

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AWARENESS IN THE CHURCH

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Case Study  
N° 6

### SYNOPSIS

Gender-based violence (GBV) means physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence carried out against a person because of that person's gender. Spousal violence is usually gender-based and is carried out by a spouse. While GBV is generally by a male on a female, it may also be female on male. A study by UNAIDS in 2011 highlighted that at least 60% of women in Africa have experienced physical and sexual violence from their most recent spouse or live-in partner. GBV has a number of negative implications in the community. It may have profound effects – direct and indirect – on a woman's reproductive health, including:

- Unwanted pregnancies and restricted access to family planning information and contraceptives
- Unsafe abortion or injuries sustained during a legal abortion after an unwanted pregnancy
- Complications from frequent, high-risk pregnancies and lack of follow-up care
- Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- Persistent gynecological problems
- Psychological problems.

A study in Zimbabwe showed that 60% of murder cases that went through the courts were due to domestic violence (Getecha et. al 1995). In most cases women fail to report any form of abuse because of financial dependency and also because the society condones wife battery and is not regarded as abuse but a “close family matter” that should not be interfered with. Sometimes women are afraid of getting a divorce after reporting their husbands' abuse. In some instances in Zimbabwe what the society says about a woman matters to the woman's social life therefore if people get to know that they are being abused they are afraid they will be looked down upon. This project was therefore targeted to community members in the church because it was easy to reach to them in large numbers.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Gender based violence is a common problem in the Chegutu District in Zimbabwe. For this reason the Kumutsiridza Organization needed to intervene and

educate the communities on the negative implications of gender based violence and what could be done to prevent it while also reporting any case thereof. This project was carried out in March 2014 and a total of approximately 900 people were gathered in the three sessions carried out. The project intended to bring together church members

<sup>1</sup> This study has been prepared by Auxilia Piringondo in anticipation of the “Gender for Results Knowledge and Training Event” (Tunis, April 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> 2014).

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and promote dialogue between men and women and the church leaders. One of the main reasons why Kumutsiridza Organization opted for the church as the targeted group was because the church is where people (both male and female) from diverse backgrounds gather despite their political affiliation, their level of education, their social status in the community, their economic level and their employment status. The venue also makes it easily accessible for the project workers as they do not incur any workshop booking cost and hotel and lodging since everything is catered for by the church. Also the people will be already gathered so there is less time spent on sending out invitation messages.

## **Goal**

The goal of the project is to reduce gender based violence in communities and avail information where those affected can receive services.

## **Target group**

The target group included couples – It is important that husbands and wives get this information together.

Youth – The youth are the future couples and getting this information at an early age will ensure that the prevalence of GVB will be reduced.

Children – Children are taught to report any cases of abuses in the family. They are also given information where they can seek for protection.

## **Presentation of the case study**

### **Approach**

The organization's two project offices were responsible for carrying out the activities with the guidance from the Project Manager. The main purpose of the project was to take advantage of the church gatherings in the area and raise gender based violence issues to the congregation immediately after church services. There was cooperation between the organization and three of the local church branches in the Chegutu District Zimbabwe. Kumutsiridza Organization and the Assemblies of God Church Leaders were responsible

for the organization and implementation of the workshops. The church congregation also comprised of three members from the Police, a member from Social Welfare and two from the Ministry of education who voluntarily gave a view and information regarding the role that their ministry plays in dealing with issues regarding gender based violence.

## **Results**

A number of women visited the organization after the workshops for guidance. A total of six women had their properties taken by the relatives of their husbands after their husbands had passed away. They did not know that they could get representation in court and have their properties returned to them. Previously women had no say in regards to their shared properties after the death of their husbands as the husband's brothers would loot all that was left. Many women were thus left in poverty and this had a cascading negative effect as they ended up failing to pay fees for their children. Two of the widows had their houses returned to them after the magistrate ordered the relatives to vacate the houses. The brothers were also given a warning in the event that they ended up abusing the widows. The other four widows still have their cases in court but the Project Coordinators are working hand in hand with the local authorities to ensure justice is served. Two women received counseling after managing to open up and their husbands also agreed to come for counseling after having beaten up their wives, because they had asked about having their names also listed in the properties. The Project Coordinators explained explicitly the importance of including the wife in the properties and also highlighted that she was also responsible for the economic uplift of the family. This also prevented looting from the husband's family in the unfortunate event of the husband's death.

Church leaders have asked the organization to continue these workshops once per month as people (especially women) are now beginning to open up to issues regarding gender based violence. After every session there is a question and answer time and because of time, not all the questions

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have been answered. This is an indicator that gender based violence was rampant in the area and for many years talking about it was actually a taboo. Women were viewed as “property” because their husbands had paid a bride price for them and therefore it was a man’s duty to “discipline”. For this reason, the question and answer session was a bit sensitive, because some men viewed the subject as a “Western-borrowed-culture”.

### **Partners**

Kumutsiridza Organization works closely with Church Leaders. The organization has opened a volunteer department where members of the Church from the various relevant government ministries are able to share their knowledge and expertise during these sessions. There is coordination from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Work, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and the Police department. Currently the organization is operating on donations from various individuals. This support is expected to increase as the demand for these workshops is increasing from other churches.

### **Outcomes and overall assessment**

The gender based awareness raising workshops allowed both men and women to share their views on their respective roles and how they can achieve a common goal in the families without the other party being abused either physically, emotionally, financially and or sexually. The expected outcomes of the workshops included the following:

- 1) Reduce the number of people admitted in the hospital due to physical abuse (this was reportedly the most common form of abuse in the area).
- 2) Increase the number of widows acquiring back their lost property from the husband’s relatives.
- 3) Increase the number of people seeking counseling from the center (the organization providing counseling services).
- 4) Reduce early marriages.

### **Conclusions and lessons learned**

While gender based violence is culturally not a crime but a family issue, it should be discussed in public and the perpetrators brought to book. The question and answer sessions provided evidence that because of financial dependency on the husbands, women chose to be silent over gender based violence. This in turn has detrimental consequences on their health as they fail to voice out their concerns even on issues regarding sexual matters. They are more at risk than the males because culturally a woman is not expected to make any decision regarding sexual activities and therefore asking a man to use a condom is considered a taboo and complete disrespect. Most of the community members were unaware about the scope of gender based violence and thought that it related only to physical abuse. They did not understand that GBV also involved economic violence, emotional violence and sexual violence.

The most important lesson that the organization learnt was the importance and benefit of working with community leaders in the implementation of any project. Church leaders played a vital role in encouraging church members to attend during their sermons. A synopsis of the workshop information was shared during the sermons and this helped to get the attention of the congregation. Church leaders also provided the workshop venues, training materials such as flip charts, pens and notebooks. This assistance was notably beneficial as the organization lacked adequate funding. Involvement of community leaders facilitated effective beneficiary participation and increased project sustainability. A sense of “Our-learning-time” is engraved in the participants as they now look forward to the workshops. Community members are now able to be on the lookout for each other since gender based violence is now openly spoken about. The organization also involved the local chiefs/headmen. These were responsible for ensuring that community members attended the

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workshops. In the Zimbabwean culture, the headman has male servants who are responsible for giving information to the chiefs. These meetings take place in the chief's homestead in an area called "Zunde Ramambo" which means "The Chief's court". This is more like a communal court room. Since the organization is also responsible for training the local leaders such as the chiefs/headmen, it allows a cascading of information flowing from the top to the bottom. This top-down approach results in the community members having a social responsibility towards each other as the servants have to report back to the chief any success or hiccup during the project implementation. Monitoring and evaluation is thus enhanced at the grassroots level. Thus it is crucial to train local chiefs as they are the voice of the people and these are the people that are listened more than Project Coordinators.

Another important lesson was that when dealing with gender issues it is also beneficial to include both males and females during the sessions. This allows both parties to understand the issues affecting the other party and also help each other in finding lasting and sustainable solutions unlike imposing solutions on unwilling parties which will cause resistance to change. Culture is a very complex and sensitive issue that needs to be dealt with carefully and without criticizing the culturally accepted norm. This is the reason why dialogue is important to ensure that all the concerned parties have a common understanding. Members need to own the solutions to enable implementation. This is a more sustainable way of dealing with change or rather a shift of culture.

In conclusion, gender based violence has been practiced for centuries in Zimbabwe. This could have been done either out of ignorance or for selfish reasons or even to boost men's egos as the revelations emerged from the discussions showed. However the importance of a balanced society was emphasized where the benefits of empowering women were pointed out. When both men and women are empowered then the whole community is empowered. Women are responsible for the upbringing of the children and they spend more

time with the children thus it is important that they teach these children on issues regarding gender equity.

### Challenges

Even though the project was successfully implemented, it faced a number of challenges. Funding proved to be a limiting factor as the organization could not carry out awareness workshops in more churches. IEC materials were not adequate for distribution in the three churches that received the workshop. The materials for the training information would have been beneficial to the public even way after the implementation of the project. Some churches that are headed only by males such as the Catholic Church were resistant to these workshops. There were some church leaders who even went to state the Bible regards women as inferior to men and therefore they can never experience the same benefits. These myths and beliefs blocked the rest of the churches from getting access to these workshops since permission was entirely dependent on the decision of the church leaders.

### Recommendations

There is a need to intensify awareness programs on spousal and domestic violence at individual, community and national levels. Intensify the participation of men, including boys and other key drivers (traditional counselors for couples, such as aunts and uncles, family members) in gender-based violence strategic interventions. Also intensify the participation of community leaders in strategic interventions e.g. chiefs, headmen, religious leaders, peer leaders. Strengthen the capacity of women's organizations that defend and enforce policies and implementation towards a zero tolerance of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe.

When dealing with gender based violence cases there is need for thorough research into the stories presented mostly by women as there is now a myth that whatever a woman does the law will always defend her. Some women are now taking advantage

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of these workshops that are promoting women rights and raising awareness on how to fight gender based violence. Stories should not be dealt with at face value but thorough investigations are necessary. All stakeholders should ensure that statistical data of all forms of abuse reported are recorded. This allows for effective monitoring and evaluation since the baseline survey will be available and therefore it will allow deciding on our targets in accordance with the statistical data. Children in schools should be taught on how to identify any form of abuse and who and where to report the cases to. Introduce gender classes in schools so as to catch them young and instill in them gender aware and sensitive values.

### Policy Gaps

- Inadequate finance and resources for the effective implementation of preventative strategies by all partners, for example, no comprehensive treatment including provision of post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for rape

victims is available (SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2011).

- Inadequate information on actual statistics and data to allow for more informed policy and programmatic interventions. No gender-based violence data collated yet.
- No index for measuring gender-based violence (SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2011): there is then a need for co-ordinated multi-sectoral interventions that work together.
- Incoherence and conflict between traditional laws, practices and civil law.

### References

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