



# Energizing Women's Participation in Local Governance through Voice and Economic Empowerment

A comprehensive community-level approach to supporting economic growth, resilience, and more inclusive local governance in Azito Village, Côte d'Ivoire.





## Context

Azito Energie, an IFC client since 1998, provides approximately 30% of Côte d'Ivoire's energy from its thermal power plant located in Azito Village, Yopougon—one of the most populated districts of the capital, Abidjan. As host to this plant, Azito village received significant compensation funds in return for the required land.

IFC was invited to collaborate with Azito Energie and Azito Village to ensure that the compensation funds catalyze more equal opportunities for women and men to contribute to the development of their community. In the past, the Azito Village's weak governance structures meant that women and young people were largely excluded from decisions about how to use such payments. Community investment decisions focused mostly on infrastructure and real estate developments, neglecting

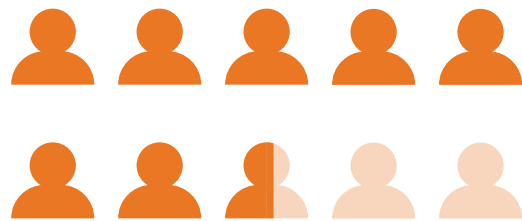
other priorities such as income-generating activities for women and youth. The resulting unequal distribution of benefits not only further disadvantaged already marginalized groups, but also compromised the community's perception of Azito Energie, particularly among women and youth.

Azito Village has historically been managed by an all-male council, which is meant to govern for 15 years before ceding to the next generation. Along with limited opportunities for participation by women and young people, the council's governance transition was severely delayed, leading to tensions and mistrust within the community. In 2020, only 41% of women surveyed felt that the village's financial resources were managed in ways that responded to community priorities, and 87% felt that community resources were spent without sufficient village consultation.<sup>1</sup>

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## The Opportunity

Through its partnership with IFC, Azito Energie wanted its payment of € 3million in compensation funds to help create more inclusive and accountable governance structures in Azito Village. Building local capacity to manage community resources as well as more inclusive decision-making was seen as an opportunity to generate tangible socio-economic benefits and strengthen the company's relationship with the broader community.



**87%** of women felt that community resources were spent without sufficient consultation

<sup>1</sup> Azito perception survey

As part of the IFC-Canada local economic development program, IFC conducted a perception survey to better understand the community's feelings about the company and how the Village is governed, as well as a series of participatory assessments called Community Score Cards (CSCs) to understand the community's priorities and opportunities and how they align with its current governance practices. During the CSCs, community leaders and representatives from all stakeholder groups within the community, including women and youth, came together to discuss their satisfaction with development activities carried out by the Village council on their behalf and to come up with concrete ideas for improvement in the design and delivery of community projects. The assessments

confirmed the need to establish more inclusive governance structures and to provide training for women and youth to enable them to participate in local decision-making processes.



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## Gender-Smart Solutions

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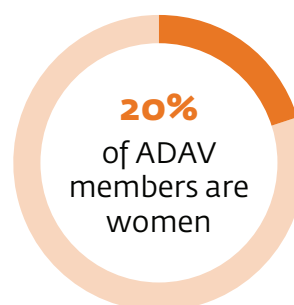
The partnership between IFC and Azito Energie focused on creating formal channels for women and young people to participate in local governance and decision-making, as well as training enabling them to become more actively involved in the management of community affairs and develop their own income-generating activities.

### KEY AREAS OF SUPPORT INCLUDED:

#### 1 Support to Azito Village to establish more inclusive governance and financial management structures

Given that Azito Village had never managed such large financial resources, a key component of the program was to build governance and financial management capacity to foster more inclusive decision-making. As women have been traditionally excluded from the Azito Village decision-making process and were not

involved in the governance structures, IFC supported the establishment of the Azito Village Development Association (*Association pour le Développement de Azito Village—ADAV*) as a planning and project implementation entity of the Village Council. ADAV's membership includes five women and 15 men and works closely with the Council. The 20% women represents a substantial increase in women's voice at the community level and is the first time that women have been represented in one of Azito Village's management structures.





With the program's support, the Village Council and ADAV worked together to identify key development challenges and priorities, create a unified and representative development plan and budget, and develop a three-year investment plan with associated yearly investment plans.

Participants, including women (16% of participants) and youth, attended these sessions and were actively involved in the planning and programming workshops.

As a result of this new way of working, the 2022 Azito Village budget allocation included funds for community projects that enhance local economic development and reflect the engagement of the women participants in the process. Projects supporting social and

economic activities included rehabilitating the local women's cooperative with cassava milling and grinding machines, equipping the health center with an ambulance, and the construction of the village's first secondary school.

In addition to supporting a change in governance structures, the program also supported training on financial literacy, cooperative and community association governance, awareness raising on the benefits and importance of a gender-balanced approach to governance, and behavior change communication workshops. Participants report that as a direct outcome of this work, the Village Council now schedules a village assembly every six months to inform the community and gather feedback on the performance of the Village Council and ADAV.

"Thanks to the knowledge gained from the capacity building and coaching sessions conducted by IFC, the village council has adopted a more modern, democratic, and participatory way of managing activities and projects for the common development of the village, unlike previous years."

**Mr. Boka Wassa Jean**, *Dean of the Tchagba Chieftaincy and President of ADAV*

"The process of securing part of the village's assets in the form of a term deposit also benefited me, both in the management of my personal finances and in the management of the health center for which I am responsible. Indeed, I have also taken out a small term deposit for the health center, hoping that this will also encourage the bank to make loans to us as needed."

**Mr. Ezan Kouao Blaise**, *President of the Azito Community Health Center*

## 2 Strategic support and capacity building for women and youth

The program organized six training sessions to build business skills among women and youth, delivered in the local language. The training included young people and members of the women's cooperative that produces attiéké, a popular Ivoirian dish produced from cassava. Trainings focused on business

basics, financial literacy and planning, and project management and development, including group formation, identifying and evaluating a project idea, and developing and finalizing a project outline. Trainings also included capacity building and training sessions with youth to help them identify income-generating activities such as poultry and fish farming.

## OUT OF 157 PARTICIPANTS



**46** were women



**111** were satisfied with the training



**32** women also participated in two workshops on attiéké processing and proposal development using the fish storage project as a pilot

Satisfaction rating:

**85%**

Satisfaction rating:

**81%**



### 3 Support to the attiéké cooperative to build capacity and become a more viable economic entity

The Azito women's attiéké cooperative is an important but underperforming community asset, and the project helped its members improve its economic viability. Based on a participatory assessment of the cooperative's needs, the project provided training, coaching, and mentoring on cooperative management, basic accounting, waste management, and hygiene, health, and safety in the context of COVID-19. The project also funded equipment for health and safety on the production line, including personal protective equipment and light rehabilitation of on-site sanitary areas. As a result of these

interventions, the cooperative improved health and safety practices, revised its articles of incorporation, and registered the cooperative under its new name. Cooperative members identified new markets, developed agreements with supermarket chains, and met with an inventory management specialist who helped them to take necessary steps towards a more formalized business (for instance, developing barcodes based on weight and improved food packaging). The program also provided coaching on cooperative management and fundraising that led to new partnerships with external donors, including the mobile phone company MTN, which financed the full rehabilitation of the facility as well as new machines and equipment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nouvellesducontinent.com/21-days-of-yello-care-mtn-cote-divoire-offre-une-unite-de-transformation-de-lattieke-dune-valeur-de-30-millions-aux-femmes-dazito/>

#### 4 Support to the Azito Women's Association to develop the fish market project and implement its fundraising strategy

Despite the importance of the attiéké cooperative, border closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic decline in clientele outside Côte d'Ivoire. To mitigate the impact and support resilience against the social and economic consequences of COVID-19, the project developed support to the local fish market

to help diversify women's income sources. Using the skills developed through capacity building for the attiéké cooperative, the women of Azito were actively engaged in the development of the fish market project, helping collect market research and identifying cost-effective items that their new business can focus on. Further technical and financial support was secured through the Corporate Partners Committee with the Village Council, and one of the local corporate partners, Azito O&M, confirmed financial commitments to support the project.

"We can never thank IFC enough for all that has been done for us, the women of the Azito cooperative. During COVID, we were trained and sensitized on the need to diversify our sources of income. IFC gave us the necessary skills to develop a fish storage and sale project. We have all the technical information and are now looking for funding for this project that will do a lot of good for the women of Azito."

**Mrs. Nanho Ines**, *President of the Women's Attiéké Cooperative*

"Before, we used to be in the cooperative without knowing the real interest and opportunity of being in a collective. Also, we occupied roles where we did not really know the roles and responsibilities to which we were assigned, which often created conflicts."

**Mrs. Beugre Herodias**, *Member of the Board of the Women's Attiéké Cooperative*

## Results

As a result of the program, both Azito Energie's standing and the roles of women and youth in the community have clearly changed. The program also contributed to a measurable<sup>3</sup> shift in community perceptions of Azito Energie: men and women both feel that women now have a more equitable share of the resources, and women feel more consulted in community decisions. In terms of local governance, women are increasingly involved in planning, budgeting, and decision-making on social and economic projects to benefit the Azito Village. They have clearly

defined roles in the village's governance and have gained skills to increase business for the attiéké cooperative and pursue new economic opportunities with the development of a fish storage project. The whole village will benefit from the improved financial management skills of the Village Council, as well as the village health center's new equipment. Taken together, the project demonstrates a comprehensive approach to supporting community-level economic growth and resilience and creating more inclusive local governance institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Women's perception of having benefitted from Azito Energie's community payments is up to 72%, from 44% in 2020; overall perceptions that these funds are benefitting women has risen 10% since 2020 (up to 73%). However, among women specifically, the change is even greater – in 2022, 85% of women felt that the financial resources of the Azito project have benefitted the village at large, up from 51% in 2020. Women's perception of being consulted has improved – while 87% of women felt that there was insufficient community consultation on use of financial resources in 2020, that number declined to 64% in 2022.

**For more information, please contact:**

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[www.commdev.org/topics/gender](http://www.commdev.org/topics/gender)

*This case study is part of a series that highlights how IFC's Sustainable Infrastructure Advisory team leverages activities to create benefits for women as part of IFC's investments in infrastructure projects.*



Enhancing Benefits to Communities in Infrastructure & Natural Resources