

## Community Investment

Three years ago the ExxonMobil Foundation funded the Initiative for Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs with a \$1.7 million grant. It was aimed at building the skills and thus the incomes of traditional women's cooperative associations in villages throughout the oil producing region. Now, the program has completed its three year commitment and the results are in. The empowerment initiative:

- Increased the individual incomes of 1,600 women in the participating cooperative associations by an average of 75%.
- Trained hundreds of women in basic business practices, good governance, micro-business development and management skills.
- Financed 236 microcredit proposals.



Al-Hassana Idriss Outman-Sheriff, Senior Country Director, Africare-Chad: *"The assistance that the project has provided this program has benefitted the oilfield region, bringing tremendous positive changes and badly needed increases in income. This effort has experienced major achievements and as a unique program that is specifically focused on the economic empowerment of women, is a milestone which should be replicated."*

### Poverty & Gender Equity

The empowerment initiative was designed around a study into poverty and gender equity issues around the oilfield region. The study found that cooperative associations were the traditional way for women to come together in small business enterprises to earn money. However, women's efforts were being held back by barriers such as:

- Limited access to credit.
- Lack of opportunities for generating income.
- Poor farming methods which limited households to subsistence farming.

- Bars to ownership of land, livestock and other assets.
- Bars to women participating in decisions by local market committees.
- Lack of business management skills.
- Low literacy rates.

The program addressed each of these issues by building on an existing social tradition in the villages of the area. Nearly every village has at least one women's association cooperative that has been formed as a mutual aid organization. The empowerment initiative focused on these cooperatives by providing them with business training and counseling, funding for raw materials to help cooperatives build inventory and expand their lines of business.

Empowered Women's Cooperatives: A Manufacturing Cooperative in Doba

The 17 women of Groupement Darsalam de Doba badly needed the help provided by the Initiative for Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs. Many of the members are widows with no support for them and their children aside from their share of what the cooperative brings in. With training, support and financing from the initiative, they diversified and expanded their original business.

Expanding from pottery (top), the women added an iron working foundry (bottom). They also began trading in commodities such as grain.



For the foundry operation, the cooperative hired two male employees who heat scrap metal on open fires and beat it into shovels and hoes and other tools under the direction of the women who then take the tools to market.



Halime Ousman, President, Groupement Darsalam de Doba: *“The Women’s Economic Empowerment Program provided us with financial aid, raw materials, and tools, so that we were able to expand our original business and earn more money. With the money we have earned, we can now trade in grain, peanuts, sorghum, and other goods for more profit. Now we have enough money to send our group’s 70 children to school – which they all love! This program is encouraging because it gives strength to women, who are usually the last to be considered. This is important because women build communities and can make sure the next generation is educated.”*

Empowered Women's Cooperatives: A Bakery in Benganga

The women of Groupement Mouwaromba have operated one of the oilfield area's traditional cooperative associations for many years, trading in nuts and grain. The empowerment initiative helped them create a new bakery business that has significantly increased their earning power. Here, they prepared bread (top left) and baked it in their new oven (top right). The women proudly posed in front of their new bakery building (bottom left)



Boujimta Louise, President, Groupement Mouwaromba: *"The program provided us with equipment to help process our bread, training on baking practices, and raw materials such as flour, oil and construction materials. Now that we can bake bread locally, we can sell our bread to the surrounding villages, and also on special occasions we can sell it as far away as Doba. This allows us to earn more money to buy food to feed our families and send our children to school. It has made a big change, not only in our families, but also in our community."*

Dinguemtoné Clement, Chief, Beyara village (on left): *"Three of the women in our village are in the groupement. I am very happy about the bakery. We now have local bread, and we are very proud that we can serve to visitors. The bread is especially important in October, because this is a very difficult time of the year as it is before the harvest and our food supply runs low. The women's baking and earnings makes a huge difference for our village."*

Ndignangar Emil, Cheif, Benganga I village (on right): *"I support what the women in the village are doing in their groupement. In fact, I try to encourage them to keep working hard at their craft. The groupement's new skills with baking bread have made a positive big change on the village. Now the women have a voice and are able to help support our village even better than before."*



**Empowered Women’s Cooperatives: A Partnership for Safe Drinking Water**

The Initiative for Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs recently partnered with the African Well Fund, a U.S.-based non-profit, to provide access to potable water to four communities in the oilfield area. Water wells have been drilled at four restaurants operated by women’s cooperative associations that have participated in the empowerment program. Those wells now deliver free, clean water to neighborhoods in Komé Atan, Bebédjia, Mbikou and Doba. The owner of one of the restaurants dashed to enjoy the fresh clean water when one of the four wells came in (below).



Hubert Nguelbet, Africare Project Manager for empowerment initiative: *“In 2010, approximately 150 women in oilfield area recognized a unique opportunity to open restaurants. But they didn’t have the resources they needed. So the program helped them with resources such as refrigerators, chairs and stoves. The newly opened restaurants were doing well in terms of revenue, but business was inhibited because of limited access to clean water. The women, having been newly empowered, requested additional assistance to address these issues. Together, we worked out a solution for this problem, and we are building four new wells in the area. Now, the women are saving precious time and money, and not only do the wells benefit the restaurants, but also their neighbors, who now have consistent access to clean water at no charge.”*

Brigitte Rokoulet Nekian, President of Groupement Mbailassem restaurant, Bebédjia: *“Before opening this restaurant in December of 2010, I used to sell cassava bread in the market. My partners and I knew that we could open a restaurant to sell other food along with our bread, but thinking about starting our business was difficult until we became involved with the Women’s Economic Empowerment Program. Now, after only 6 months, my restaurant is doing very well, and I’m looking forward to getting even more training from the program. This well that we are building will help us save money and also help our neighbors. Empowerment of women is important to us, because as widows with no support system, we are now able to save money and even send our children to school.”*



