the Local Rights Programme and coordinated community action, Abuator now has consistent electricity, a road, school improvements, a community-built bridge, and women in leadership.

"If the Local Rights Programme had not entered our community," said Boniface, a resident, "we would still be living in the dark literally and socially."

Abuator's transformation was not handed to them. It came through training, advocacy, and collective effort.





PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE: 16 YEARS OF GROWTH IN THE ENVIRUMEDIC AND ACTIONAID STORY

When the Local Rights Programme (LRP) began in Delta State in 2008, it carried out a clear mission: to reach poor and excluded communities using a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to develop. At the heart of this mission was the belief that sustainable change could only be achieved when local actors those closest to the people were empowered to lead. This is the story of how that belief turned a small, passionate organisation into a structured and thriving development force.

The LRP, formerly known as the Partnership Against Poverty (PAP), was built on collaboration. In Delta State, it found a local partner in Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC), a modest organisation with deep community roots but limited resources and capacity. With funding, technical support, and consistent mentorship from ActionAid Nigeria, ENVIRUMEDIC began a journey of institutional transformation.



"The LRP didn't just fund us," said Lucky Eniegide, now Programme Manager at ENVIRUMEDIC. "It gave us the systems, the knowledge, and the structure to grow."

Through LRP, ENVIRUMEDIC was able to set up formal systems that strengthened both internal and external operations. The organisation developed: Clear financial and administrative structures, improved governance and internal accountability, strengthened human resource systems, effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting frameworks. With these systems in place, ENVIRUMEDIC not only delivered impactful projects across rural communities, but also gained recognition and credibility that attracted new partnerships and donor funding.

Lucky Eniegide, who now oversees project implementation, began his journey as a volunteer under the PAP initiative. The LRP became his training ground, where he was exposed to a wide range of capacity-building opportunities, including financial management training, budget analysis and advocacy training, agroecology and regenerative agriculture, tax justice and governance reviews, international learning exchanges



"The LRP transformed my life," Lucky shared. "The hands-on, tailored training I received helped me grow from a volunteer to a programme manager. More importantly, it taught me the value of patient engagement, especially with women in rural communities. When you build their capacity, they drive transformation."

The LRP began with a presence in 13 communities across Ughelli South, Ughelli North, and Ndokwa East LGAs. Many of these communities had no schools, no access roads, no health centres, and limited exposure to their rights as citizens.

Through ENVIRUMEDIC's work under the LRP, that reality changed. Communities were mobilised and trained to demand accountability from the government. Social structures like the peer education groups, women's cooperatives, Ward Health Development Committees (WHDCs), and social audit committees were created to drive advocacy and monitor services. Farmers, women, and youth were equipped with tools, knowledge, and platforms to improve livelihoods, organise cooperatives, and engage with policymakers.



"When we first entered the communities, the level of illiteracy and misinformation was high," Lucky recalled. "Today, those same communities are leading their own advocacy efforts. Behavioural change has been one of our biggest wins."

The LRP did more than support project delivery. It helped ENVIRUMEDIC become a learning organisation, one that evolves with its communities and remains deeply embedded in their struggles and aspirations. Today, ENVIRUMEDIC stands as a structured, transparent, and visionary organisation. It continues to collaborate with the 13 communities, nurturing local leadership and sustaining impact through the very structures built under the programme.



"We will continue to walk alongside these communities," Lucky said. "Our goal is not to lead them, but to support them to lead themselves."

This story of ENVIRUMEDIC is proof that when local organisations are trusted, trained, and supported, they don't just implement projects they become pillars of change.



THE EDUCATION REBIRTH OF OBIKWELE COMMUNITY

In Obikwele, a riverside community in Ndokwa East LGA of Delta State, education once meant children sitting on the bare ground, under leaking roofs, trying to learn in poor conditions. Amenyi Primary School had no desks, damaged roofs, and teachers who struggled to keep pupils motivated. When it rained, classes stopped. When the sun was intense, children endured it in silence.

In 2010, this changed with the arrival of the Local Rights Programme (LRP), implemented by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC. The programme aimed to strengthen the community's ability to demand and drive change using a Human Rights-Based Approach, starting with education.

ENVIRUMEDIC supported community members to engage the Ministry of Education and SUBEB, advocating for intervention in the school. Renovation followed. Classroom blocks were rebuilt, increasing the number of usable classrooms from 3 to 9. Roofs were repaired, desks and chairs provided, and fans installed.

Teachers received training during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve their teaching methods. The school compound was improved with the planting of mango trees. Pupils were supported with books, sandals, flasks, and food items, reducing barriers to attendance.

Before the intervention, fewer than 30 children attended the school. That number has now grown to over 150, with better retention



"Before, I didn't like coming to school," said Henry, a Primary 6 pupil. "Anytime it rained, I got wet. My uniform got dirty because I sat on the ground. But now I come with joy, because I have a desk to sit on and a roof to cover me. I thank the ActionAid people."



Mr. Louis, the Primary 6 teacher, said, "For six years, I watched children come to school and run home whenever the rain started. The roof was leaking badly. Many days, I taught under a tree or stopped lessons entirely. But today, it's different. Our pupils stay in class when it rains. They are more focused, more eager to learn, and they keep coming back."

The support from the Local Rights Programme has changed the atmosphere of the school. Amenyi Primary School now has better infrastructure, improved learning conditions, and growing enrolment. What was once a school in poor condition is now a functional learning environment where pupils and teachers are motivated to stay.



BUILT BY THE PEOPLE: THE POWER OF COMMUNITY STRUCTURES IN DELTA STATE

Sustainable development is more effective when owned by the people. This is the foundation of ActionAid Nigeria's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), which supports communities to lead their own development. In Delta State, this has been evident through the Local Rights Programme (LRP), implemented by ActionAid Nigeria and ENVIRUMEDIC since 2006 across 13 rural and riverine communities.

The LRP's focus was to shift power to communities by providing tools, knowledge, and platforms to organise and advocate. A key strategy was establishing and supporting community structures such as Women Peer Education Groups, Youth Advocacy Clubs, Cooperative Societies, Social Audit Committees, and Ward Health Development Committees (WHDCs). These groups were made up of local members, trained and supported to operate independently, becoming active agents of change.

In Abuator, the Social Audit Committee led advocacy that brought electricity to the community for the first time in over 50 years. In Obikwele, peer educators and parents worked together to renovate Amenyi Primary School, leading to new classrooms, improved furniture, and enrolments rising from below 30 to over 150 pupils.

Women-led cooperatives in Otutuama, Otegbo, Ebor-Orogon, and Ophorigbala accessed training and farm inputs for cassava production. This improved harvests and incomes, while promoting sustainable farming practices. In Emunu-Orogon, the WHDC ensured that the local health centre once dormant now operates effectively with staff and regular drug supplies, especially for maternal and child health.

Before the LRP, decisions were often made by a few individuals, usually men. The new structures created inclusive spaces where women, youth, and marginalised groups now contribute and hold local authorities accountable. Through social audit committees, public projects are monitored. Through peer education, women and girls share knowledge on reproductive health and rights. Through cooperatives, farmers gain access to credit and markets.

These structures have outlived the project cycles because they are rooted in the community. Advocacy continues, younger leaders are mentored, and communities collect data and prioritise needs.

"We no longer wait, we act."

This statement, repeated across the communities, reflects a shift in mindset. People now engage directly with government, track results, and follow up on commitments.

From health and education to agriculture and infrastructure, the community structures built under the LRP have helped move people from the sidelines to active participation in shaping their future.





THE POWER IN PEOPLE: HOW ADVOCACY TURNED THE MARGINS INTO MOVEMENT

For decades, the riverine and rural communities of Delta State sat on the fringes of development. Cut off by poor roads, abandoned by government plans, and overlooked by corporate interests, they had grown accustomed to silence. Silence in their schools. Silence in their clinics. Silence in their town halls, where decisions were made about them, but never with them. Then something changed.

The Local Rights Programme (LRP), implemented by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with ENVIRUMEDIC, entered these communities with no silver bullet just one fundamental belief: that power lies within the people.

At the heart of the LRP's work in the 13 communities across Ughelli North, Ughelli South, and Ndokwa East LGAs was advocacy. Community members, many of whom had never stepped into a government office, were trained to: Identify their rights, understand how public systems work, document their challenges, demand responses from the people meant to serve them. For many, it was the first time they learned they had a right to ask, a right to question, and a right to be heard. From written petitions to strategic media campaigns, from peaceful visits to ministries to video documentaries highlighting the state of schools, roads, and clinics, these communities began to speak. And the world began to listen.

In Abuator, a community without light for over 50 years, the people used advocacy tools learned through the LRP to engage with DESOPADEC and prominent sons of the soil. Today, they have electricity, streetlights, and a sense of pride. In Obikwele, parents and teachers, once resigned to teaching children under leaking roofs, pushed for school renovation. Now, over 150 children attend a well-equipped Amenyi Primary School. In Emunu-Orogun, women led advocacy for access roads and a bridge to their farmlands achieving what was once considered impossible. These weren't just isolated wins. They were proof that when people are equipped to speak, they can change the course of their community's future.

Advocacy didn't only build roads and classrooms; it built confidence. It gave women, who were once excluded from leadership, the tools to negotiate for inclusion. It gave young people the courage to raise questions in council meetings. It gave ordinary citizens the language and structure to engage ministries, departments, and agencies not with fear, but with focus. These communities learned not only how to demand change, but how to sustain it.

Today, these once-forgotten communities are no longer waiting in silence. They are writing letters, leading campaigns, organizing town halls, and even using social and traditional media to amplify their voices. What the LRP did was not to give them power, it was to help them discover that they already had it.

“Before this programme, we believed that help must come from outside,” said one community member. “Now, we know it starts from us.” The story of the LRP in Delta State is not just about infrastructure or training or funding. It is about something deeper and more lasting: the awakening of power in people who had been told to wait, because they are not waiting anymore. The real development wasn’t just in the roads, classrooms, or boreholes, it was in the minds and voices of the people rising.





ActionAid Nigeria in collaboration with Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC)
Present

LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME (LRP) LEARNING AND CLOSE OUT MEETING, DELTA

SESSION	TIME	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE
Arrival & Registration	9: 00am – 9:30 am	All Invited Guests
National Anthem	9:30am – 9:40am	All
Introduction of Dignitaries & Guests	9:40am – 9:50am	MC
Welcome Address	9:50am – 10:00am	ENVIRUMEDIC/ ENVIRUMEDIC Board Chairs
Opening Remarks	10: 00am – 10:15am	Andrew Memedu, Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria (AAN)
Goodwill Messages	10:15am - 10:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• His Excellency, The Executive Governor of Delta State• Economic Planning and partners coordination Office• Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development• Ministry of Education• Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources• Office of Senior Special Assistant to the Governor On Civic Engagement and Civil Society• Delta State House of Assembly• Delta State Civil Society Organizational Forum

SESSION	TIME	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE
Goodwill Messages	10:15am - 10:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other MDAs represented. • Representatives of Community Heads • Representatives of women groups (SWOFON) • Representatives of Linked Children
Overview of the Local Rights Programme in Delta State	10:45am - 10:55am	Kehinde Arowosegbe Manager, Local Rights Programme, AAN
Drama play/ Cultural dance	10:55am - 11:15am	LRP communities/Theatre Group
Presentation of Local Rights Programme Documentation	11:15am - 11:40am	Chief Monday O Itoghor Chief Executive Officer (CEO) ENVIRUMEDIC
Experience Sharing Session	11:40am - 12:25pm	LRP stakeholders
Presentation of Certificates of Recognition and Plaques to LRP partners and communities	12:25pm - 12:55pm	Andrew Memedu, Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria (AAN) and stakeholders
Vote of Thanks	12:55pm - 1:00pm	Hajara Adamu, Delta LRP Advisor
Group photos, lunch & closing	1:00pm - 1:15pm	All

LIST OF LRP AWARD STAKEHOLDERS

Community Level Stakeholders

S/N	Community	Name of Actor(s)	Designation(s)
1	Ophorigbala	Faith Egbo	Women Peer Education Facilitator
2	Ophorigbala	Godwin Bayan	Community Facilitator
3	Esaba	Awolowo Perry	Facilitator
4	Esaba	Elehor Esiakpere	Women Peer Educator
5	Esaba	Peter Darah	Change Agent
6	Otutuama	Mrs. Elizabeth Udjohoro	Facilitator
7	Okwemor	Oghenero Olili	Facilitator
8	Otegbo	Endurance Polo	Facilitator
9	Otegbo	Friday Zifa	Facilitator, Change Agent
10	Egbo-Ideh	Micha Joseph	Facilitator
11	Emonu	Ebor Kingsley	Facilitator
12	Emonu	Grace Osadjoku	Cooperative Coordinator
13	Ebor	Meshach Isikpedo	Facilitator
14	Ebor	Victoria Aboh	Facilitator
15	Ebor	Mary Esewan	Women Peer Educator
16	Ugono	Chief Omi James	Facilitator
17	Abuator	Boniface Adebali	Facilitator
18	Ossissa	Agatha Uyabeme,	Facilitators
19	Ossissa	Osakwe Juliana	Facilitators
20	Obikwele	Okonta	Facilitator
21	Obikwele	Afam Oseji	Change Agent
22	Arhavwarien	King Solomon Okurukere II	Change Agent
23	Arhavwarien	Wilson Mukoro	Facilitator
24	Ossissa	Okonji Godwin	Facilitator

ENVIRUMEDIC LRP STAFF

	Organization	Name of Staff	Designation(s)
1	ENVIRUMEDIC	Chief Monday Itoghor	CEO
2	ENVIRUMEDIC	Enegide Lucky	SPO
3	ENVIRUMEDIC	Beauty Ituku	Sponsorship Officer
4	ENVIRUMEDIC	Augustina Ighovoja	Finance Officer

ENVIRUMEDIC SUPPOTING STAFF

1	ENVIRUMEDIC	Alex Oke-Oghene Okekporo	M&E Officer
2	ENVIRUMEDIC	Christian Oyibu	Logistic Officer
3	ENVIRUMEDIC	Alom Anthonia	Secretary
4	ENVIRUMEDIC	Akpobasah Iwemah Cecelia	Assist. Finance Officer

LGA Representatives

1	Ndokwa East	Obi O. Patricia	NULGE Vice Chairperson
2	Ndokwa East	Okpako Believe	Agric HOD
3	Ughelli North	Timbo Emmanuel	Agric HOD
4	Ughelli North	Hon. Austine Oghenesivwohwo	Clerk
5	Ughelli South	Robert	Agric HOD

Ministry of Agriculture

1	Mins. of Agric	UJu Osadebe	Director, Fishery
2	Mins. of Agric	Ogboru Mamode Jacinta	Director, Ext. Services
3	Mins. of Agric	Edukeigho Emenuwe	Unit Head, MORWSA
4	Mins. of Agric	Isioma Patience	Director, PRS

Other Government and Institutional Actors

1	House of Assembly	Abigail Esaedi	Clerk, House Cttee on Agri
2	Mins. of Environment	Briggs Vivian	Director, Climate Change
3	Mins. of Environment	Fidelis Ogheneochuko Ogirisen	Deputy Director
4	Economic Planning	Okpako Daniel	Deputy Director, Budget
5	Economic Planning	Felicia Atogun	Director

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

1	CSO	Fred Nohwo	IFAS Co-Chair
2	CSO	Richard Benin	DELBAG
3	CSO	Joy Tobe	DELBAG
4	CSO	Edewor Egedegbe	DELBAG
5	CSO	Ayo Nafetiti	DELBAG
6	CSO	Onose Martha	DELBAG

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My involvement for the past 15 years in driving the implementation of the Local Rights Program in Delta State, as the Executive Director/CEO of Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC), a partnership with ActionAid Nigeria, has significantly impacted me in all ramifications.

Firstly, I am empowered through skill development. Yes, before the partnership, ENVIRUMEDIC has been on with focus on activism little did I know that development work is beyond activism but incorporate empowerment, human rights based , policy influencing, and physical modeling approaches;

Secondly, It gave me an opportunity for improved access to basic amenities provisions of basic infrastructure like schools, primary health centers, and livelihood empowerment schemes for women and youths;

Thirdly, as a traditional Chief, it has made me women's rights and gender equality advocate to recognize the importance of women in our society and contribute to enabling women to play critical roles in decision-making processes that affect their lives; and my increased community participation and Policy influencing that has giving me opportunity to work with governments and stakeholders to model and provide gender-responsive services, potentially leading to policy changes that benefit your community.

In conclusion, this program has really impacted me with capacity building, values addition, partnerships and good governance.



IMPACT

Hajara Opaluwa Adamu

My journey in Delta State began in 2013 when I joined ActionAid Nigeria to support the Women's Rights Unit. From the onset, I was deeply inspired by the resilience of the people especially women who, despite the harsh realities of environmental pollution caused by decades of oil exploration, remained committed to shaping a better future for themselves and their communities.

The women I met were navigating a double-edged sword: the weight of patriarchy on one side and the grip of poverty on the other. Yet, they carried a quiet strength. Thanks to the foundational work laid by my predecessors, we were able to hit the ground running, blending our efforts with those of women who were eager to learn, grow, and lead.

When I resumed my role as the Local Rights Programme Advisor, it felt like a continuation yet also an evolution of the relationships I had begun to build in my earlier position. This time, I had the opportunity to engage more deeply: to plan alongside communities, co-create change strategies, and reflect collectively on what was working and what needed to shift.

Over the past seven years, this shared journey has been one of transformation, both personal and collective. We've seen women step into leadership roles, children thrive in community-led initiatives, and men become allies in advancing gender justice. Each programme, dialogue, and training were a stepping stone toward the vision we all held in common a community where rights are respected, voices are heard, and people lead their own development.

Delta State has become more than a location to me. It is home to relationships that have shaped my growth and deepened my commitment to social justice. I think of friends like Faith in Ophorigbala, Oga James, Awolowo, Afam, and the many children whose stories fuel our motivation. I am equally grateful for our dedicated partner ENVIRUMEDIC and its incredible team: Chief Monday, Lucky, Beauty, Cecilia, Anthonia, Alex, and our meticulous accountant, Augustina. Your collaboration has made this work not just possible, but meaningful.

We are not yet where we want to be, but we are certainly not where we started. That is the power of solidarity, persistence, and locally led development. Together, we are proving that real, lasting change that begins when communities are at the center of their own transformation.

To everyone who has walked this journey with us: thank you for your cooperation, your courage, and your unwavering dedication. Indeed, we are creating the change we want to see.
Thank You



PROJECT FACT SHEET

Project Title: Local Rights Programme
Project Donor: ActionAid Nigeria
Project Implementer: Environmental and Rural Mediation Centre (ENVIRUMEDIC)
Project Duration: 2007-2025
Project Partner in the state: ENVIRUMEDIC
Project Implementing State: Delta
Project Implementing LGA(s): Ughelli North, Ndokwa East and Ughelli South
Project Implementing Communities: Emonu, Ebor, Ugono, Arhavwarien, Otegbo, Egbo-Ideh, Okwemor, Otutuama, Esaba, Ophorigbala, Abuator, Obikwele and Ossissa
Total Amount of Grant Received by ActionAid Nigeria (Annually) e.g
Project Staff Strength in the state: 4 staff 2 female and 2 males and 15 volunteers
Project state and community level platform/structures established: VSLA group:41, Women Peer Education 26, SWOFON 1, CDC 13, 9 WHDC Groups
Project thematic areas and number of reached: Health, Education, Environment, Women's Rights, Just and Democratic Governance, Agriculture, Emergency Preparedness and Responses,
Project collaborating MDAs in the state: DARDA: Delta Agricultural and Rural Development Authority. Ministry of Agriculture and natural resources, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of water resources, Ministry of Economic Planning, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Primary and secondary Education, NAIC: Nigeria Agricultural Insurance Corporation, Bank of Agriculture, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, State House of Assembly

Number of policies influence/initiated in the state through the LRP project: Women Inheritance across LRP Communities, Women in community leadership, Women harmful Traditional Practices, Integration of women budget line into the Delta State ministry of Agriculture, Increment of DARDA Budget Line in the Delta State Agriculture Budget, Introduction of Delta State Citizen’s Dialogue to the Ministry of economic Planning Budget
Number of women who secured political appointment in the state through the implementation of LRP project.
Number of women who contested and win political seat in the state/LGA level through the implementation of LRP project in the state. 1, Late Maureen Akporugo

11,256

Number of People that benefited from either cash or in-kind distribution

41

Number of Co-operative Group formed

820

Number of women enrolled in Co-operative Group formed

N35,000,000

Amount generated from Co-operative group

41

Number of Peer Education Group

4,100

Number of women enrolled in Peer Education

70,748

Number of school children reached

17,687 directly | 53,061 indirectly

9

Number of Boreholes constructed- 1 and 8 through advocacy

11

Number of gender sensitive toilets constructed or renovated.

1,785

Number of women reach through sensitization on political participation

8,400

Number of women reach through sensitization on Economic empowerment

586

Number of women reach through sensitization on GBV prevention and response

22

Number of schools
constructed/renovated



12

Primary schools
renovated

8

Secondary schools
renovated

2

Secondary Schools
established

121

Number of Traditional Leaders
and Religious Leaders
Reached

7

Number of GBV referred

13

Name and number of
GBV/Girls club established

2

Number of GBV cases
managed

8

Number of women inducted
into traditional
council/cabinet.

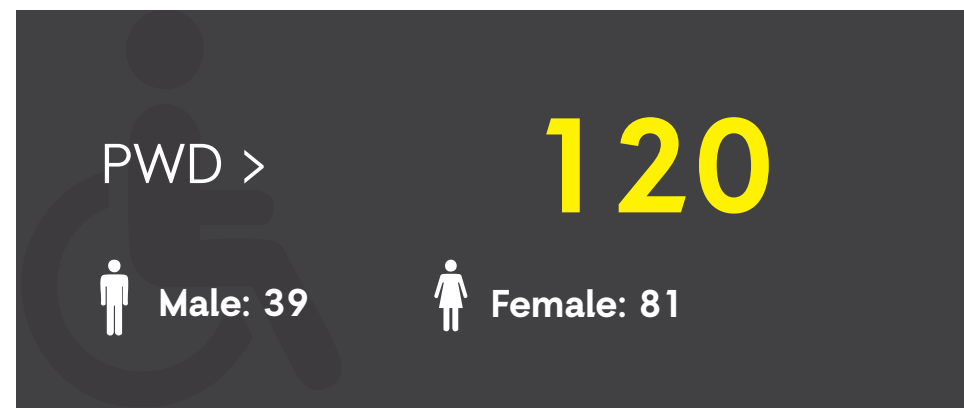
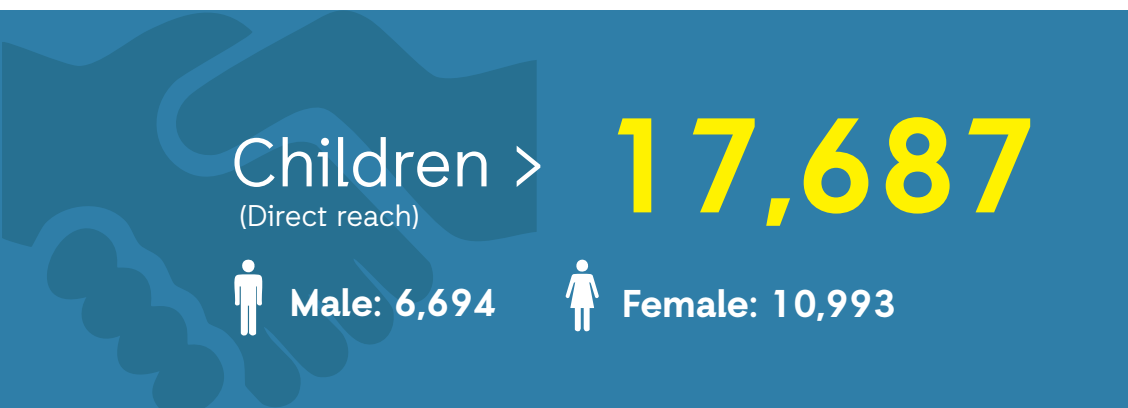
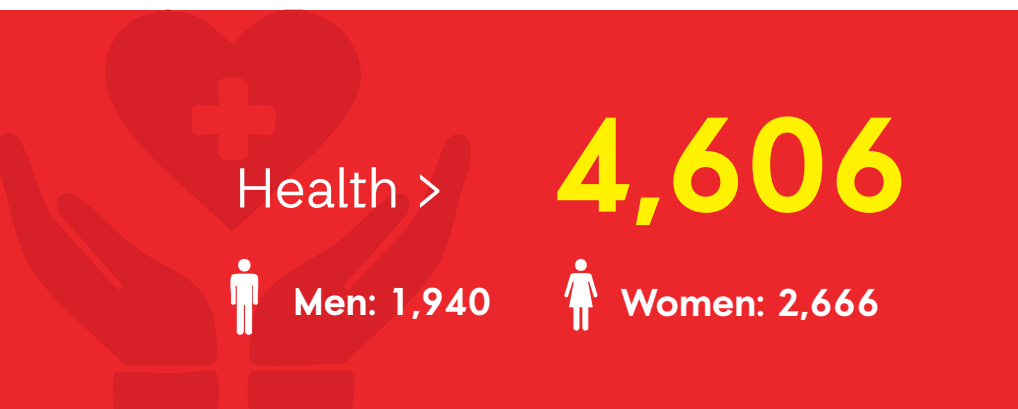
2,990

Number of women who
established/owned a live skill
business.

180

Number of women
provided with start-up
grant/equipment on
the project

SECTORIAL REACH



List of Delta Communities

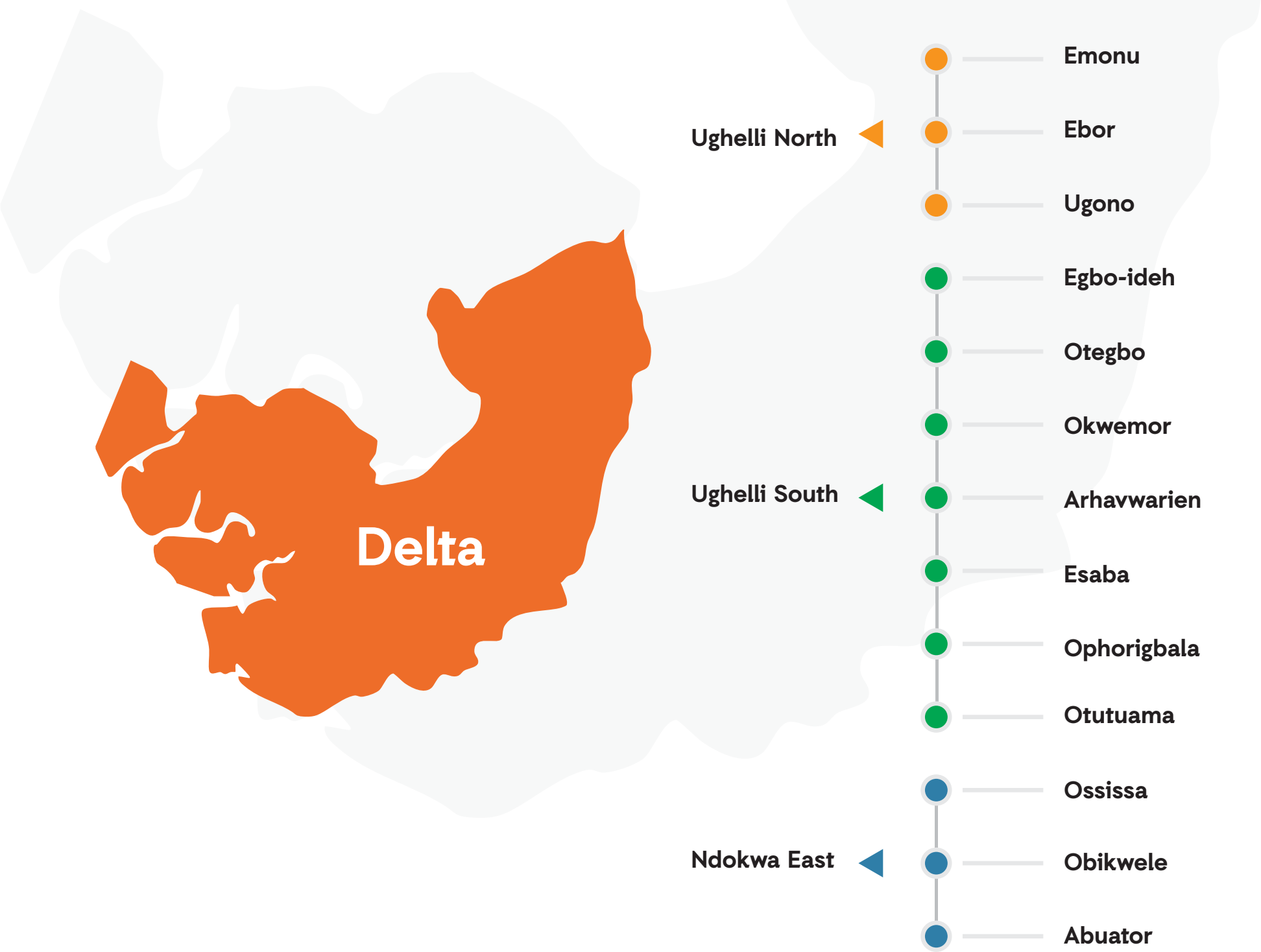


PHOTO GALLERY









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