

Women Of Nigeria International

"Women Of Africa"

Supporting the Nigerian Community

Since 1994

BACKGROUND

Women Of Nigeria International (WONI) was created in response to the many life experiences of the founder. She was born and raised in Nigeria like a slave girl without opportunities such as obtaining a secondary education. She was a victim of trafficking for servitude into the UK, although within the limits of an African culture now severely distorted.

She got married in Britain in 1973 and had a married life characterised by constant physical and emotional abuse. Her yearning for cultural support could not be realised due to the absence of a community organisation such as WONI, to provide the much needed confidential support that so many long for.

The combined experience of a childhood of slavery and a married life of abuse motivated the founder who became eager to devote her life to the service of humanity through the service of the women of Nigeria and their families. This way, she would be sure that others would have the support that she was unable to obtain and therefore guarantee a better quality of life for others. The opportunity presented itself in April 1994 when the military strangled a hold on the people of Nigeria. The political crisis that followed led to the death of the founder's mother and thus intensified her determination to devote her life to the services of the women of Nigeria who are voiceless.

In September 1994 Women Of Nigeria International was created in response to the human rights abuse crisis in Nigeria. Following the work with orphans in Nigeria in February 1995, WONI became a registered charity in the United Kingdom on the 26th June 1996 to work with women and children in the UK and in Nigeria.

During the last 10 years both in the UK and in Nigeria, WONI has come across other Nigerian women who have had similar life experiences and have also felt the absence of meaningful support in their time of need.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians in London

	Total	Males	Females
Inner London	41,324	19,660	21,664
Outer London	27,586	13,670	13,916
Greater London	68,910	33,330	35,580

Fig 1: Figures for Nigerians living in London- Source: Census 2001

The 2001 Census did not break down ethnic minorities in terms of their ethnic communities. However the Sovereignty Journal Index published by ‘The Independent’ on 3 December 2003 stated thus *“One of the most striking trends has been the doubling of the capital’s black African community to 370,000, with large increases in the numbers of people born in such countries as Nigeria, Somalia, Ghana and Kenya. The trend indicates that black Africans will shortly pass Indians (437,000) as the most numerous ethnic group in the city.”*

The publication also indicated that *“children from ethnic minorities will be in the majority in London’s schools within a few years as accelerating population shifts transform the composition of the capital”*.

These trends indicate that WONI’s target population is growing, as is the need for better cultural understanding between these communities and the UK Authorities.

Community profile and needs

1.1. What is the community?

The Nigerian community in Britain is highly isolated due to cultural differences between African (minority) culture and the UK (majority) culture. Our project founded to respond to the cultural needs of the Nigerian community evolved over many years.

The Nigerian population have grown considerably over the last ten years to an extent that Nigerians represent about twenty per cent of all Africans in the United Kingdom. Although a significant section of the community is in the UK legally, there is an equally significant section that is categorized as illegal immigrants according to British Immigration Laws.

Problematic for the British Authorities is the growth in the number of Nigerians who are victims of international trafficking. Young girls are trafficked for domestic work in the UK while others are in transit to European countries for prostitution.

As the population of Nigerians in the UK expands so too is the population of children and young adults of Nigerian origin born in Nigeria and brought to the UK to join parents and members of extended families. This development is creating extreme challenges to British Authorities particularly the schools and social services, as parents struggle to re-establish cordial relationships with children and young adults from whom they have been separated for a period of time.

Our experience working with the Nigerian community, social services, school authorities shows that the increase in the number of Nigerians relocating to the UK lack the confidence, knowledge of British systems and understanding of UK systems to access services.

We work with women and children in distress and provide support to African parents whose children are at risk of being excluded from the UK Schools system or are subject to child protection under the 1989 Children's Act. We provide general support through advice, counselling based on our cultural understanding of our communities and individual advocacy.

1.2. **What are the features of our community?**

WONI is based in the London Borough of Southwark, which contains the largest African and particularly Nigerian population in London. The Boroughs of Lambeth, Newham and Croydon have the next highest African populations. The highest Nigerian population in London (after Southwark) are found in Hackney and Lambeth. The 2001 census shows 390,254 Black African residents throughout Greater London, with 167,725 residing in Inner London.

The London Borough of Southwark also has the highest African Child population (up to the age of 18). As Southwark has the highest figures for our target population it makes our presence there all the more important.

However, these figures are likely to be an underestimate of the true figures, as many people of Nigerian and other ethnic origins may be unable to complete the

complicated census form due to language barriers or were distrustful of the process, so did not participate.

Some other factors responsible for the isolation, exclusion and disadvantage of the African community in the UK are:

- Distrust of processes and systems
- Cultural misunderstanding between the UK and African communities
- Traditional relationships and hierarchy of power between men and women
- Domestic violence
- Sexual discrimination
- A predominance of single parenthood, where women are the head of the household
- Lack of immigration status in a large section of the communities
- Administrative Invisibility (British Immigration Laws)
- Trafficking of a large number of children and young adults into the UK for domestic work and others
- A high rate of illiteracy.

There are also wider issues preventing members of our target groups from participating fully in UK systems;

- Inability to participate in the wider community due to cultural barriers.
- Racial discrimination
- High rate of people living below poverty line
- Lack of recognition of non-UK qualifications and experience
- Negative stereotyping

Nigerians in particular are stereotyped as fraudsters and untrustworthy. This is creating a deeper bias against individuals and organisations. Fraudulent acts by individuals are seen as 'evidence' that the entire community is fraudulent. Thus the communities are further disadvantaged and further excluded.

These issues mean that people from an ethnic minority background, especially the Nigerians, are predominantly disadvantaged and therefore excluded from the enjoyment of services that are valuable to the wider society.

1.3. Our environment

The London Borough of Southwark is an inner London Borough and one of the most deprived. The latest census figures and national statistics give some indications, such as:

- A high proportion are not able to work with UK formal systems
- A high proportion of single parents

- A high proportion of people living in overcrowded accommodation
- A high level of children living below the poverty line
- Very few owner/occupiers
- Unemployment is double the average for the whole of England
- A significant proportion has “no recourse to public funds”
- The rate of African children in Local Authority Care across London is very high in comparison to other ethnic groups.

The neighbouring Boroughs of Lambeth and Lewisham, which also have large African (Nigerian) population, suffer similar problems. Our clients are therefore likely to be coping with problems of poor housing, poverty and isolation.

Registered Object (Clause 3 of the Constitution)

The relief of poverty, sickness, distress, isolation, promotion of good health, economic empowerment of women and their families through education, cultural support for greater integration into society in the UK and abroad.

Our Vision

Our vision is to enhance the ability of African Women to meet the socio-economic challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Our Mission

Our mission is to integrate the Nigerian community into the wider UK community to reduce isolation, reduce poverty level and cultural misunderstanding. Promote good health and improve the sense of self-worth with the Nigerian community

Our Main Activities

In furtherance of the overall aim of our charity, we provide the following services:

- Support for mothers and children in distress.
- We support Nigerian parents with children aged between 5-19 to better support their children through the educational system to reduce the rate of exclusion at school and raise the academic standard within the target group.
- We support parents whose children are in Local Authority care or, at risk of being taken into Local Authority Care under the Children’s Act 1989.
- We provide advice on immigration and welfare Laws in the UK.
- We support asylum seekers.
- We support the elderly who are isolated and in need of support with various issues.
- We support young adults who are victims of trafficking into the UK.

- We provide opportunity for African parents to gain skills needed to gainful employment through our volunteering support.

During the last fifteen months we have worked with African parents whose young adults are subjects of the Justice system.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Women Of Nigeria International has since 1994, provided cultural support to the Nigerian community in London. Our support went beyond London to cover Middlesex, Croydon and Plymouth where Nigerian children are privately fostered.

We have received telephone enquiries from social workers in Portsmouth seeking support for a Nigerian who was adopted in 1974 to locate his/her birth parents.

WONI, despite her funding disadvantage has been able to provide the much needed support to the Nigerian community in the UK. This support has come with tremendous sacrifice on the part of the management committee and especially the Director who continued to endure financial hardship in order to prevent other vulnerable members of the Nigerian community from experiencing what she went through in her own personal life.

I on behalf of the management committee wish to thank the Director Alice Ukoko for her dedication to the service of others in a foreign land.

WONI is a grass root organisation devoted to providing culturally specific services to the Nigerian community, social services, school authority and other agencies working with the community through the many difficulties that they encounter in their lives in the UK.

WONI responding to the expressed needs of our community has expanded to cover many areas that are causing frustration to Nigerians in London.

The number of persons who benefited from our culturally specific service grew mainly due to word of mouth recommendation by beneficiaries who recommend our services to others.

WONI has advertised her services widely through Databases and other mediums in Borough Maps and others in order to reach a wider audience.

We are confident that with more funds WONI will contribute to cultural understanding and social cohesion across the UK.

I wish to use this opportunity to thank our funders and supporters with whom the Nigerian community would have suffered greater hardship, exclusion and frustration in the UK.

As Chair of the Executive Committee, I wish to congratulate my fellow Executive Committee members, who through commitment, has achieved the changes that the charity is making in this year 2005. Women Of Nigeria International has been renamed “Women Of Africa” in order to expand our vision, mission, areas of involvement.

TREASURERS REPORT

Our charity is monitored by the Charities commission and our accounts are recorded by an independent body.

Due to good financial management, WONI’s projects have managed to survive throughout the years, although fundraising is still a major issue for the charity. WONI has to rely heavily on volunteering and donations to provide many of the services she has to offer.

Areas of Operation that require financial resources:

- Education projects
- Research
- Welfare and Information
- Community involvement
- Employment
- Health
- Overseas support

DIRECTORS REPORT

Community Involvement and Cohesion

Since 1994, WONI has supported the community through various projects and activities.

Free advice is offered to all members of the community on immigration, employment, welfare and legal issues. In order to reduce the level of poverty within the African community, we have also been able to provide work experience

placements for about 20 people who have been able to progress onto paid employment within the private and public sector.

WONI also supports her international community. A case of unaccompanied minors, born in UK of Nigerian parents, was taken on by WONI. The children desired to remain in the UK to complete their education, at the expense of their relationship with their parents who had brought them to Nigeria three years previous. WONI supported them by reconciling the children with their parents and arranging accommodation for them in London in order to continue their education.

International trafficking is also recognised by WONI as a real problem affecting the community. In 2002, WONI's attention was brought to the case of a Nigerian woman who had come to the UK in 1975 to visit her mother-in-law (her British husband and two daughters remained in Nigeria) and although the marriage had failed she was kept as a 'slave' to serve her estranged husband's mother. Her desire to return to Nigeria, in order to be reconciled with her daughters and family, was hindered by her confinement to a wheelchair and her sectioning under the Mental Health Act. With WONI's involvement the section was lifted, although she remained in a nursing home due to her disability. WONI travelled to Nigeria without success to attempt to make contact with her family.

Due to this overwhelming problem of International Trafficking, WONI travels to Nigeria in order to alert families on the dangers of allowing their children to travel unaccompanied to the UK on the promise of a better life and education.

Our Projects

'Better Chances' for our children's future

The 'Better Chances' project, set up in 2002 and supported by BBC Children in Need, aims to raise academic standards in Primary and Secondary children in the 5-16 year age groups and young adults up to 19 years old within the ethnic minority communities in London. WONI accompanies parents to meetings with the School authorities to discuss issues of concern and work with the school to provide appropriate support to the children especially cultural support. Where needed, especially when there is a risk of permanent exclusion, WONI makes written representation to Independent Appeals Boards. To date, WONI has a 90% success rate in this area.

In order to expand this support, we are currently undertaking research into the rate of School Exclusions. This requires making contact with Local Education Authorities throughout London. Unfortunately, our three year funding from BBC Children In Need came to an end this year, so 'Better Chances' is in need of new financial support.

Cultural misunderstanding regarding Child Protection Laws

Children are a major area for WONI as children are the next generation. However, due to misunderstandings between the UK systems and the African culture, many African families face the prospect of losing their children to Local Authorities. In the borough of Southwark alone 1256 children were taken into care between 2000 and 2005. Of these 17% (212) were of African Origin compared to the 9% that were Caribbean and the 0.6% that were Chinese. A similar trend is seen throughout London, with 24% of Lewisham's looked after population from 2000 to 2005 being of African Origin and 38% in Croydon.

In order to assess the degree of this misunderstanding, WONI began research into the **Impact of the 1989 Children's Act on African Families in London** in July 2005.

'The African Maiden'- a campaign against Female Circumcision.

In 2000, WONI wrote and produced the drama 'The African Maiden', which although an appreciation of African Art, also drew attention to the brutal and controversial practice of female circumcision found in many African cultures. The drama had showings in the Blue Elephant Theatre in Southwark and a video was also launched. This dramatisation transformed this cultural taboo into a national discussion and led to the enactment of the Female Circumcision Act in 2003.

Directory of Nigerian Associations in London (2003).

The launch of this directory is our gateway to bridging the gap between the Nigerian communities. This was supported by the Peabody Trust and so far 200 copies are in circulation. The directory includes Nigerian businesses and organisations similar to WONI, which specialise in certain areas in a way that Nigerians feel comfortable with their use. The directory has also proved to be useful for non-Nigerians, particularly researchers interested in the Nigerian community, thus further closing the gap felt by members of the community.

The launch for the directory took place at the Greater London Authority and was attended by many members of the Nigerian community and the Major of London, Ken Livingstone.

Challenges Ahead

Reducing the rate of absolute poverty in Africa.

In order to add value to the efforts of the British government and the G8 we organised and delivered an Africa Conference parallel to the G8 Summit, which held in Edinburgh and was supported by the Scottish parliament. A second stage of this took place at The Africa Centre in October 2005, to which representatives of African

Governments attended. The aim of these two events was for Africans to discuss Africa and to bring her in line with the UN's Millennium Development Goals. In the case of the October conference it was a chance for the people of Africa to engage with the governments to bring a lasting change to Africa in the future.

Resolutions

'Women Of Nigeria International' was renamed 'Women Of Africa'

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which held at The Africa Centre, on October 2005, resolutions included the following:

- ❖ Change of accounting period
- ❖ Dissolution of management committee
- ❖ Name change from Women Of Nigeria International (WONI), to Women Of Africa (WOA)
- ❖ Change from Management Committee to Board of Trustees
- ❖ Election of Board of Trustees Members
- ❖ Appointment of a President
- ❖ Appointment of Friends
- ❖ Constitutional Issues arising from the change of "name" and "division"
- ❖ Adoption of constitution
- ❖ Adoption of Strategic Plan (2006- 2009)

Change of accounting period

In presenting the annual accounts the treasurer informed the AGM that the accounting period had been changed from being January to December to 1st April to 31st March of every year for easier financial accounting. Thus, the annual account being presented was for the period January 2004 to 31st March 2005 amounting to twelve months period the treasurer informed the AGM. The change was agreed and duly adopted.

Dissolution of Management Committee

Management put forward convincing argument for the dissolution of the Management Committee.

Name change from Women Of Nigeria International (WONI), to Women Of Africa (WOA)

Although WONI has been providing services to statutory agencies and many African communities in the UK, its name tends to exclude the many groups and individuals who have benefited from its services. The change is necessary to clarify the Charity's work to the wider beneficiaries as opposed to limiting access to Nigerians exclusively. All present agreed unanimously to change the name WONI to Women Of Africa.

Change from Management Committee to Board of Trustees

It was also agreed that to enable the Charity meeting the rapidly growing needs of the beneficiaries, the government body should be changed from Management Committee system to Board of Trustees that should be made up of at least fifty percent of professionals. It was agreed that would ensure the services being provided would be of a high professional standard.

Election of Board of Trustees Members

Trustees have a legal obligation to the Charity to oversee the functioning of WOA. Those nominated for the positions presented and introduced themselves with a short profile of their professional education, experience and what they hope to bring to the Charity.

The members of Board of Trustees were duly elected according to the constitution.

This took place in the form of an oath of commitment to the legal running of Women Of Africa.

<u>Elected Board of Trustees</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Role</u>
Rosemary Senugondo	Uganda	Treasurer
Mr Chukwudum Ikeazor	Nigeria	Chair person
Mrs Senait Tekle	Eritrean	Vice chair
Lara wilkey Adesina	Nigeria	Recruitment officer
Irene Mugabirwe	Nigeria	
Mr Pery Natufe	Nigeria	Financial secretary

Miss Pulcherie Kissengo	Republic of The Congo	
Richard Chukwuka	Nigeria	Recruitment officer
Shelia Ochugboju	Nigeria	Director of communication
Ini Udom	Nigeria	Recruitment officer
Irene Akpofure	Nigeria	Recruitment officer
Miss Dorothy Ewwarayee	Nigeria	secretary
Sylvia Nyakunengwa	Zimbabwe.	

Appointment of a President

Management informed the AGM of the need to appoint a “President” who will be the ceremonial head of the organisation. Mrs Glenys Kinnock MEP was suggested for the position. However, the AGM left they needed more names put forward and before an appointment is made by the Board of Trustees at a future date.

Appointment of Friends

It was agreed that the status of “Friends” of WOA should be created to enable professionals who are able to contribute some time to support the activities of the organisation without the legal duties which being Trustees impose. Two Friends of WOA were appointed at the AGM.

Constitutional Issues arising from the change of “name” and “division”

The expansion of Object (Article 3 of the Constitution)

It was agreed that given the change in the needs of African’s both in the Diaspora and the continent particularly following the focus on the development of the Africa Continent as recommended by the Commission for Africa” and the campaign to reduce the poverty level in the continent, it became necessary for this Charity to be constituted and empower across the many socio- economic challenges. As such the AGM resolved that an application be made to the Charity Commission for England and Wales to have the Charity’s “Object” expanded.

Adoption of constitution

Having deliberated on the issues arising such as the change of Name from WONI to WOA, the expansion of the Object, the change of structure and Management and the change from Director to Chief Executive Officer, the Constitution was unanimously adopted.

Adoption of Strategic Plan (2006- 2009)

The AGM considered the needs of the organisation as contained in the Strategic plan for the period 2006-2009. This was again deliberated upon extensively and duly adopted.

Change of Object

Following from the resolution passed at the 2005 AGM, the Charities Commission for England and Wales has approved:

- 1. The change of name**
- 2. Expansion of object**

The expansion of object for instance article 3 of the Women of Africa Constitution reads as follows:

- ❖ The organisation's object shall be: Relief of poverty, sickness, distress, and the preservation and promotion of good health among women and children in Africa.
- ❖ Relief of poverty, sickness, distress, isolation and the advancement of education, preservation and promotion of good health among Africans in the UK generally.

Service Quality Mark Achievements

WONI has been awarded:

- ❖ The legal services commission's Quality Mark for advice service providers
- ❖ The exemption to provide immigration advice by commission at level one

THANK YOU

On behalf of the management committee, we wish to thank and express our sincere gratitude to all our funders who have supported WONI with funding and in kind support throughout the years:

- BBC Children in Need
- ALG
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Awards for All
- Greater Peckham Association
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
- South East London Community Foundation
- The Association of London Government
- Charities Aids Foundation
- Claudia Webbe: Policy Advisor to Ken Livingstone
- Lee Jasper: Policy Advisor to Ken Livingstone on Equalities
- Comic Relief
- Millennium Awards for All
- Southwark Council
- Healthy Community fund
- Churches Commission for Racial Justice
- Southwark Children's Fund
- Bridge House Estates Trust Fund

We wish also to thank members of the management committee whose dedication secured the achievements made by the organisation, evidence of which is the expansion of the charity signified by the change of name:

- Mrs Regina Inekuku (Chair)
- Ms Dorothy Ewaraye (Treasurer)
- Miss Marie Otigbah (Secretary)
- Anne Jones
- Mrs Queen Irone
- Mr Perry Natufe

- Mrs Jemima Danjuma
- Mrs Irene Akpofure

We wish to welcome the members of the Board of Trustees.

- Sheila Ochugbujo
- Chukwundum Ikeazor
- Ini Udom
- Sylvia Nyakunengwa
- Irene Akpofure
- Perry Natufe
- Richard Chukwuka
- Lara Omotoke Wilkey-Adesina
- Rosemary Senugondo

We look forward to working with them to achieve more for Africans in Africa and the Diaspora.

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