


**LOCATION:  
JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA**

# A Time of Great Change

[www.slgnigeria.org](http://www.slgnigeria.org)

A photograph showing several women in traditional Nigerian attire, including headwraps and colorful shawls. They are focused on working on a large, intricate beaded necklace or bracelet. The beads are arranged in a grid pattern on a wooden frame. The women are wearing headwraps in shades of red and orange. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**In Jigawa, in the north of Nigeria, local governments lack the capacity to develop clear and focused policies and strategies that can be fully costed, implemented and effectively evaluated. The Jigawa State Government and the DFID-funded State and Local Government Programme (SLGP) are working in partnership to assist local governments to develop systems to deliver high quality and appropriate services to their citizens.**



“Before this, I have not been doing anything. I was a full-time housewife”, Halima Suleiman explains. Halima lives in Jigawa, in the north of Nigeria. Halima has come to the Women’s Centre in Buji Local Government Area to expand her skills and her ability to earn some extra money to support her son and four daughters.

The Centre teaches women skills such as literacy, knitting, sewing, and production of certain items to sell in the local market, including groundnut cakes and body cream. Bello Isa Gwadayi, the Chairman of the Buji Local Government, says, “Women [are] very important in society, so we have to teach them skills to be self-reliant... once you educate a woman, you educate a whole family.”

The Buji Women’s Centre was rehabilitated as part of support provided by the DFID-funded State and Local Government Programme (SLGP). Rather than SLGP identifying the project and implementing the work itself, however, the rehabilitation formed part of larger-scale work to support the development of Local Governments and their capability to deliver services to their citizens that are of a high quality and appropriate to the local environment.

With the support of SLGP a number of Local Government Areas (LGAs) have developed their own poverty reduction strategy papers – the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) – reflecting those developed at national and state level. A key element of this has been encouraging LGAs to think about the practical implementation of policies to ensure that LEEDS is made realistic and is supported by clear strategies.

The State Government and SLGP jointly developed the idea of a Challenge Fund aimed at the nine LGAs targeted for the first phase of LEEDS development.

As Muhammad Yusha’u, the LEEDS Desk Officer of the Jigawa State Government explains, the State Government learnt from their experience of issue-based projects (IBPs) in the health sector supported by SLGP, and addressed the need to bridge the gap between strategy development and implementation. The LEEDS Technical Committee decided it was “imperative to utilise the idea of IBPs at LGA level”, Muhammad says. As such, the committee developed a framework for LEEDS that required each LGA to include an IBP to champion LEEDS implementation, demonstrate reform and serve as a ‘quick win’.



Guidelines were provided to each LGA, as well as technical assistance from SLGP in the development of the LEEDS document and individual IBPs. IBPs submitted for consideration for funding were then evaluated in a transparent manner against pre-determined criteria (including linkages to MDG targets, involvement of civil society, addressing of at least one key LGA governance issue, government commitment to continuation of funding, and a local government department identified and committed to management of the project) and one selected for funding from each of Jigawa's three senatorial districts.

The Challenge Fund was designed to be a learning process for the LGAs; to see if they could work through the necessary stages of stakeholder consultation, project design, costing, and implementation. In Buji, the Local Government held a stakeholders' consultation through which an issue was decided on. CBOs have an ongoing involvement in the process, being represented on the Co-ordination Committee.

As Muhammad explains, "some LGAs were sceptical the funds would appear" as there had been hold-ups in government disbursements of funds in the past. The involvement of SLGP in the process, however, ensured that the money promised was available in accordance with the signed Memorandum of Understanding between each of the three successful LGAs, SLGP and the State Ministry of Local Government and Community Development. This three way agreement also helped ensure the project remained a cooperative engagement between the three organisations involved and not a donor-led initiative.

Through the implementation of the selected IBPs, the LGAs have had to improve their financial and procurement systems to adhere to SLGP and State Government requirements. After the initial instalment of the money promised, further instalments were only released on approval of detailed accounts from the LGAs.

The impact of the Challenge Fund has spread far wider than just the three LGAs who were selected for funding of their proposed IBP. It has even spread further than the initial nine invited to submit proposals, who were each provided with assistance to develop their LEEDS document. In the process of working with SLGP to help the initial nine LGAs develop their LEEDS documents, Jigawa Government learned a number of valuable lessons, and has begun to address these issues itself.

A Department for Planning, Research and Statistics has now been set up in each of the 27 LGAs to aid the LEEDS process at all stages. There has also been a significant improvement in the budget process. As Muhammad explains, the "budget was just seen as an annual exercise... Government now gives this utmost importance. [There has been] remarkable improvement". In future, LGAs will have to defend their budgets in the State House of Assembly. There is now also a Due Process Unit in place, and a committee in each LGA mandated with monitoring the implementation of projects and their conformity to due process. These committees are required to report quarterly to the Ministry of Local Government.

On the State level, the Challenge Fund has enabled a number of issues to come to the fore, and the State Government itself, with technical support from SLGP, is taking real steps to address these issues. On the LGA level, the nine target LGAs have benefitted from support in venturing into a new way of thinking and working, where policies are supported by clear strategies and real implementation. On the individual level, people like Halima have directly seen the impact higher quality strategies and implementation of projects can have. With the knowledge garnered, better service delivery can spread to other parts of the LGAs.



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For Halima, all this means that she is now able to attend the Women's Centre in Buji and learn skills that will help her to earn extra income to support her family. The whole experience for her has been a positive one. "Before, I was living an idle life. Now I am doing something. I am very happy."

The LEEDS Technical Committee in Jigawa State is now building on lessons learnt during the process in the nine SLGP-assisted LGAs to help others to develop their LEEDS. Other LGAs are being encouraged to include IBPs within their document, and the State Government is committed to providing money to fund at least some of these.

Muhammad describes the changes that have taken place within the state. "Now we are moving at a

time of great change. Changes are made to enhance service delivery. Service delivery will lead towards achievement of MDGs".



Photography courtesy of Afolabi Sotunde.

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