Message from the Director
Looking back over the past year, one of my most treasured experiences was that of interviewing the women who had benefited from Ifendu project in Neke. Listening to them recounting their success stories and achievements against the backdrop of their previous struggles, I felt happy and reassured that the project was worthwhile. This newsletter edition brings you a selection of those stories from the impact assessment. I use this opportunity to express once again my heart-felt gratitude to our sponsors especially, Nächstenliebe Weltweit and Misean Cara as well as our facilitators in the field, without whom such success would not have been achieved. On behalf of all Ifendu staff, facilitators and project participants, I say “a very big thank you” to you all who have supported us in the past and all who might consider supporting us in the future. You have a huge share of the blessings we have been continually receiving all this while.

Yours faithfully,

Sister Rose Uchem (MSHR)
(Executive Director, Ifendu).

Ifendu project in Neke is one big success story written large in the lives of both individual beneficiaries and the community as a whole. The question is: How did it happen? What factor underlies the high level of impact that the Ifendu project has recorded in Neke? This was how it happened.

Shortly after the project was inaugurated in Neke, Ifendu decided to address an existing problem of the community before proceeding. Knowing that unless that pressing problem was first solved, any other planned intervention would be pointless and would not succeed. The problem was that of low pricing of cassava in Neke as identified during the needs assessment phase.

Ifendu, therefore, organized a joint forum of men and women community representatives to examine the problem more closely and to find possible solutions to it. There was a good response. The attendance was most encouraging; they were mostly red-cap/council chiefs and women leaders,
including our then newly trained facilitators. There were also other women from the rank and file of the project beneficiaries. Advance preparations were made so as to maximize that singular opportunity. The project leader instructed the facilitators to produce a drama which would bring out the problem very clearly. They dutifully and successfully did that. After the usual workshop preliminary exercises, the drama was presented to the participants.

Highlighting and analyzing Neke’s problem

It was heartbreaking to watch the drama which portrayed the exploitative practices of traders from Enugu metropolis who used to come to their market to buy cassava. The average Neke woman who brought her bag(s) of cassava to Nkwo Neke Market might have been hoping to make some money to pay off her debts or to buy food for her family. Yet those traders would intercept the goods on arrival in the morning but would not finalise the deal. They would rather continue dilly-dallying until evening time when the market would nearly close. They would price the cassava so low; and being near to closing time, the woman would be compelled to sell at whatever ridiculous price the trader would agree to pay. Worse still, the trader might refuse to pay but bid for taking out the goods on credit; promising to pay on the next Nkwo market day in four days’ time. In most cases the seller would succumb to this gimmick considering the cost and burden of having to transport the goods back home. Incredible, yet a reality! The debtor would then vanish into thin air as she would not appear on the next market day as promised. In the worst case scenario, some women had the experience of going to Enugu to seek out their debtors without success. Such was the long-standing problem pre-existing in the community before Ifendu intervened. It came up during the preliminary needs assessment as ‘working like elephant and eating like grasshopper.’ It meant working exceedingly hard but reaping meagre or no economic benefits. The drama presentation helped greatly to highlight the issues.

One of the facilitators, Ijeoma Ogbonna, excellently facilitated the discussion that followed using a set of given guidelines to process the drama. During the discussion, some of the male participants confessed that they were moved to tears when the drama was going on. One man put it this way: “for the first time, I saw very clearly the problem I had always known but only vaguely grasped.” In the subsequent step, they were put into small groups to brainstorm and come up with possible solutions to the community’s problem and report in a plenary session. The proposals were then collated, prioritized, crystalized and put on a single newsprint/flip chart paper. Finally, the project leader (Sr Rose Uchem) ceremoniously handed over the paper bearing the community’s agreed solution to the problem to Elder Charles Ogbonna (the
appointed liaison person) and asked them to go and implement them.

When men and women work together to solve a problem, there is progress
Two months following that historic inclusive community forum, it was reported to Ifendu that they appointed delegates from that forum comprising men and women. They held a series of meetings in the interim to fine-tune the plans and communicated to the whole town prescribed measures to limit the amount of cassava that anyone could bring to the market at any one time. Consequently, the price of cassava went up for the first time from N2,000 to N4,000 per bag, to the benefit of our beneficiaries and others. Thus, Ifendu successfully helped the entire community to solve their long-standing problem of ‘working like elephants and eating like grasshopper;’ that is, the problem of low pricing of their goods and exploitation by traders from Enugu metropolis. As at mid-2021, when we carried out an impact evaluation in that community, a bag of cassava was selling for N20,000 and our women were smiling going home! Some of the beneficiaries narrated their stories as follows:

No longer called Anayo
Rachel Onah both sells and cultivates akpu (cassava) told her story like this: “Before I joined Ifendu, people used to call me anayo (that is, a beggar or a parasite). However, by the special grace of God through Ifendu, I am no longer a beggar. I am now a giver. Ifendu coming to Neke brought light to women like me. It was through Ifendu that I learnt how to read and write. They taught us how to invest money to make more money. Before now, if I got money I would not know how to put it to good use. The money they gave me helped me to start up my cassava business. I divided it into two. I used half to cultivate cassava farm and the other half to purchase a ‘chain’ (that is, a portion of cassava farm ready for harvesting). After harvesting the ‘chain’ and selling the produce, I made a lot of money. When my own crop matured, I sold it as well. My mind now went to the house I started building six years ago; that I did not know what to do with because there was no money. That was where I put the profits I made. I bought and installed iron doors and glass windows (popularly called ‘Alumaco’). Although I have not finished plastering the walls, I am doing that gradually. I pray they give me another loan so that I can make more money to complete the house. As God has used Ifendu to bless me may he also bless others. I also pray God to bless and keep Sr. Rose and give her long life.

Thankfully, Rachael and her colleagues have since received another round of micro-credit support. And it is such a pleasure to note that they are now in their fourth round. All hail to our able facilitators in the field without whom this level of success would never have been achieved!

Improved couple relationship
Chizoba Odoh sells fresh tomatoes and happily narrated how her life changed in many ways: “Before I joined Ifendu, things were very difficult
for me and my family. Ifendu became a light in my family. I used the money I was given to start my fresh tomato business and also invested in my children’s education. It was as if God visited me from heaven. I have gained a lot from Ifendu. They are truly light of life. Previously, I could not afford to buy a single wrapper to wear; but now I am able to change my wrappers. Also I am now able to pay my children’s school fees. From the profit I made, I bought a refrigerator; all thanks to Ifendu. God has really blessed me through them. Apart from the financial aspect of my gain from Ifendu, I learnt how to live in peace with my husband and how to care for my home. I am happy to say that Ifendu saved me from many things. I used to be very bad tempered but now I have changed. Even my husband has been telling other people how much I have changed and how peace and quiet have returned to our home. My husband who used to stay out a lot now comes back home. Before, he never even looked at my face but now he does … praise the Lord! I wish other women would come and enjoy this light that I am experiencing.

Diversified income streams
Blessing Ugwu, a trader and a farmer who sells ukpaka, groundnut, native soap among others, put her success story like this:
“I used to sell only ukpaka (oil bean seeds) before I joined the Ifendu programme. I did not make enough money to take care of my family and personal needs. Things were very difficult for me then. I used to owe people a lot but now I thank God. I am no longer owing anybody anything. When I joined the group, I learnt many new things. They taught us to diversify our income sources; that a woman should not have only one source of income. After the training, I added groundnut, soap and some local herbs to what I was selling before. I can say that my profits are increasing. I like Ifendu because what they taught us helped me very much. They taught us how to keep record of those owing us; how to write down their names, how much they are owing and the date. Ever since I started recording my sales in this way, it has become easier for me to recover my money. Other things also changed in my life; even my way of thinking. I learnt that the responsibility of managing the home should be shared between a married couple and not just left for one person to shoulder alone.

Friends now call me ‘Company’!
I am Ugwu Cecilia. I am from Akpaani Neke in Isi-Uzo local government area of Enugu State. I started making and selling body cream, soap, balm/rub, detergent and other things in the market after we trained. That is why my friends and call me “Company!” Before I joined Ifendu, I was not easy to work my source of livelihood. Then, a friend of mine introduced me to Ifendu. I quickly registered and began attending the literacy classes. The classes helped me to be able to stand up and talk in public which I was not able to do before. Ifendu trained us in different things like how to make cake, chin-chin, buns, puff-puff, body cream, vaseline, washing soap, balm, omo (detergent) and other things. They also gave us loan to start our own business. When I collected the money, I was very happy because I wanted to go into cream and soap production which was my area of interest but I had no money. I immediately went to Ogbete Enugu and bought everything I needed. Another thing that helped me was the business training they gave us. That was where I learnt to be friendly to customers. I no longer frown at customers who price down my goods and it is helping my business.

Better understanding with spouse
Eriugo Roseline sells iced fish. She narrates how the Ifendu programme changed her relationship with her husband: I am a three-time beneficiary of Ifendu micro-credit scheme. I used to sell okpa (bambara nut)
flour; but later I switched to frying akara (bean cake). Now I sell fresh fish. I usually go to Ikem, a nearby town, to buy my goods and then sell them in Neke. From the profit I made, I bought four plastic chairs and a big cooler which I rent. I learnt how to attract customers with a cheerful face and also learnt that I should rest after farm work and keep my body clean as well. Since Ifendu started organizing trainings that involved both men and women, I no longer have misunderstanding with my husband. Things have changed in my home. My husband has started doing things that he used to ignore before. I have told people that Ifendu is both ‘light’ and ‘light of life;’ that they should come and join this group so that their lives can change for the better.

Taking care of seven children

“I sell akpu (cassava). My husband has died and I am the only one taking care of our seven children. I have benefited from the micro-credit three times. I used the profit I made to buy three bundles of zinc. Although I have not yet started any building, I decided to buy the zinc first and keep because of the rising cost of things” (Ezeoha Juliet).

Will never forget you

Ugwuagbo Roseline trades in crayfish and is one of those who have benefited from the micro credit several times. She recounted her blessings like this: Before I got the second loan, I used to cook with firewood but with the profit I made, I was able to buy a kerosene stove. After the third loan, I used my profit to buy a big drum (GP tank) for harvesting and storing rain water. I really appreciate Ifendu for all they are doing for us. “Ebe unu si k’anyi rie, Chukwu ga eme kwa unu n’owwe unu rie. Anyi agaghi kwa echefu unu. [meaning, since you decreed that we should not starve but that we should eat, God will surely provide for you. We will never ever forget you].”

Buying and reselling items in high demand

Lawretta Ugwu sells fruits such as watermelon, cucumber and carrots, among others. Putting into use her learning points from the business training she attended gave her a break through in her business ventures. This is her story: Before now, I used to go to the bush to gather firewood and sell to get a little money to take care of my children. I was managing my life with much difficulty then; but after Ifendu taught us how to do business, I started going to more interior villages to buy things cheaper and take them to the big town to sell and make more profit. Coming back from the town, I would also buy certain items that are in demand and bring them to the village to sell. Being a member of Ifendu, you have nothing to lose. Rather you have so much to gain. I have collected loan from Ifendu three times and I have used it to achieve a lot. My new ability to read and write and also to separate capital from my sales is one of the things I will never forget. The business training we had really helped me.”.

Learned to separate profit from sales

Agbo Regina deals in akpu (cassava) and is one of those who endlessly celebrate their gains from Ifendu. She tells her story like this: “I sell akpu and I make sure it is very neat so as to attract customers. I cultivate cassava myself and also buy from the market when I exhaust my own. I use my profit to buy things that are needed in my home. I bought a set of tower pots and a big drum which I use to ferment the cassava. My husband appreciates me very much because I assist him financially in taking care of the home. I learnt so many things from Ifendu; things like keeping myself neat and dressing well. Anyone who sees me always compliments me. We were taught how to be punctual and I always apply this to my business. Before I used to feel very happy and rejoice and I would be saying “eme turu m ego aka ta;” [that money entered my hands today]. I didn’t know the difference between my total sales and my profit. It was through the business training that I learnt the difference between sales and profit and also how to calculate my profit or loss. I also learnt how to make chin-chin, cake, soap, detergent. I hope to buy an oven which I will use to make cake. I want to go into cake business because we were taught to diversify our business. Ifendu is a beautiful organization and that is why I thank Sr. Rose for
enjoying peace of mind
Eze Jecinta, originally from Ikem but married into Neke, sells assorted soup condiments such as egusi (melon seeds), onions, pepper, etc. She told her personal story: “I used to work as a casual labourer. I worked for people in their farms and got paid little amounts. It was barely enough to take care of my home. Ifendu came around and changed my life for the better. I no longer work for others. It is God that brought Ifendu. I do not know what I would have done without them. People like us would not have known what to do with their lives. I was moving about looking for help everywhere because my husband was very ill. The illness lasted for eight and half years and the burden of the family was on my shoulders. Then I heard that Ifendu was in Neke and that they were helping people. Although my husband later died, I feel peaceful because I can still take care of myself and my children. Ifendu counted a huge sum of [money] that I didn’t even know how they suffered to get it and gave me. I used the [micro-credit] to buy these things I now sell. I learnt how to make soap for my own use but I sometimes I make it for sale. I also learnt how to make body cream; although I have not yet perfected in that. When I get more money, I will buy the ingredients in big quantities and make soap for sale. There was a time in my life when I could not sleep no matter how hard I tried; but now I sleep peacefully because help is coming from somewhere. God will bless Ifendu and bless Sr. Rose because she was the one that taught us everything. She taught us how to live peacefully in our homes. May God bless her going out and her coming in.

Amen. I advise other women to join Ifendu. They would learn many things including how to dress smart; you can see how I look now. They would learn how to pray straight from their heart and how to write their names. I can now write my name. When I attend our town’s women’s meeting, they usually ask me to do the roll call. I happily show that I can do it because I am attending sister’s school. They usually laugh at me and ask if I wanted to become a reverend sister (a nun). I keep telling people that it was God who sent Sister to come and teach us.

Truly the light of life
Agbo Roseline N., who trades in palm oil - buying and selling - had this to say: “Before I started this business, I used to do menial jobs for people. My husband was doing the same thing. Whenever he came home, he would give me a little money to buy foodstuff from the market. It was never enough. We could not pay our children’s school fees. Things were very difficult. When I heard that there was a group that helped people, I went and joined them. They were called Ifendu. They gave me money with which I started this palm oil business. I would buy directly from the producers and take it to the market and resell it to the consumers. I have benefited a lot from Ifendu. They taught me how to do business; how to make bar soap, liquid soap, body cream, bread, puff-puff and other things. At the close of the market everyday, I count my money, remove the profit I made and use a part of it to buy foodstuff before going home. I am spreading the good news to all women in Neke; telling them to join Ifendu because they are truly the light of life. They help to uplift people who do not have much.
PROFILE OF IFENDU

Ifendu for Women’s Development (Ifendu) is a Holy Rosary Sisters’ project. It was registered as an NGO with the Corporate Affairs Commission, Abuja, in 2004, and attained United Nations’ Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) special consultative status in 2010. Ifendu came into existence to contribute towards eradicating discriminatory and harmful traditional practices that negatively affect girls and women, to improve their well-being in all spheres of life, and to promote their full inclusion in the society. Thus, Ifendu envisions a new world where girls and boys, women and men, are truly equal and are free from all kinds of discrimination. Ifendu’s mission is to contribute towards bringing about such a more inclusive world where everyone counts. The name, Ifendu, literally means the ‘light of life;’ signifying the light or the insight that comes from increased social awareness and sense of empowerment that beneficiaries often report after exposure to new insights from the organization.

At the initial stage, Ifendu concentrated on addressing the roots of women’s oppression in the society mainly through gender awareness-raising publications, workshops and public lectures with very heart-warming results. With the passage of time, Ifendu expanded its project scope beyond lectures and publications to include economic and social empowerment of women in rural communities. This evolution of project focus came about as a result of a consultancy that USAID-sponsored Management Sciences for Health (MSH) awarded the project leader in 2014. The consultancy involved providing technical support to community stakeholders for the abolishment of traditional practices harmful to women and girls in Enugu State (Igbo-Eze South). The project leader’s experiences in the course of the relevant research motivated and inspired her to steer Ifendu project toward addressing extreme poverty and gender-based oppression among rural populations.

With financial support from both private individual and corporate donors, Ifendu provided social and language literacy education, vocational and business skills training as well as micro-credit support to vulnerable women in Uahunowerre. This effort resulted, in many cases, to improved standard of living due to increased income, diversified sources of income resulting in turn from gainful employment. The project also led to enhanced sense of self-esteem and improved levels of couple relationships as well as directly and indirectly positively transforming whole communities, in some cases. Subsequently, Ifendu extended this model of project engagement to other communities. Currently, Ifendu has projects in four local government areas (LGAs): three in Enugu State and one in Imo State, namely: Igboeze-South (Uahunowerre), Igboeze North (Aji, Enugu-Ezike) and Isi-Uzo (Neke) and Orsu LGA (selected communities). In Uahunowerre, Ifendu with external funding support, built a women’s centre. In Neke, the project has taken up climate action; promoting tree planting, use of energy saving cook stoves as well as composting and recycling. It would be interesting to see the outcome of the new ventures in the coming months.

For more details on Ifendu’s projects outcomes, see past reports and newsletters on:

Ifendu website: www.ifendu.org
Instagram: https://instagram.com/ifenduforwomendev?utm_medium=copy_link
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ifenduforwomen.dev

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