

Strengthening the Response Capacity of Legal Clinics Centers in 6 LGAs of Kano State Project



**ISA WALI
EMPOWERMENT
INITIATIVE**
...empowering women, developing children

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STORIES FROM THE FIELD

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Maryam Uwais MFR
Founder

Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative

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About IWEI

Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization inaugurated on 12th December, 2009; it was founded by Mrs. Maryam Uwais, MFR, in memory of her late father, Ambassador Isa Wali and registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, Abuja, Nigeria, (Certificate Number. 856560) in November, 2009.

IWEI's governance structure comprises of a strong board of twelve (12) directors that includes professionals from all aspects of life who advise and guide the organization as well as a growing network of staff and volunteers that execute its programs.

From its establishment to date, Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative continues to support women, youths and children in areas of family health, economic empowerment, access to justice, human rights, life skills and education for women, youths and girls.

Vision:

“Peaceful, healthy, empowered communities with social justice for women, youths and children to fully develop their potential

Mission:

“IWEI seeks to transform the society by enabling women, youth and children escape the cycle of poverty and ignorance mostly fostered by harmful traditional practices, by attaining a state of wellbeing and having a voice through innovative, qualitative and sustainable empowerment programmes.”



Executive Summary

Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative's two-year project titled: “Strengthening the Response Capacity of Legal Clinic Centres in Bichi, Dawakin Tofa, Garun Mallam, Rano, Warawa and Wudil LGAs of Kano State was implemented with the support of MacArthur Foundation. Its precursor titled: “The Establishment of Legal Clinic Centers in 6 LGAs of Kano State Project” which was implemented between 2013 and 2015 was also supported by the MacArthur Foundation.

The project's three main objectives were strengthening the response capacity of the women legal clinic centres through capacity building of paralegals and legal education classes for target community women, youths and children; advocating for the establishment of a state-wide framework to guide and support the work of paralegals; as well as establishing links between women and the leadership of government economic empowerment institutions in Kano state.

Therefore, in the course of the project year, IWEI worked with all relevant stakeholders across the 6 target LGAs as well as at the state level to achieve the project's objectives. These include women, girls and children who are victims of rights violation, members of women cooperative groups, community-based paralegals, community members, security agencies etc.

These stories were generated through field interviews which capture the testimonies of the beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project. Those interviewed included beneficiaries of paralegal services and women cooperative strengthening trainings; LGA coordinators, community-based paralegals, stakeholders such as community leaders, police, Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON) etc.

The Work of IWEI on ACCESS TO JUSTICE

"IWEI paralegals have significantly complimented our own paralegals, their existence also predated our own paralegals here in Kano state. Their presence in terms of providing access to justice is felt in rural areas. IWEI should be commended for being the pioneer organisation training paralegals in northern Nigeria".

Abubakar Ahmad, Kano State Coordinator of the
Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON)

Speaking on the contributions of IWEI trained community-based paralegals in the quest for attaining access to justice especially for women and children at the grassroots in Kano State, Abubakar Ahmad, Kano State Coordinator of the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON) said: "IWEI paralegals have significantly complimented our own paralegals, their existence also predated our own paralegals here in Kano state. Their presence in terms of providing access to justice is felt in rural areas. IWEI should be commended for being the pioneer organisation training paralegals in northern Nigeria".

Narrating his experience working with IWEI's paralegals on sexual and other related offences, Inspector Halliru Muhammed of Police CID's rape and other sexual offences unit in Shahuci, Kano says working with IWEI's paralegals had really made their work easier as the paralegals had significantly lessened the interference of influential members of the society in sexual offence cases such as rape.

"Influential people may want to influence cases of interest to them; however, with independent

paralegals involved, the case cannot be manipulated. Again, paralegals help to encourage the relatives of victims not to give up on a case until its successful completion including providing them with financial support where necessary," reveals Inspector Halliru Muhammed.

He added that attending various IWEI seminars had helped him establish fruitful relationships with pro bono human rights lawyers offering free legal services, medical doctors as well as lawyers from the Kano State Ministry of Justice which has made it much easier for him to prosecute cases and ensure access to justice for women and children.

"Having attended IWEI's seminars, I now have better understanding of medical terms associated with rape and other sexual offences, for example, I can now distinguish between legal and medical definition of rape as such I am now better when it comes to handling cases in court. Myself and other police officers are now more enlightened about the importance of paralegals when it comes to access to justice," admits Inspector Halliru.



Our Stories from the field: Legal Empowerment & Access to Justice

Legal aid and access to justice are essential to guaranteeing the legal rights of citizens particularly indigent ones across all societies; access to justice will always be truncated if citizens especially those belonging to the vulnerable and marginalised groups lack adequate knowledge of their rights due to poor access to information. Such groups of people find it difficult navigating through the legal system and cannot afford the services of a legal counsel.

Amongst others, weakness of the judicial system, low literacy levels and the society's deeply patriarchal nature contribute to poor access to information and poor awareness of legal rights in rural communities of Kano state, particularly among the vulnerable & marginalized groups majority of whom are women and children which

results in violation and denial of their rights. Against this backdrop, IWEI's aim is to empower women to be able to stand for their rights and improve access to justice, our approach has been: advocacy, awareness creation through community sensitization, radio programmes & jingles, legal education for women at the legal clinics as well as legal aid services provided by our trained community-based paralegals.

The work of IWEI's trained paralegals is slowly gaining recognition across Kano State, while some of the cases handled by the paralegals have been referred from the Police and prosecutors; others are referred from LGAs outside of the 6 target LGAs.

In fulfillment of one of the major objectives of the "Strengthening the Response Capacity of Legal

Clinic Centres in the 6 LGAs of Kano State Project”, IWEI's community-based paralegals (CBPs) have successfully mediated, resolved as well as referred a total of 677 cases which include sexual assault and violence, marital disputes, forced marriages and divorce; 78% of cases received by IWEI paralegals were resolved through mediation while criminal cases were referred to the criminal justice system, with close follow up by the paralegals.

Please note that names of some of the beneficiaries of paralegal services as narrated below have been changed for client confidentiality purposes.

Against her will: a community divided

Jamila Bala, (not real name) is a 14 year old girl from Kunchi LGA who, was forced into marriage with Badaru by her father despite being in love with one Tanimu. Though the marriage rituals had been performed but she was yet to be taken to her new husband's house and that was when she ran away and was hidden by Tanimu's sister. Jamila with the support of Tanimu then took the matter to court.

The father was summoned to appear before the court which further enraged him. Jamila's father in turn got Tanimu detained by the police along with 2 of his family members. This brought about division among the members of Jamila's community; feelings were running high and there was tension and acrimony which led to sharp division among the community members; one camp in support of Jamila and the other in support of Badaru.

It was at this stage that the case was referred to IWEI's paralegals in Bichi LGA by the prosecutor and the case was handled by Sulaiman Abubakar with the support of other paralegals who hosted series of separate meetings with the families of the trio of Jamila, Badaru and Tanimu, the village head and community members which later

culminated in a large meeting with all the parties involved in the presence of community members.

The turnout at this meeting was large due to the interest the issue had generated within the community. At the meeting, Abubakar was able to reconcile the aggrieved parties and bring peace to the community. The marriage between Jamila and Badaru was dissolved and all his expenses were refunded to him by Tanimu's family. At that same meeting, Jamila was married to Tanimu and a peace accord was signed by members of the 3 families involved to henceforth live peacefully with one another.

This story clearly shows the level of trust and confidence that paralegals enjoy from both the judicial system and the community.

The quarry dispute: Our Village, Our Voice, Our Victory: the story of a village and a quarry company

Tofa a rocky rural community in Rano LGA, of Kano State had been experiencing several challenges because of the quarry activities in their communities. The hazardous impact of the company's drilling and blasting of hard rock using explosives was resulting in cracks in the community's muds houses while fallen pieces of rocks ensuing from the company's activity was also killing their domestic animals, these actions were a threat to their lives and livelihood.

In 2017, the community had another major hit that they couldn't stand anymore. They had tried to meet several times with the Abu Dasa Quarry but they wouldn't grant them any audience.

At the time the community was going through this, the paralegals had gone for a community education visit to Garbawa which is a neighboring village to Tofa. Some of the women from Tofa were at the sensitization session. Upon getting home, they told their husbands and four

days after, they visited the Paralegal closest to them Mal Dayyabu to learn more and find out how they could be of help.

They learned about the legal clinic and the work of the community paralegal from him and they decided to report their issue to the clinic through the lead paralegal of the LGA Murtala Ishaq who in turn conveyed a meeting between other paralegals and the community members.

Supported by the paralegals, the community wrote a complaint letter to concerned authorities including the Office of the Special Advisor to Kano State Government on Solid Minerals Development as well as Abu Dasa Quarry itself. After a series of follow-ups jointly carried out by the community members and paralegals, the Special Advisor and her team went to the village to investigate and assess the level of damages caused by the company.

Thereafter, a meeting was held with the representatives of Tofa community and the quarry company, the District Head of Rano as well as Rano paralegals whom the community had requested to serve as their lead representative to resolve the issue. After series of meetings, an agreement was finally reached: those who had suffered damages to their buildings were given compensation (monetary & building materials) by Abu Dasa; the company also tendered an unreserved apology to the members of Tofa community.

“For a long time we had wanted to sit down and discuss with the quarry company but they refused to listen to us, until the paralegals intervened and we were able to achieve a breakthrough over the issue. An agreement was reached that if anyone's animal was killed by a fallen rock resulting from the company's mining activity, they would be compensated,” says Abdullahi Tofa, a community activist from Tofa.

Though the community had made several attempts to meet and discuss with the officials of the company since 2013 when the quarry company commenced operations within their community, it was not until they reported the matter to IWEI paralegals in Rano that the company eventually listened to them. This underscores the importance of having community-based paralegals and their effectiveness in resolving disputes.

If not for the paralegals....I could have gone into prostitution

In neighboring Gidan Marabus community, located less than a kilometer away from Tofa in the same Rano LGA, 23-year old Bara Sani (not real name) had been forced into a marriage with one Mato by her father, Mallam Sani. Bara's marriage to Mato was an unhappy union in which she suffered physical abuse and neglect.

To add to her woes he was also seeing a woman and though people were telling her, she refused to believe until she learnt that the woman had delivered a child for him, out of wedlock; after the baby was weaned she was brought to him and he entrusted the care of the child to Bara, who accepted to bring up the child even though people kept asking her why she would not leave but she felt it was her fate. Bara finally decided to leave the marriage when her mother-in-law accused her of not taking proper care of the child, when she asked her husband to find them another place to live, he refused, instead he told her he wanted her to get pregnant for him with their second child so he could maltreat her. She said rather than that happen, it is better we part ways.

In Rabiun, an IWEI paralegal who also happened to be her relative, Bara found a way out of her doomed marriage. With his support and guidance, she reported the case to IWEI paralegals in Rano who invited her father Mallam

Sani for consultation; during the meeting he became so angry that he verbally abused the paralegals and vowed to never support Bara's quest for divorce from Mato.

Though she was insistent she did not want to return, her relative cajoled and finally persuaded her to return to Mato's house; unfortunately, nothing changed and he continued to maltreat her. When she could take it no more, Bara again approached her father who threatened to disown her if she went ahead to seek for a divorce; her last resort became the IWEI paralegals. This time the paralegals supported Bara to seek for divorce through the court.

"At court, the judge told me to pay back the dowry of N5000 and another N5000 on top to which I agreed but before the divorce would be finalized, he gave us two weeks to see if we could reconcile our differences, instead as we got home, my husband gave me my divorce papers; my father who was unhappy with my going to court to seek for divorce disowned me and said I should never come back to his house. I did not have to pay the N10,000 as I told my now ex husband that he should pay me back the expenses I had incurred looking after our children. He did not want to have to pay so he let me go". Her father disowned her and told her never to return to his house.

Bara who is now happily married to her current husband and first love, Mamman, said "We were married in court with the support of the paralegals since my father had disowned me over the divorce of my first husband and even though he was approached to consent to giving me away in marriage, he steadfastly refused and swore not to forgive any family members who supported me in getting married. If not for the paralegals, only God knows where I would have been by now as my father had rejected me, I could not go to other members of my paternal side – I could have gone into prostitution,".

Though Bara was 23 years old and according to the Nigerian Constitution is an adult who should be able to make her own decisions, for many women like her it is not so due to the society's highly patriarchal and conservative nature hence women are expected to obey their parents or husbands, without question.

Bara's story again validates the capability and support provided by IWEI's community-based paralegals in ensuring access to justice for women whose rights have been violated.

Accused of witchcraft: saved by a paralegal

The father of 23-year-old Bala Mati of Refawa community in Garun Mallam LGA had been accused of witchcraft and thus nearly lost his life after being exhaustively tortured and humiliated by a mob in his community led by one Rabe. Sixty-five-year old Mati Yahaya was tied to the back of a motorcycle and dragged on bare earth before he was asked to cross over a pregnant woman he was alleged to have preyed upon – after he had been stripped naked! He was almost lynched by a group of young men at the instigation of a community member.

"They stripped my father naked in the presence of women and children, despite his age. They tortured him with the intention to kill him".

Bala who was away schooling in Edo state at the time of the incident had returned on holiday and wanted to ensure justice for his father, but he did not know how to go about it and lacked the financial muscle to hire a counsel and navigate through the cumbersome court processes. His last resort became IWEI paralegals

If I meet anybody in need of support, I will recommend the services of the paralegals as I was really happy with the support they gave my father and I

Musa Mati

- based on a recommendation by one Magaji of neighboring Garun Babba community.

He therefore approached IWEI paralegals through Abdullahi Adamu, a community-based paralegal in Garun Mallam who helped him take the case to court including guiding him through the court processes. Bala confesses that without the IWEI paralegals there was no way he could have been able to successfully prosecute his case at the court.

The paralegals will not look down upon you, they will respect you even though you are there to seek for their assistance," narrates Bala with a sense of satisfaction.

Money for your divorce

Embattled eighteen year old Zaliha Ali (not real name) of Bunkure LGA was until recently married to one 42-year-old Mallam Talle of Chiromawa in Garun Mallam LGA; hers was a marriage riddled with dehumanizing and humiliating experiences of various forms of physical assault and inhuman treatments such as being chained to a bed, locked in the room as well as bitten by her husband. Despite all what she was going through Zaliha's father was against her seeking for a divorce from Talle as such when she ran away from Talle's house to her father he immediately turned her back and not wanting to go back to Talle she ran away and spent the night in the bush where she was found the next day and taken to Dayyabu Shehu a paralegal in Rano LGA.

Dayyabu helped Zaliha filed a case at the court in Rano and when the court invited Talle and presented Zaliha's demand for a divorce from him he grudgingly agreed to divorce her but under the condition of Khul'; a form of divorce in Islam whereby a woman seeking divorce from her husband pays him back his dowry or any other amount mutually agreed upon by the duo. The judge therefore ordered Zaliha to pay back Talle his dowry so he would in return divorce her.

Dayyabu had a series of discussions with the judge concerning the ill treatment Zaliha had suffered at the hands of Talle during the marriage and why she should not be asked to pay back the dowry in order to gain her freedom.

The court ordered Talle to divorce her which he did over the phone because he had absconded to an unknown destination while the case was still ongoing leaving Zaliha who was pregnant at the time. When Talle returned which was after she had the baby, Dayyabu approached him with a list of expenses incurred by Zaliha for delivery of his child to refund to her. He threatened to take him to court again if he failed to make the refund and Talle in order to avoid litigation, paid for all the expenses.

If not for paralegals, Zaliha may still be living in an abusive marriage, or have had to pay back the dowry as ordered by the court if she was to get her divorce and would have borne the hospital expenses alone. This is the unfortunate plight of many women and girls faced with situations similar to that of Zaliha; those who do not have access to paralegals therefore, have to endure violations of their rights and various forms of injustices.

Justice for the victim

As a result of the society's stigmatization of victims of sexual violence and poor handling of such cases including destruction of evidence, most victims never get justice hence the perpetrators go unpunished, but when paralegals are involved, they ensure support for the families of victims through the entire procedure – from hospital, to police through courts processes – thereby ensuring justice is obtained for the victims.

This can be seen in one of the cases handled by a Paralegal Sani Kassim in Wudil LGA in which 14-year old Rabi Musa (not real name), a hawker, became a victim of attempted rape after she was

lured into an uncompleted building by 65-year old Saleh Isa in Bauchiyal community of Wudil town.

Immediately after the incident, a community leader in Bauchiyal named Nura Abubakar reported the case to Sani a Paralegal who ensured Rabi was first taken to the hospital for medical examination before the incident was reported at the police station from where a case was filed at the court in Wudil.

At the court and based on the medical report obtained from Wudil General Hospital, it was established as a case of attempted rape and the convict was handed a 3 month prison sentence with an option of a fine of the sum of NGN50,000, which Saleh Isa opted for.

“IWEI supported and encouraged us to take up and follow up with the rape case in our community. With the support of the paralegal, Sani Kassim, we were able to follow all laid down procedures in such circumstances including getting medical report, reporting the case to the police and successfully filing up a case at the court. As it was a case of attempted rape, the court asked the perpetrator to serve a prison term or pay a fine of NGN50,000, which he did,” says Nura Abubakar, who reported the incident to IWEI paralegal.

Rabi's case is a victory for the Bauchiyal community of Wudil where Saleh had been harassing girls for years and getting away with it; his conviction by the court in Wudil for the attempted rape of Rabi is a huge success for members of the community; it shows the determination of IWEI paralegals to support communities not to let perpetrators go unpunished thereby ensuring justice is obtained for the victims which ultimately serves as a deterrent to potential perpetrators.

A leadership crisis resolved

A protracted leadership tussle had ensued among the members of the Wudil Students Association (WULSA); the crisis became so intractable that the case had to be taken to the Wudil Division of the Nigerian Police Force.

The police, confident in the ability of IWEI paralegals to effectively mediate and resolve such conflicts referred the case to Paralegal Sani Kassim who promptly intervened, took over the case thus it was withdrawn from the police. After series of consultations, an amicable resolution to the crisis was arrived at; WULSA now has one united leadership.

“IWEI facilitated the resolution of our leadership crisis which had divided our students union; some people who are not even students anymore had taken the union to ransom for years. They were eventually banned from participating in the activities of WULSA and due process was followed to arrive at the resolution. Today, we have one leadership that is accepted by the majority of our members,” says Nura Uba Said, one of the leaders of WULSA.

The successful resolution to the crisis that had bedeviled WULSA for a year and factionalized the students association by Paralegal Sani Kassim, after the case was referred to him by the Wudil Division of the Nigerian Police Force, once again illustrates the level of confidence the security agencies have in IWEI paralegals' ability to successfully resolve civil disputes.

Supporting the traditional justice system: improving access to justice in the community

Yakubu Abdulkassim is the village head of Laraba community in Warawa LGA who acknowledges the effort of IWEI paralegals in ensuring access to justice for women and children in his community through sensitization programs and legal education classes; which he believes compliment

and support his work of dispensing justice among members of his community.

“Thanks to the sensitization efforts of Mal Khamisu [IWEI paralegal] the men in our community came and requested that literacy classes be set up for married women, to help them better understand marriage and how to peacefully live with their husbands. This has helped significantly reduce marital disputes in the community.

Abdulkassim adds: “Moreover, as a result of the sensitization work of IWEI paralegals in our community, the Hisbah was also inspired to establish an outpost here in our community, to help in resolving conflicts and improving access to justice in the community”.

Empowering women to stand for their rights

Prior to IWEI's intervention in the 6 target LGAs, women and married adolescent girls across the communities didn't even know what their rights were not to even talk of being able to stand for such rights. Thus, the women suffered a lot of indignities and were subjected to various forms of rights violations by their husbands, mother-in-laws, brother-in-laws etc.

Such abusive husbands – who see their wives as 'mere properties' – act with reckless impunity and would at the slightest provocation physically abuse their wives or deny them feeding, medical care among other basic needs.

Moreover, mother-in-laws who see their daughter-in-laws as rivals do their utmost to ensure they make life unbearable to them; the daughter-in-laws are helpless and have to live under such subjugation and may eventually be forced out of their matrimonial homes.

Since the commencement of the Strengthening the Response Capacity of Legal Clinics Centers project, 525 women across the 6 project LGAs such as Liti Ilu of Darki community in Wudil LGA

and Rabi Abdullahi of Dawaki town, in Dawakin Tofa LGA have successfully completed IWEI's legal education classes, while 185 more women are currently enrolled in the legal education classes.

Raising their Voices

Having attended IWEI's women legal education classes, married adolescent girls and women like Liti Ilu and Rabi Abdullahi are now defying centuries old cultural traditions that deny women the right to raise their voices and stand for their rights – thanks to the legal and human rights knowledge they acquired while attending IWEI's legal education classes.

Liti Ilu -Standing up for my rights

About five years ago, I was 20 years old at the time, I met and fell in love with Mamman and a year later we got married. At first our marriage was okay but gradually Ladidi my mother in law started to make my life miserable and I endured this for 2 years. In the end, she made Mamman divorce me though it was against his will.

After my divorce I joined IWEI's legal education class at Darki where coincidentally I met my former mother-in-law Ladidi who also happened to be in the same class. Overtime, as a result of lessons we were learning in the legal education class, which also included Islamic religious knowledge and periodic lectures on marital issues bordering on the rights of men and women in marriage, my mother in law softened towards me and we started to talk with each other.

“Later, Ladidi decided to allow Mamman and I to remarry, however, his brother who was instrumental in instigating Ladidi's dislike of me decided he wouldn't allow me to return to Mamman's house by coming up with all sorts of excuses. After 4 months of waiting, I got fed up and one day I asked myself: 'what is the use of the knowledge on knowing that I have acquired at the legal education class if cannot stand up them?' and with that I promptly returned back to my

husband's where I have been living happily ever since along with my mother-in-law" Liti recalled with a smile.

Liti's story demonstrates how with knowledge, women are able to claim their rights
The Dawaki 10: Defying the culture of submissiveness

35-year-old Rabi Abdullahi recounts an incidence that happened to her and 9 classmates of IWEI legal education program in Dawakin Tofa town. "The 10 of us were among those selected to participate in a radio-based English literacy programme, however, when the names of the participants for the radio programme was shortlisted by the LGA's office of the agency for mass education, our names were nowhere to be found on the list; they had been swapped with the names of other women who were not among those earlier selected"

The Dawaki 10 were very angry at the injustice against them and decided to take action; they organized and mobilized all women whose names had been swapped for a peaceful sit-in at the agency's office. As a result of their action they

were re-enlisted back onto the English programme.

"If that incident had happened before we started attending IWEI legal education classes, we would not have dared to take any action. However, the IWEI legal class has empowered and liberated us to be able demand for our rights, before now I couldn't tell A from B but now I can not only read and write in English but have also acquired a basic understanding of Arabic.

I missed the opportunity to have an education as a girl because my grandfather disliked formal education and therefore paid a bribe to have me dropped out of school as a girl," she recalls with regret

The Dawaki 10 story highlights the importance of educating women to know their rights that when people know their rights, they are able to organise themselves to demand for justice whenever their rights get violated. The Dawaki 10 story shows that providing legal education is crucial if people especially the vulnerable members of society are to be legally empowered.

The testimonies of IWEI's PARALEGALS

Before IWEI pioneered it, the concept of paralegals as a mechanism for access to justice for indigent people was completely non-existent and virtually unheard of in Kano state, if not northern Nigeria as a whole. Until now, the only means of access to justice for women in the 6 project LGAs were the police and court systems – both of which were either unaffordable or inaccessible to them.

By introducing paralegals services and also training community people to work as paralegals in the 6 project LGAs of Kano State, IWEI, for the first time, is making access to justice a reality for particularly women and children at grassroots. The most inspiring development is that IWEI's paralegals also include women such as Binta Magaji who are passionately and committedly working to ensure access to justice for her fellow womenfolk in her Dawakin Tofa LGA.

This respect comes not only from fellow community members and particularly women whose cause they are majorly championing; instead, it also comes from security agencies like the police who see them as complimenting their work of ensuring peaceful and just society.

All the IWEI paralegals interviewed have attested to having acquired a new status in their communities such that they have now gained a considerable amount of respect and influence among members of their communities – thanks to their newfound role of ensuring access to justice for their community members.

Moreover, they now all have a sense of responsibility and see themselves as leaders and models in their respective communities.

Binta Magaji, a paralegal from Dawakin Tofa LGA



Prior to becoming an IWEI paralegal, Binta Magaji was working as a Hisbah woman thus was already helping women and girls have access to justice by resolving major challenges they faced in her native Dawakin Tofa LGA which are largely to do with drug abuse, rape, illiteracy and lack of economic opportunities which leads to disputes with their husbands. Since becoming an IWEI paralegal, Binta has been exposed to various trainings at Bichi, Kano and recently in Lagos which helped changed and improved her approach to mediating and resolving mostly marital conflicts across Dawakin Tofa LGA and beyond.

She admits that prior to becoming a paralegal she only knew the Hisbah approach to solving disputes and therefore had some challenges resolving problems; however, the various trainings she had attended have exposed her to multiple approaches to resolving disputes like sitting down to critically analyze and assess a problem or dispute before deciding what approach to use in resolving it including involving other paralegals and being gender-sensitive in doing so.

Binta also states that whereas as a Hisbah woman she was trained to use the Quran and Hadith in mediation now as a paralegal she has been exposed to other tools including the common law legal system adding that her newfound knowledge has helped her resolve issues more effectively which she said has in turn earned her a considerable respect among particularly husbands and wives across her native Dawakin Tofa. Binta said “I will always be grateful to IWEI for the knowledge I have gained through them which is helping me to ensure that women whose rights have been violated have access to justice.

Divorced then ripped off by her husband

Speaking on the case she is most proud of as a paralegal, Binta Magaji states: “My most memorable case was that of a divorcee woman who reported her ex-husband to us. She came to me complaining that her husband had divorced her and had oppressed her rights; she was helpless since if she made any attempt to secure back what he had taken away from her the society will accuse her of publicly embarrassing and humiliating her ex-husband and father of her children.

“The crux of the matter is the ex-husband had sold off her domestic animals (goats, chickens and sheep) worth over NGN30,000 before she could return to clear out her belongings after her divorce and when she confronted him he told her “karfi ya cinye” (You have been overpowered). We invited her ex-husband to a meeting at Hisbah office and laid her her accusations against him which he accepted as being true.

“I then asked her what course of action she wanted to be taken against him or if she had forgiven him. She emphatically replied: 'No! I do not forgive him and I want him to pay me for my animals.' I told him you have heard her, do you agree to pay her back if not we will take the matter to court. He quickly agreed and said there was no need for a court case.

“He therefore agreed to pay her back over a 6-month period and they both signed a written agreement to that effect. Each month he would bring me the money as that was her request and when he had paid in full I took the whole amount to her, she was so happy that she offered me N1000 out of appreciation but I refused to accept as my service was for free – I was only helping her. I was very happy at the outcome of the case.”

Dayyabu - the Paralegal positively impacting his community

Dayyabu Shehu, a Hisbah official is also a paralegal working in Rano LGA and whose residence has since become a center of attraction for those seeking conciliation and mediation, particularly married women.



“As a result of the paralegal trainings I attended conducted by IWEI, I have learnt how to carry out mediation and conciliation between people. I have learnt that I must seek permission from my clients before taking on their cases. I have seen the differences between the way IWEI and Hisbah carryout their work and I have made recommendations to hisbah office to adopt some of them such as: conduct sensitization to raise awareness on issues affecting society; carryout advocacy to influential members of society. These were some of the skills I have acquired and which I am now practicing in my work as a paralegal”.

Dayyabu also said wearing the paralegal uniform provided to them by IWEI also gave them a sense of credibility in the eyes of stakeholders in the justice sector including the police.

His work as a paralegal has earned him enormous respect and trust among not only indigent people but also very educated members of the communities around Rano LGA. Through word of mouth, cases are being referred to him not only from Rano but also neighboring LGAs such as Bunkure, Samaila, Kibiya and other LGAs.

Speaking on the major challenges being faced by women in his LGA, he said certain challenges like domestic violence and rampant divorce, were being experienced by women from Rano town while women from rural parts of the LGA grappled with challenges such as being asked to do heavy chores like fetching of water from long distances and firewood in the bush as well as being denied proper feeding and clothing by their husbands.

Sulaiman Abubakar, a paralegal from Bichi LGA

Sulaiman Abubakar is one of IWEI's most active paralegals in Bichi LGA who said the major challenges being faced by women in his LGA were to do with forced marriages and irresponsibility on the part of fathers who do not take their responsibilities of feeding, clothing as well as

taking care of the health and educational needs of their children seriously thus leaving women with the burden of solely catering for their children.

Prior to becoming a paralegal, Sulaiman confessed that he was a very reserved person who was not concerned about happenings even in his immediate environment. “Less than 6 months after becoming a paralegal I have become known in all the nooks and crannies of Bichi LGA and even beyond, particularly among women. I have also handled not less than 10 cases and have gained considerable respect within Bichi town and neighboring communities,” reveals Sulaiman.

Sulaiman's favorite case as a paralegal is that of Jamila Bala of Kunchi LGA (narrated earlier in the document) and who was forcefully married to one Badaru, by her father. Although he has been working as a paralegal for barely 6 months Sulaiman attests to the fact that his work of ensuring access to justice for especially women has entirely changed his life and endeared him to them.



Stories from the field: Economic empowerment of women

Although most of the rural women across the 6 project LGAs were already engaged in one form of income generating activity or the other they faced a myriad of challenges developing and making their small businesses profitable; due to their inability to determine their expenses and profits, poor saving habits, high costs of production, as well as poor access to markets leading to overdependence on their menfolk.

Moreover, although some of the women may belong to business cooperative groups, most of such groups exist just in name. As such other challenges include: poor understanding of the roles and responsibilities of cooperative groups, individualistic approach to business. They also have poor understanding of the advantages of working in groups and poor access to finance and information.

These challenges lead to high cost of production and ultimately for many, low profits or outright loss in some cases. Against this backdrop, IWEI's approach was to: train women in cooperative groups; support women already in cooperative groups to become organised and resourceful; provide linkages to financial institutions; mentoring and monitoring.

The outcomes of IWEI's intervention across the 6 project LGAs now is that many women have bank accounts where they save money; accessing loans from banks or through raising funds among themselves; they now work together in groups which reduces the cost of production. Through the meetings organized by IWEI, members of various cooperative groups come together to share experiences, resolve challenges which means the groups are now able to improve their businesses hence maximize their profits.

Rahinatu Alhassan, a groundnut oil producer from Wudil LGA



Rahinatu Alhassan of Asugulle community in Wudil LGA is the leader of the women's cooperative group in her community, whose members are majorly into ground nut oil and cake (kuli-kuli) production. Prior to IWEI's intervention there was no cooperative group in the community; instead, the women were going about their ground nut oil and cake businesses, with very little profit.

However, after attending the 3-day training by IWEI, they decided to form a cooperative group and thus began to do their business as a group; 17 of them contributed NGN1000 each raising a capital of NGN17000 to procure ground nut which they shared equally among themselves, with the agreement that they would each pay back the value of the groundnut they collected including a certain amount as savings for their cooperative group.

Maryam Murtala, a petty trader from Warawa LGA



Maryam Murtala of Garin Dau community in Warawa LGA says although they had a registered cooperative group prior to attending IWEI's 3-day training, the group was virtually non-existent because she states, "We didn't know what we were doing, the only time we come together as a group was when we heard that a bank loan

would be given to cooperative groups. In such circumstances we will contribute NGN500 each and give to someone to help us secure the bank loan, which we never managed to get any way."

"After the training, we began to meet every other Monday and contribute NGN50 each. By the time our savings reached NGN15,000, we decided to invest it by procuring soya beans which we later sold at NGN20,000. Now, we want to buy onions which we will also dispose of later in the year; this time our plan is to divide the profit into 3 parts: one will be added to our capital, the second will be saved for the group while the third will be shared among members. Now, we are so financially independent that we don't even need the bank loan anymore," explains Maryam.

Moreover, Maryam's group now gives back to their community through literacy classes they established for women in their community whom she says "desperately want to learn how to read and write". She said the classes which are held 3 days a week teaches women basic literacy & numeracy, Islamic Studies by volunteer teachers, engaged by the group who also pay them stipends.

Lami Abdulhamidu, soya beans cake (awara) producer from Rano LGA

Lami Abdulhamidu of Ruwan Kanya community in Rano LGA produces a local delicacy called awara (fried soya beans cake) says prior to attending IWEI's 3-day training, members of her group who were into petty-trading did not know



whether they were making a profit or loss on their businesses. She said not until the training did they become aware that most of them were actually operating their small businesses at a loss.

“Since the training we learnt: how to cost our products and determine our profits, better packaging and marketing strategies for our products which include ensuring cleanliness and exploiting opportunities presented by occasions such as weddings and naming ceremonies to market and sell our products to fellow women,” recalls Lami. As a group, we are now able to support members in need, for example sponsoring the medical care of our members” explains Lami.

Lami said though she was into many petty businesses, yet her capital was mixed and she couldn't ascertain whether or not she was making any profits which meant she had to borrow to finance her trades. She discloses that attending IWEI's training helped change her ways of doing things. “Now I don't borrow anything for my awara business anymore and my capital has risen from NGN5000 to NGN25,000.

Maryam Akilu, leader of a women farmers group in Rano LGA

Maryam Akilu's Yolawa women farmers group, Rano LGA – “Our group was engaged in seasonal farming and after harvest, we would keep our capital until the next rainy season”. Maryam said since members of her group attended IWEI's training, they have diversified their business by venturing into the retail of foot wears, and textile materials, which they procure and distribute to the group's members to sell. This is a huge change from just keeping their money lying idle till the next year and members are now busily engaged.

“After the training, we held a meeting to explore business opportunities to venture into as a group, we collectively agreed to use NGN30,000 out of our capital and invest it in textile and foot wears retailing which we distribute to members to sell and make profits. At the end of the month we divide the profit into three; one part is added to our capital which is now over NGN73,000 while the second and third parts are saved in the bank and shared among members, respectively,” explains Maryam.



Experiences of IWEI trained Facilitators on
WOMEN COOPERATIVE STRENGTHENING TRAINING

IWEI trained 12 female facilitators who were responsible for training, mentoring & monitoring members of women cooperative groups in the 6 LGAs. This sometimes-entailed riding on the backs of animal drawn carts or walking or riding on motorbikes in order to reach the women some of whom live in hard to reach rural communities but they took this all in their stride and as all part of a day's job.

Maryam Olaniyan, a strengthening women's cooperative groups facilitator at Wudil LGA

Prior to becoming an IWEI facilitator, Maryam Olaniyan says she used to be an impatient and reserved person who didn't relate well with people, however, she confessed that the training

of trainer (TOT) experience had changed her so much that she had learnt to interact well with people and also not to react to everything that comes her way. She is originally from Osun state thus prior to becoming an IWEI facilitator, wasn't very fluent in Hausa language; the training had

helped her improved on her Hausa language skills.

As a result of her facilitation experience Maryam who holds an NCE certificate says she now has acquired the requisite skills to be a good teacher and also manage people for which she has been inspired to start a private school; she is confident that her experience will make it easier for her to start and run the school.

Salma Yusuf, a strengthening women's cooperative groups facilitator at Rano LGA

Salma Yusuf says prior to participating in IWEI's Training of the Trainer (TOT) she used to be shy and lacked the confidence to stand before a crowd of people and address them especially considering the fact that the members of the women groups are much older women than she is. She says although her trainees were already engaged in various forms of petty-trading, they lacked even the most basic skills of running a petty trade.

"After the 3-day training and business mentorship they are now doing very well. I am now also feeling inspired to start my own business, I have learnt to be humble and patient as well, I have also learnt a lot from the women while working with them," confesses Salma Yusuf.

Shafa'atu: Being an IWEI facilitator has transformed my business life

Forty-five year old Shafa'atu Abdulkadir said her experience as a Facilitator has left indelible marks in her business life. She belongs to a school for married women and herself and her colleagues were engaging in all kinds of petty businesses, individually; they would take their commodities to the school to sell. She is applying her learnings from the training she received from IWEI and her experiences as a Facilitator into her personal life.

"I approached my colleagues with the idea of starting a business group and we commenced with just 5 members. I then began to organize step-down trainings for them, similar to the ones I gave to the women at Garun Mallam LGA. Later we got the group registered with our LGA (Gwale), we are now working to get it registered at the state level," narrates Shafa'atu, a mother of five.

Speaking on how far they have gone as a cooperative group in the last 8 months, Shafa'atu said: "We began by contributing NGN50 each during our monthly meetings which was later doubled to NGN100 and when our savings reached NGN6000 we decided to venture into ground nut oil production. Now, we have diversified into air freshener and car wash detergent production."

Testimonies of IWEI's Coordinators in

BICHI | DAWAKIN TOFA | GARUN MALLAM RANO | WARAWA | WUDIL LGAs

IWEI'S work across the 6 project LGAs of Bichi, Dawakin Tofa, Garun Mallam, Rano and Warawa is being managed by 1 coordinator in each of the LGAs; he or she directs both the paralegal and women's economic empowerment aspects of the project. They also share their testimonies below;

Fifty-two-year old Hauwa Abubakar is the Coordinator of IWEI's women's legal clinic centre at Bichi LGA who says before IWEI came to the LGA they didn't understand their rights and confirmed that their capacities had now been built to be able to ensure access to justice for women and children. She adds that other women in the LGA had also learnt a lot through their participation in the legal education classes and cooperative groups which has improved their economic condition.

She is proud of her work as Bichi LGA coordinator and also grateful to all the paralegals working with her in Bichi LGA for "the immeasurable support they give me; I enjoy 100% cooperation from them which is responsible for the tremendous successes I have recorded in terms of delivering on our mandate – without their support and cooperation I wouldn't have achieved anything."

Hauwa who is married with 9 children also feels hugely indebted to her husband who she states: "allows me the freedom to go anywhere and at any time to do her work as a paralegal and

women economic empowerment champion. He has never been bothered by the frequency of my being out of home for my work; instead, he always offers me pieces of advices on how to go about solving some of the disputes that are brought before me, based on his wisdom and wealth of experience as an elderly man."

In neighboring Dawakin Tofa LGA, Hauwa Ibrahim is the Coordinator of IWEI's legal clinic centre who states that prior to IWEI's intervention in the LGA, family disputes had to be reported to the police or courts of law which were beyond the reach of many people, as there was no alternative means of resolving such disputes. However, she says with IWEI's paralegals such cases are now being effectively resolved, without anyone having to pay a kobo.

Abdullahi Adamu is the Coordinator of IWEI's legal clinic centre at Garun Mallam LGA who says the major preoccupation of women in their LGA is rice milling, which he said was being poorly done. However, since the beginning of IWEI's intervention the women's capacity had been built around improving the quality of their rice. "Prior to the coming of IWEI, their profit was little, in fact some were even operating at a loss; now they are making reasonable profits," reveals Abdullahi.

In Rano LGA, prior to IWEI's intervention, the conditions of women was nothing to write home about as they were in a pitiful condition, says

Murtala Ishaq, IWEI's Coordinator in the LGA. However, he said, after the intervention and various sensitization campaigns there is now a significant improvement in girl-child enrollment in school adding that the condition of married women in terms of access to justice has also significantly improved – thanks to IWEI's various legal education classes for women spread across the LGA.

Khamisu Kabir is the Coordinator of IWEI's legal clinic centre at Warawa LGA, who says the major challenges being faced by women in his LGA were to do with lack of Islamic and Western education, lack of economic opportunities as well as being

neglected by their husbands. However, he said the situation has significantly changed since the commencement of IWEI's intervention in the LGA.

Sani Kassim, Coordinator of IWEI's Wudil legal clinic centre says they have managed to earn the confidence of women in search of justice in the LGA who will now rather take their cases to them than take such cases to the police or courts, since they are sure of getting justice without it costing them anything which for people with poor resources means a lot to them.

Photo Speak



Photo Speak

