

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **ON**

### **CODRIGAP'S OBJECTIVE TWO STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S VOICES**

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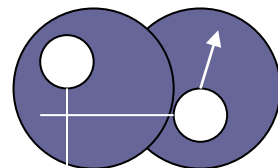
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## INTRODUCTION

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The Community Driven Gender Advocacy Project (CODRIGAP) is one of the projects under the Poverty Reduction and Wealth Creation (PRWC) Programme of the Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives (CENSUDI). CODRIGAP aims at empowering communities, and especially women, to break socio-cultural barriers that retard development and more especially reduce the participation of women in decision-making and their access to productive resources. CODRIGAP is in its third year of implementation and has yielded tremendous results. One of the ways that CODRIGAP has been achieving its results in the last three years has been to enhance the voices of women in the development dialogue especially at the family, community and district levels. This component has proved to be the key to achieving the other four objectives of CODRIGAP. This document is the final report on the application of funds provided by MATCH International Canada for the implementation of the Women's Voice Objective.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS COMPONENT OF CODRIGAP

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- Strengthen the organisational capacity of women
- Enhance the capacity of women's groups in public life, advocacy and communication skills
- Support women to secure seats to district and regional assemblies as well as other bodies where they can raise issues directly and lobby decision makers for change
- Create the opportunity for groups to meet and exchange ideas on challenges and successes
- Support female groups to partner with HIV/AIDS service organisations to address Traditional practices and policies that discriminate against women (TRAPPDAW), through some of which both women and men may be infected with HIV/AIDS virus
- Monitor the progress of work in communities

## ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE PERIOD

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During the period under review, various strategies and activities have been carried out with women and their communities to strengthen women's capacity in ways that has improved their participation in decision making particularly in CODRIGAPs design and implementation processes.

## **IDENTIFIED AND BUILT THE ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY OF WOMEN GROUPS**

At the project planning stages, at least five to ten women from each of the six<sup>1</sup> participating communities were identified, trained and coached in gender, public speaking and planning skills to enable them participate much more effectively. We also provided some gender sensitization to the traditional rulers, male and female custodians of culture, some district assembly staff and potential partner organisations as part of our preparations towards the development of the proposal. These separate training and sensitization sessions were designed specially to meet the needs of our various target groups based on our experiences and various focus group consultations that we had held across the Upper East Region.

These initial steps proved to be very useful as women spoke out cogently then and now on matters of concern to them in the presence of men. Traditional authorities were and continue to be much more accommodating and understanding of women's concerns. During the proposal development stages, this created a conducive environment for dialogue resulting in a well thought out proposal that has hardly undergone any major changes since its implementation started three years ago.

Three of the communities we have been working with since the design stage are what we refer to in the region as the "Capital Communities of Culture and Tradition." Here tradition holds sway over modernity and cultural practices, particularly those that denigrate women, were often seen to be created and/or ordained by God. We are happy to report that about three years of our interactions with them has already started yielding results. In many of these communities, the key male custodians of culture are leading the fight to change these traditions. We attribute this success partly to our approach which also recognizes the importance of keeping good traditional practices and culture. Indeed CODRIGAP supports the communities to strengthen traditional practices that are good such as annual festivals and home coming events.

In 2006, we worked with communities to identify their existing and functioning socio-economic women's groups. Some interesting findings of this work include:

All communities have social women's groups, usually headed by a Magazia and other female leaders.

Every woman in the community is a member unless she opts out and refuses to abide by its rules.

Magazias are not necessarily selected by the women themselves but by chiefs and clan heads.

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<sup>1</sup> The communities who fully participated in the design of the proposal were only six. The other four communities joined after the proposal was written

Where the community is too large, like in Tengzuk, sectional magazias are selected then the lead Magazia also selected but not necessarily voted for or selected from among the others.

Because the chief selects these Magazias, they are treated as one of the elders and are consulted regularly although not formally as they do not usually participate in their council meetings.

Other groups within the communities are income generating and affinity ones. Such groups those that are functioning well and achieving their objectives average 5-10 in each community. These groups are much smaller in size than the community wide social group but also span a wide range from 5 women in the smallest group to about 80 in the largest.

One achievement of the identification of women's groups has been the directory of women's groups that has been widely circulated to district assemblies, other NGOs and funding agencies. Another major achievement has been the training of the leaders of these groups in group dynamics and organisational development. At least 4 groups from our directory have benefitted from credit given out by the Department of Women through the District Assemblies. These groups are from Nyorkukor and Kantia.

A challenge has been the number of groups – too many to be reached but the size of funding has not been sufficient to reach all members of groups with the training. Additionally, there should have been more than one training session on group dynamics and development but the resources were woefully inadequate. We have been creative in mainstreaming some of these skills into regular training but that has still not been able to fill the void.

### **CAPACITY OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE, ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS BUILT THROUGH TRAINING**

During the period under review, six major regional level and ten smaller workshops have been held for project communities, partners and other stakeholders. In addition, many other dialogue and sensitization gatherings and conversations have been facilitated at the community level either alone or as part of the community action planning (CAP) processes. At the design stage it was envisaged that one or two public life skills workshops would be specially designed for women. However, at implementation, the realities on the ground dictated that the skills be mainstreamed into the other training activities and communities encouraged to ensure more female participants in all workshops. Another reason for this change is that some of these skills had already been mainstreamed into the earlier training in group dynamics and organisational development. Finally, women need to practice their public life skills in a mixed setting rather than a female only group. An evaluation of past training sessions (1991/2/3) given by CENSUDI to groups of

women revealed that many of the women who did well in practice sessions during training, were still very challenged once they found themselves in a mixed group. Since many gatherings that most community women attend are also attended by men, it is important to help them learn within that frame. However, there were ample opportunities and spaces created during the workshops for women to learn and practice skills by themselves before practicing in the mixed setting. Some lessons we learnt when training for women is done in a mixed setting include:

- One needs to be very observant so that the training methodology and content is constantly adapted sensitively
- Use any situations that may lead to conflict or unnecessary gender related arguments as opportunities for sensitizing both men and women
- Ensure that male participants do not hijack the whole process as they may already be less shy and have a tendency to want to show off

Major achievements of these capacity building activities include:

- Women's better knowledge and understanding of their own needs and their confidence at articulating them at meetings and gatherings Women no longer feel shy to appear and talk in public meeting grounds, especially in the presence of their male counterparts. Males have also become aware of the value of female contributions in decision making, especially at the community level and do not prevent or discourage them from making any contributions.
- Majority of women are now allowed to sit with their husbands in taking decisions pertaining to the welfare of households. For instance, as part of the need to reduce extravagant funeral performances, men and women, wife and husband in many of the participating communities decide together on the kind and quantum of resources to be allocation at each stage of funeral performances. These decisions are of guided by bye laws that many of these communities have adopted.

### **SUPPORT WOMEN TO SECURE SEATS IN DISTRICT AND REGIONAL FORUMS AND ON OTHER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES WHERE THEY CAN LOBBY FOR CHANGE WITH DECISION MAKERS**

This activity started with an assessment of women's membership of Unit Committees in the ten communities. Ghana's decentralised system designates District Assemblies as the planning authorities charged with the overall development of their districts. The system also requires that men and women, working through their communities, must participate in the formulation and implementation of the district plans. Planning at the district level therefore starts community plans which are first harmonized at the Unit Committee level through the Town/Area/Urban/Zonal Council level to the district level. District

Assemblies then ensure that the development plan is submitted through the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) to the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for approval, and of their budget to the Ministry of Finance for approval. Funds are channelled through the same route to the communities for implementation of their dreams. Our assessment of all these bodies revealed that less than 2% of their membership is female. All the Unit Committees in the 10 communities had no female member. After some dialoguing and negotiations, each of the ten (10) CODRIGA Project communities agreed to give three (3) of the five (5) member Community Facilitation Team (CFT) places to women. CFTs operate as a subcommittee of the Unit Committees (UC). So this single act of affirmative action or positive discrimination immediately moved women's participation in these critical planning bodies from less than 2% to over 20%!

The CFTs together with some women's group leaders (two from each community) drawn from ten (10) communities of the Talensi/Nabdam District and the Bolgatanga Municipality have been equipped with leadership, planning and facilitation skills. Women with children participated actively and carried out assignments diligently to the admiration of their male participants. Women with suckling babies came with other women to take care of their babies and this enabled them to participate freely in the training programme. A few of these baby minders also seized the opportunity to involve themselves in the training thereby expanding the knowledge sharing process. Platforms were created for all participants to carry out presentations during plenary sessions and this provided another avenue for them to further strengthen their presentation and public speaking skills.

During the development of action plans at the community level, women who benefited from training took the lead in organizing others in various focus groups to discuss and analyse issues of concern to them, agree on actions they want to take as women and by the community against discriminatory and harmful practices. These concerns were then collated and presented at community wide meetings as messages from women. The power of these women's collective action and voice has resulted in CAPS that are awash with genuine community level concerns and actions. These are major achievements in just three years.

In 2006, the project supported female candidates in the Bolgatanga Municipality and Talensi-Nabdam Districts during the district assembly elections. All female candidates were given some financial support to manage their polling agents on Election Day. The candidates themselves had identified this as their greatest need and yet they were often unable to provide adequately for their polling agents because by Election Day many women would have depleted their resources. Other women in past elections recounted how they lost elections because their male polling agents had let them down when they needed them most. Without a happy and committed polling agent, rigging is very easy. Female candidates were also supported morally with visits by female and male mentors and role models to candidates at their various electoral areas to encourage them to and to provide visible support from others leaders. The result of this is that some women were

able to secure seats in their electoral areas. For instance, out of thirty-eight (38) seats in the Talensi-Nabdam Assembly, three (3) were secured by females. Twenty-one (21) of the ninety seven (97) female candidates in the upper East region won their seats. This is an improvement of % over the 2002 elections. Those candidates who lost are consistently being encouraged not to give up in their ambition and desire to lead their communities. Some of them are periodically invited to some of our workshops so that they can hone their campaign skills. Some lobbying got some of them nominated into the Assemblies and to serve on boards of various public and private organisations. CENSUDI showed the way by appointing one such community leader to her Board. Our efforts got two losing candidates in the 2006 elections appointed as members of the Talensi-Nabdam District Assembly. Another nurse who lost her seat to a man continues to mobilize women in her electoral area to build a meeting and recreational centre and is now looking for matching funds to complete it.

## **FACILITATE INVITATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS**

Policy makers (Traditional Institutions and District/Municipal Assemblies) were engaged in series of sensitisation programmes and this was meant to inculcate the spirit of gender into policies they make at the modern and traditional governance levels. At the Assembly levels meetings were held with Municipal/District Planning and Coordinating Units of the Bolgatanga Municipal and Talensi-Nabdam District Assemblies. The Assemblies were convinced of the relevance of the CODRIGAP and its concept of implementation using the decentralized framework of local government structures. The Assemblies therefore accepted responsibilities of:

- Getting involved with CENSUDI and the communities during community entry processes of the CODRIGA Project;
- Orientating Assembly persons to know more about the project;
- Integrating Community Action Plans (CAPs) into the Assemblies' Medium Term Development Plans (MTDP); and
- Encouraging the Assemblies Persons to team up with their respective chiefs to enable them work together effectively since the project has to do with customs and traditions.

The Traditional Policy makers (Bolgatanga, Talensi and Nabdam Traditional Council members) sensitisation also succeeded in convincing most of them who understood the implications of some of the negative and discriminatory policies and practices against women and even advocated that there is the need for them to make changes when they go back to their various traditional areas. The traditional leaders therefore assured their support for the Project in their various communities and agreed on certain roles they would be playing in ensuring the success and sustainability of the Project



Even though these changes at the community as well as district level are not yet visibly realised we anticipate the desirable impact to be felt when communities with the assistance of the various stake holders start implementing their community action plans (CAPs).

### **FACILITATE AND SUPPORT WOMEN'S GROUPS' DIRECT ACCESS TO DISTRICT SERVICES AND DECISION**

Facilitate and support women's groups' direct access to district services and decision. With regards to this particular activity much has not yet been achieved as the communities have not yet started implementing most of the issues outlined in their CAPs. However the district assemblies have indicated their preparedness to assist communities, especially, women's groups to access services at the district assembly level. There are even indications that some assemblies have already begun responding positively to demands from women's groups. For instance one of our monitoring visits revealed that the Talensi-Nabdam has ever responded positively to some women's group when they demanded for electricity to be extended to a group grinding mill.

### **IDENTIFY, MOBILISE AND EFFECT PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FEMALE GROUPS AND HIV/AIDS SERVICE ORGANISATIONS**

(8) CFTs (4 male and 4 female) from eight project communities participated in an HIV/AIDS workplace policy planning and implementation workshop. They in turn have developed a plan of action which they will be supported to implement in their communities.

### **FACILITATE AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES TO CULTIVATE THE HABIT OF SAVING, MOTIVATE COMMUNITIES TO INITIATE THEIR OWN ECONOMIC VENTURES AND PROVIDE SOCIAL INTERMEDIATION SERVICES SUCH AS SKILL TRAINING, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

As part of our efforts to fight to reduce poverty and create wealth to ensure tangibility of its benefits, the CODRIGA project embarked a programme last year which had all economic groups (males and females) registered in its catchments communities. A proposal was then developed aimed at starting up a pilot project on mobilising communities to cultivate the culture of saving. The objectives of the project were to:

- Mobilise and encourage communities to cultivate the habit of saving.
- Motivate communities to initiate their own economic ventures.
- Provide social intermediation services such skills training, financial management, records keeping, etc.

The project planned to employ the strategy of encouraging individuals to cultivate the habit of contributing to and being shareholders of a Community Based Credit Union. This

proposal however could not yield any fruits because we could not get funding for the project. We however hope to continue looking for donors who would be willing to sponsor this pilot project, which we hope to replicate in many other communities.

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### CODRIGAP DIALOGUES AND SENSITIZES THE YOUTH

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This activity was aimed at making youth of all ages and sex, and most especially the young females, to own the CODRIGAP project by making contributions into their Community Action Plans and taking the lead role in their implementation. It therefore began with the identification and registration of youth based on age groups (10-15 and 15-30 years) and sex (male and females). Roles were assigned to Community Facilitating Team (CFT) members who had the youth of their communities registered and mobilised for a one day meeting with the Implementing Partners (IPs) and CODRIGAP Field Officers (CFOs). On the day of the sensitization in each community, youth present were segregated into groups (male youth, female youth, or a mixture of various age groups and sex) and sensitised, depending on the situation on the ground. The CFTs and other community leaders led the facilitation processes

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### ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE YOUTH SENSITISATION

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Generally the sensitisation programme in the communities was very successful as it revealed the following:

While some youth had some knowledge of development projects in their communities, others did not. Even those who had the knowledge of these projects were not actively involved in taking decisions about them because the elders will not allow them to talk as tradition does not allow children, especially girls, to sit among elders in taking decisions on such issues. Others also cited the non exciting and non tangible immediate gains as things that kept them away from community meetings and forums to discuss development

Based on the above assessment, the youth were then sensitised on the CENSUDI-CODRIGA Project.

It was observed that male youth were the majority in attendance compared with their female counterparts and this, we learnt, was attributed to the fact that:

- Girls are involved in more household chores such as cooking as well as livelihood activities than boys
- Girls migrate more to the urban areas for porter and other menial jobs than boys
- Girls are given out for marriage at early ages

The youth therefore agreed to actively participate in their communities' development activities beginning with the validation of the CAPs.

Youth from some of the communities have already elected their male and female community facilitation representatives

Plans are also far advanced to train them and guide the youth to discuss their peculiar concerns and formulate actions for inclusion in the community action plans.

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## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

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Despite the above elaborated short term outcomes on women empowerment much still needs to be desired as the ultimate goal of the overall project, which is aimed at reducing poverty and creating wealth is yet to be realised. Some of the lessons we have learnt so far include:

- Achieving and sustaining behavioural and attitudinal change requires longer than three years. Intangible advocacy projects like CODRIGAP take relatively long time to translate into desired results. Indeed our experiences so far with CODRIGAP show that three years is what it takes to just set up, i.e. engaging the communities in formative research for obtaining their commitment to the design and implementation of approaches and interventions that challenge them to think and act differently. In many of the communities, the perception is that NGOs provide welfare needs rather than facilitating communities to develop themselves. Getting communities to change this perception, especially when there are other NGOs working in that vicinity with this '*welfarish*' approach is tough and time consuming.
- The process of information sharing with communities and facilitating community dialogue and sensitisation in order to break socio-cultural barriers that silence women's voices have been extensive and quite long. It has however created awareness at all levels of participating communities about the project and what it seeks to achieve beyond the elimination of TRAPPAW.
- Mobilizing and sustaining interest in peri-urban communities has proven to be very difficult mainly because there are other economic and instantly rewarding activities that attract the attention of inhabitants as opposed to the intangible and long term nature of CODRIGAP benefits.
- The intangible nature of the project has discouraged most of the youth from actively participating in its activities; the youth are looking out for tangible projects that would contribute to raising their economic status.
- Another challenge was our inability to get funding sources for the implementation of the pilot project on mobilising communities to cultivate the culture of saving. This proposal was forwarded to one of CODRIGAP donors, MATCH International, but was rejected because funding of such nature, they said, was not part of their budget plans at the time.

- Lack of salaries or allowances for CFTs makes them feel reluctant to put in their best. This fact coupled with the intangible nature of the benefits of the project explains the insufficient and lackadaisical participation by youth in the project. There is a significant presence of young men and women to act as facilitators, but we need to find ways of motivating them and sustaining their interest in project.
- Low level of literacy, capacity and experiences especially of women and girls restricts engagement with state actors while there are others who are restricted by attitude and strong belief that any engagement with state actors will provoke political reactions.
- Given the role socialization plays in creating the current gender discrimination and inequities in our societies, we will make better progress if we started with very young children in preschool.
- The interaction with traditional authorities and councils (TAs & TCs) as part of district and community entry have been very useful in terms of ensuring legitimacy for the project, facilitating implementation and ensuring that beyond the substructures, communities have other channels and institutions for engaging with and demanding accountability from the DAs. The challenge is to help strengthen capacity of TCs and DAs to strengthen mechanisms for dialogue and accountability between them.
- Another area of learning is that effective community driven advocacy (addresses strategic needs) needs to include social and economic development initiatives that are tangible and bring immediate benefits to people-addressing their practical as well as strategic needs. CODRIGAP lacks immediate benefits and this has been a problem with communities. In a weird twist of fate, the disaster food aid assistance that we have been giving since December 2007, has served to draw in and sustain new faces to our meetings with communities. We recommend that the project begin to include activities and resources to address practical needs in tandem.
- Mobilizing and sustaining interest in peri-urban communities has proven to be very difficult mainly because there are other economic and instantly rewarding activities that attract the attention of inhabitants as opposed to the intangible and long term nature of CODRIGAP benefits.
- The slow progress in carrying out other planned activities for the year is due to the disaster that hit the UER in the second quarter of 2007. The need to assess the extent of damage caused by this year's flood disaster in the Project communities and to help find assistance for them took more time than had been envisaged. This could partly be attributed to the fact that there is inadequate staff to handle both project activities and emergency programmes at the same time. The other major reason for the time consuming nature of the disaster assessments is because CENSUDI staff had no experience or skills in emergency preparedness. Finally,

our desire to ensure that the little assistance we got is targeted to the most vulnerable required in depth participatory vulnerability analysis- which is time consuming.

## WAY FORWARD

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- Develop and support a youth programme: To attract and sustain the interest of youth in the project, we have adopted a strategy of pre-sensitising the youth on each stage of the project, which we have started doing and hope to continue. The youth leaders would also be targeted and encouraged to be actively involved in mobilisation of people, especially their colleagues, for the project meetings at all stages. We therefore hope to facilitate the next batch of communities to select active youth to be part of the CFTs to continue wooing the youth to the project. We are also discussing with communities, the institution of an annual award or benefit package to CFTS as well as ways by which the communities can support the CFTS in other ways rather than cash.
- CENSUDI should source more funds to support tangible initiatives that address practical needs of communities emanating from their CAPs.
- There is also the need to continue soliciting funds for the implementation of the pilot project on mobilising communities to cultivate the culture of saving, which was meant to start in two of the CODRIGAP communities. When this is found to be successful and feasible we would therefore develop proposals for sponsorship around the promotion of income generating activities in each of the other project beneficiary communities.
- Support communities to develop and implement initiatives in their CAPS
- Support communities to implement their HIV/AIDS plans
- Work with the ministry of education and DAs to pilot gender education in a number of day nurseries and kindergartens in our communities.