

Beacon of Hope Initiative

AWOS Program Update from April to October 2023

The ministry of African Widow and Orphan Support (AWOS) continues to be seen in communities as the gentle caring and loving hand of God reaching out to traumatized widows and orphans. May God continue to bless AWOS and the supporters of this great ministry.

So far, from April to October 2023, implementation has been carried out in thirteen (13) target communities that have experienced traumatic events following activities of Boko-Haram, banditry, armed herders and kidnapping. Widows reached received economic empowerment and trauma healing, while orphans and their caregivers were reached with school fees support and caregivers' training on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) care. Widows, church and other community leaders received training on empowering widows and orphans towards improved health and rights. A total of 1, 120 beneficiaries were reached within the period under review.

Beneficiaries reached were from the following States and communities:

1. **Adamawa State:** Hildi and Kwarhi communities were reached through Church of the Brethren (EYN) women fellowship.
2. **Benue State:** Agee and Mchia communities were reached through Universal Reformed Christian Church (URCC) Women fellowship.
3. **Kaduna State:** Malagum community reached through Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Women Fellowship
4. **Nasarawa State:** Maraba Akunza and Gidinye communities were reached through Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) women fellowship
5. **Plateau State:** Dura, Gwawereng, and Zargon communities were reached through Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) Women Fellowship. While Jebbu Miango community was reached through Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) women fellowship
6. **Yobe State:** Dapchi and Fune communities were reached through Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) Women Fellowships respectively

Beneficiaries who were reached are as follows:

- 390 widows reached with economic empowerment and trauma healing
- 210 widows, church and other community leaders were trained on empowering widows and orphans towards improved health and rights
- 260 orphans who were provided with school scholarship
- 260 caregivers received training on provision of care and support to orphans

Orphan support/ Caregivers' Training

Traumatized orphans were identified and selected by the leadership of the women fellowship and Church leaders. School fees support was provided for three years (estimated \$110). Orphans who lost both parents were given priority. Caregivers of orphans were also trained on how to provide improved care and support to orphans. Caregivers testified of finding the lessons very helpful and made commitments to work on improving the relationship with their orphans.

Beneficiary orphans appreciated the opportunity to be in school and learning among their peers. Some of the orphans are able to read and write better in English unlike before. Caregivers shared their appreciation for the support.



Widows Support

Economic empowerment training was carried out for traumatized widows building their capacities in self-help ventures. Lessons learnt include how to choose appropriate businesses, marketing strategy, proper record keeping, and money management among others. The widows were also introduced to savings and loans groups where they now save weekly to pool local funds they can borrow from to expand their businesses. Trained widows were provided with business startup capital (estimated \$92) which enabled them to expand or establish businesses of their choice. These businesses include selling of grains, crop and animal farming, tailoring, hairdressing, and food selling. Some beneficiaries shared learning things they had not known before. They expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to make some income for them and be able to meet some of their needs. Some said they were happy being able to support their families without depending on others and even contribute to their communities which is given them some self-worth. They are grateful and send their appreciation to AWOS



Training at Dapchi

Economic empowerment training at Mchia community

Trauma healing

Traumatized widows participated actively in trauma healing sessions in target communities. Beneficiaries testified of receiving help especially when they took their pains to the cross. Some shared finding some relief after making the decision to forgive those that hurt them. They also expressed having renewed hope for the future and being able to sleep and eat better. Some are beginning to attend church and other community activities more than before.

Beneficiaries are thankful for the opportunity to be part of the healing sessions stating it has reminded them of God's love even though they suffer and it has renewed their strength to carry on in life. They see this ministry as an act of God.



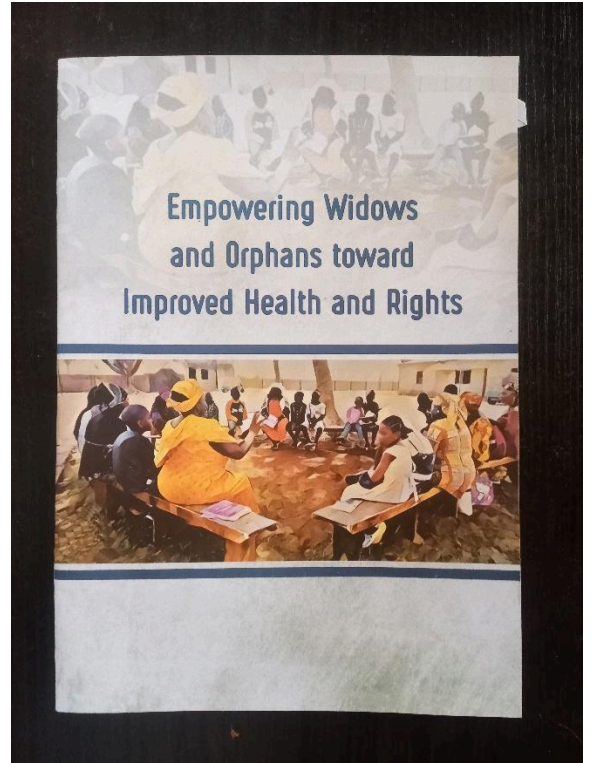
Empowering Widows and Orphans towards Improved Health and Rights

Widows, church and other community leaders were also trained using a new developed manual titled “Empowering Widows and Orphans towards Improved Health and Rights). The development of this manual was facilitated by African Widow and Orphan Support (AWOS) aimed at bringing to light the dilemma of widows and gives a glimpse of what widowhood means in most communities in Nigeria and indeed Africa. This manual provides biblical and true-life stories of how widows and orphans were traumatized, dejected, abandoned and even became suicidal. It provides a call to action for Church and communities about the type and quality of care and support provided to widows and orphans as they come to terms with the new reality.

Some community leaders within target communities who are custodians and implementers of community laws were grateful for this initiative stating they find the training and manual very helpful and insightful. They made commitments to carry out sensitization during community meetings and programs. Church leaders also made commitments to include the messages during sermons and other fellowship meetings.



Training with leaders at Kwarhi



Training of leaders at Gidinye

Esther's Story

Esther Samuel a 42-year-old woman was happily married to her husband Samuel and they lived in Angwa Misisi community of Kaduna State, with their four children.

Samuel, worked hard to meet the basic needs for his family, so Esther his wife stayed home to do chores, care for their children and occasionally accompanied him to the farm.

With a loving husband who cared for her and their children, Esther was grateful to God and was admired by many of her peers in her community.

In March 2018, on a night that seemed like every other, while they were asleep, they awoke to the sound of gun shots by armed herdsmen. They fled their homes along with neighbors to a nearby village for safety. In the process of running, Samuel fell and dislocated his ankle. They got to the village and remained there until it was relatively safe to return to their community.

Back in their community, they were living in fear of another attack from the armed herders. They could not freely go to their farms and market. Samuel continued to nurse his leg as it was treated using local remedies. After a while, Samuel and some of his neighbors went to their farms. As they concentrated on the farm, the armed herders ambushed them. Samuel's neighbors were able to escape, unfortunately, he could not run fast enough due to the condition of his leg and so he was captured.

Samuel was tortured while in captivity for weeks. His captors told him to denounce Jesus Christ and join them which he refused. They would call Esther over the phone while they continued to torture and force him to denounce Christ and join them or he would be killed. Esther could hear her husband yell and groan in pain, she would weep while pleading for her husband's release over the phone.

The last time they called her, they tortured him to her hearing and told her they were going to kill him and dump his body in the bush, true to their words she heard a loud bang from a fired gun and that was the last time she heard from them. She wept and wept till she became numb.

Life became unbearable for Esther, she isolated herself. A few friends and community members would come to help out with some food items but it wasn't enough, they barely could feed and her children dropped out of school because she could not pay their school fees. She couldn't make sense of her life anymore.

That was Esther's state until she was selected as a beneficiary of Beacon of Hope's program in 2021 by her women fellowship leadership. She was invited for a trauma healing group session for widows in her community, she reluctantly attended the sessions. During the sessions, she began to express her pain as others shared their experiences; she learned that in spite all she had been through, God still loves her. She made up her mind to forgive those who attacked them and killed her husband. For the first time since her husband was killed, she slept soundly without nightmares or reliving the last gunshot sound.

Esther is thankful also for the business training she received with a takeoff capital that enabled her to set up a business where she sells grains. She is making some income for herself and able to feed her family and even send her children back to school.

Esther said, “May the Lord bless AWOS and its supporters for remembering a poor abandoned widow like me through Beacon of Hope, may this same support reach others like me. May God never forget BHI and AWOS?”