



**HOPE FOUNDATION FOR  
AFRICAN WOMEN**

*Eliminating Gender Disparities  
to Create Strong Communities*

## **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: PARTICIPATORY AND TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ABAGUSHII (Based on Popular Education)**

### **Introduction**

This project is collaboration between HFAW and EPES Foundation. HFAW is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of marginalized and vulnerable women and families in Kenya through community economic empowerment and increasing women's awareness of their gender issues and human rights, encouraging them to engage in the restructuring of their own communities—ultimately creating stronger and self-sustaining communities. EPES (Educacion Popular En Salud) is an independent community based non-profit foundation in Santiago Chile that mobilizes communities for health. EPES has reached over 100,000 women and their families in poor communities with innovative strategies and tools for empowerment and collective action. Epes holds yearly international program on popular education in health to share its methodologies and strategies developed over three decades.

The HFAW/EPES project was conceived in 2010, when Grace Mose-Okong'o, Ph.D. attended the first EPES International Training Course on Popular Education. She left inspired to bring back to Kenya a similar participatory development approach. Upon her return to Kenya, Dr. Mose with Hellen Njoroge, created the nonprofit organization, Hope Foundation for African Women (HFAW). HFAW addresses gender disparities by raising awareness about women's constitutional and human rights; provides reproductive health and civic education; leadership training and mentoring opportunities; engages women in self-help groups; and provides technical assistance that helps women access small loans to improve their economic well-being. The overall goal of HFAW projects is to improve health and advance human rights of Kenyan women and families through popular education, leadership training and the development of community health and human rights teams.

During the first phase of this project EPES invited six women from HFAW to go to Chile for two weeks in January 2014 to attend the Fifth International Training Course on Popular Education in Health in order to introduce them to the EPES model. This group consisting of HFAW founders Grace Mose and Hellen Njoroge, training specialist, Dr. Mary Washika, program Associate, Lisper Bundi, and two community women coordinators Koyo Nelly Owino and Joyce Trufena Amoyi, worked with the EPES staff to adapt the curriculum, plan logistics and lay groundwork for the implementation of the model in Kenya. The Kenyan women left Chile inspired to immediately embark on a six month pilot of the EPES model. This report documents the launch and the first six sessions of the training including the accomplishments, challenges, financial expenditure of the \$5000 provided by Epes for first part of pilot and next steps. The report documents preparations that were done in February and March, motivation, launch of the training, and first parts of actual training.



Kenyan women graduates of EPES course

### **Accomplishments**

HFAW's general goal for the pilot was to adopt the Epes model for training community health and human rights promoters to improve the health of women and families in Borabu sub-county. Our specific objective was to motivate the recruitment and training of 25 health and human rights promoters in the village. To accomplish this objective HFAW implemented its plan in four phases namely preparation, motivation, launch, and actual training.





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- (i) **Preparation for the training** - HFAW spent much of its February and March preparing for the training which was set to begin in April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014. In our preparation we made three agenda drafts before we arrived at our final schedule. Staff worked diligently to prepare materials that covered every step of our implementation plan: nametags and packets strategically made in different colors to aid divisions of participants into discussions groups, panel presentations and evaluation categories; charts which were created with great visual and memory appeal. For example we used a drawing of a house in conjunction with artistically made pillars on a manila paper to elaborate the principles, values and pillars of popular education. Staff prepared five charts on priority matrix that will aid the teaching of the topic of prioritizing problems in their communities. Staff who had visited the human rights museum in Chile recalled how that experience was remarkable even when the facilitator eventually covered the topic of human rights. We wanted to make our human rights topic as lively and memorable and since we could not fly our participants to Chile we made a collection of human rights abuses portraits d in Kenya which we would later hang on the wall for our participants discussed the topic. Following our EPES model we used simple, affordable and easily accessible materials such as toys, waste paper to make dices, manila papers, waste magazines, felt pens and pocket files. We also created a banner and fliers to use for motivation stage.



Human rights portraits and other training materials

reflecte  
to view as we

Our preparation also included working with grassroots coordinator of the Kisii community to alert the community of the impending training, identify provisional leadership committee and work with it to talk to potential participants, gauge the costs for various items, identify the venues, plan logistics, make appointment with local leadership whom we intended to invite to the launch of the training and invite entertainers. HFAW has learnt that creating relationships with community and local leadership of those we intend to impact on is the way that could lead to project ownership and sustainability.



Meeting with the deputy commissioner

- (ii) **Motivation** - At the beginning of March, HFAW team travelled to the village to tighten the logistic planning, visit local leadership to explain the project and motivate participants to register for the launch and training. We targeted political, religious and social services leadership as well as grassroots men and women including community based organizations and churches. For the leadership we visited the sub chief, chief, county representative, deputy County Commissioner, Gender unit, Health unit, police unit, development, school principal and head mistress offices and invited the top leaders. We

made calls and visited the County Women's representative in parliament and invited her to be key note speaker for the launch. We invited ordinary men and women in the village to register for the launch and training.

After three days of intensive motivation and a feeling that we had garnered the people's and leadership support we travelled back to Nairobi and wrote formal letters of invitation to the launch scheduled for April 2 and training for April 3 and 4<sup>th</sup> 2014. The rest of the preparations entailed planning for refreshments, tents, chairs, media invitation, and entertainer preparation with relevant message on human rights. We also worked with our provisional committee members to assign topics to different leaders and assist them with focused talking points. We worked with the security office to provide safety during the launch day. We worked with ordinary Kenyans to ensure the security of the banner from being stolen from where it was showcased to advertise the event. Staff and our provisional committee worked on numerous details to ensure the success of the launch and training.

- (iii) **Launch of the training** - Our original plan was to launch our training in a small enclosed conference room holding 40 to 50 people but upon sharing with our County Representative we revaluated our venue plan. He was very pleased with our planned project that he proposed we hold it in Kijauri public works ground where we could reach as many people as possible. This is a community space used to hold public events at a charge but he went a step further to ensure that we use the space without any charges. This leader promised to be supportive to our project.



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By engaging a community Christian Band, The Mission Brothers and a well-known Kisii traditional musician, Ombuna, HFAW was assured of over 250 participants on our launch day, April 2, 2014. We were pleasantly surprised that the launch quickly filled with music, dance and fun which became a draw to over 300 people and created a great atmosphere to raise awareness of issues. We had learnt from EPES model that people learn more when they are having fun. HFAW had three objectives for this day; to raise general awareness of the gender and human rights issues that would be core to the training, announce HFAW's impact in the community to garner support and more importantly motivate the identified participants to enter into the training the following day with enthusiasm.



Entry to the ground with song and dance

During the launch we were thrilled to know that all our invited leadership turned up. This was unusual considering that this was a woman's day and all the leaders in each one of these offices were men who could care less about women's issues. The day progressed well with extraordinary speeches and role plays. For example, the audience was treated to a special action where a local primary school acted out the practice of FGM. This gave the students an opportunity to reprimand parents for doing FGM underground since its legal ban. It also revealed how police were so corrupt they could not be relied upon to stamp out FGM. All these unfolded in front of the invited deputy commissioner of police who is expected to address such a vice. Very serious messages were passed on amidst laughter including condemnation of child labor. Leaders were strategically appointed to tackle different gender and human rights topic. For the first time in the village FGM was addressed by a man. As a doctor he provided the clinical aspects of the practice and urged urgency to eradicate this practice.

A respectable health provider spoke about family conflicts which intertwined with alcoholism addressed by a senior chief who confronts them on a daily basis. These topics were strategically arranged to reveal the gender aspects of them and especially the drastic impact on women. HIV/AIDS was tackled by the health unit representative who gave the statistics of the infected people and the ones on anti-retroviral drugs. The statistics indicated that most people do not take the drugs even after knowing their status and most people do not know their status till it's too late and at a critical stage therefore she emphasized on free testing and counseling and encouraged people to go for the test and also for the infected to go for the drugs.



Girls act out Impact of FGM

The county representative who was charged with the topic of gender based violence admitted that it was a tough topic for a man to address considering that men were the perpetrators. He however authoritatively urged the community to stop condoning the vice. The leader from the gender unit had a hard time explaining the services available in his office which apparently was well known for corruption. Women loudly registered their displeasure with the office which was obviously not living to the expected standards of providing empowerment programs.

After all speakers were done with addressing the gender issues, HFAW CEO talked about the EPES model emphasizing how it transforms communities and pointed out how this model has been successful in Chile through EPES Foundation. She challenged the participants to know that they have a responsibility to know their rights and stand up for them. Local leaders were not doing their job because nobody holds them accountable. She urged women to take up their cause and transform their own lives and showed to them what women were doing in Chile to change their realities.

"No woman can be respected for being desperate." She said. Women will earn respect when they get both economic and educational empowerment and that is what HFAW wants to help them accomplish." Said Mose.





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HFAW staff got a chance to introduce themselves to the audience and each spoke eloquently sharing their transformative experience in Chile. The County Women representative reiterated all the issues which had been addressed and made a commitment to support the HFAW project. She thanked EPES for sponsoring the pilot and made further request for more financial and technical support. She hoped that by the time HFAW completed its training we could have been able to produce strong women who stood up for their rights. She challenged HFAW to "give me 5 Hellens." Hellen is one of the six women who trained in Chile and who spoke strongly about the rights of women and children. "All children should be treated equally whether it is a boy or a girl, a child is a child." Said Hellen, reprimanding the serious discrimination against the girl child this dangerously patriarchal community. The County Women's representative ended her speech by officiating the opening of the training. HFAW felt that we accomplished all our objectives as we could not contain many people who wanted to be included in the training. We ended up scaling our number of trainee to 30 up from the original 25 at the request of the county representative to include additional participants from other wards to develop leadership in those regions which will be key when scaling up. With a song from the County Woman representative the launch was closed with the same jubilant mood of dance and music.



- (iv) **Training** - With the high anticipation HFAW launch had set we began our training on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 on a very high note. The participants were filled with expectation to learn how to transform communities. We started the pilot by emphasizing its seriousness "This is like

no other you have seen in the village and we must succeed." Said HFAW CEO. HFAW first training covered three sessions: why projects fail in the community; the Epes concept, history, values, principles and pillars; identification of issues and deep discussion of the issue of FGM.

The first day of training, HFAW innovatively adopted the EPES model and included topics which would not normally be included by EPES but were relevant to our situation such as why projects fail in the village immediately a funder leaves the neighborhood. The participants were well aware of the reasons some of which they identified as: corruption, lack of leadership, lack of community ownership, and when tokens come to an end.



Addressing the seriousness of this course

We discussed the concept of popular education, showcased photos of its successes in Chile and juxtaposed it with HFAW programs and accomplishments. We discussed the popular education principles, values, history and pillars. The theological pillar was particularly resonating because Africans consider themselves deeply religious. HFAW successfully linked some of the principles with our religious and African values. We presented ourselves not as feminists but strong community transformers. Africans have a tendency to resist Western feminism that is perceived as family breakers and men haters.

The afternoon was spent identifying the issues. This was done through presentations. Some groups identified as many as 20 community issues. Such issues as child labor, alcoholism, poverty, prostitution, land issues, corruption, FGM, GBV, marriages within same clans, child marriages, etc were identified.

Even though the day was intense participants stayed on. We had late break tea and lunch and yet none of the participants wanted to leave the training. The day was packed with total participation of everybody. The training was broken into short sessions interacted with song and dance dynamics plus other games and exercises. Many of the dynamics we used were locally based which allowed participants to fully participate. Our variety of methods included mini lectures with sessions of group discussions and panel presentations. We also had an open question and answer session.

group discussions followed by plenary issues.



Everybody wanted to contribute





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Preparing presentation

The following day had planned to spend time to understand some of the issues that were identified in the community. Because these issues are so thorny in the community there were sporadic and deep discussions about them. A very intense discussion on the issue of FGM began. During our motivational visit in March we had informal trainings with people at the grassroots whom we thought had enough knowledge and skills to handle some of the issues. HFAW believes that this strategy of engaging community in all ways will lead to community ownership and sustainability of the project. The community doctor took center stage and gave frank facilitation of this session following how we had coached him to employ dynamic methods. This male doctor from the community who had seen the impact of this practice shared a five minute documentary where participants watched with horror the way young girls genitals were painfully torn with blunt tools. It appeared that the men in the room had

never known exactly what happens during FGM since they are never included in the cutting ceremony. They expressed complete dismay at what they saw. One man said with great sorrow "Where were you last year, I just "circumcised" my girls." Some men made commitment to work each day to end this practice. A woman gave a testimony how she bled to near death and how she and her husband, the doctor who was facilitating decided not to mutilate their daughters. They are so rare couple in the community who have not done this practice on their girls.

We ended up not covering some topics that were aligned for this day as we chose to give people a chance to have this level of depth in sharing. We motivated people to realize that they were so important in ensuring that they understand the issues well so that they can train others. We explained the motivational stage, training and organizational stages of our training each time showing them why we did things the way we did such as visiting leadership offices. They got it clearly that the community depended on them. We emphasized the value of learning to speak up as they will be ambassadors for the them on how to motivate people and made them to role play a visit to poster announcing the launch and an activity that will ensure a county women's representative became guest speaker for their launch. We allowed them to invite any leader of their choice and not necessarily the county women's representative.

We gave the participants homework for next session that we planned for May. We ended the day by disbanding the provisional leadership committee and giving the people a chance to democratically choose their gender balanced steering committee.

Shortly after we returned to Nairobi and embarked on reviewing our accomplishment and evaluated our preparedness for the May session, HFAW staff got a call from one of the community mobilizers who indicated that our May plan was not well informed. He raised with us concerns that in May parents are normally trying to address school fees issues and returning children to school and so chances that many participants will not be able to attend were real. We immediately contacted the steering committee who confirmed the fears and suggested that we do our training on April 21 through 23<sup>rd</sup>. HFAW staff packed up again and headed west.

We arrived on 20th afternoon and held a quick meeting with the steering committee to ensure that our logistical planning were up to date. The training started promptly on 21. We were pleasantly surprised to find all participants waiting for us in the training venue. This was remarkable considering that this change was a short notice. The one person who did not attend had permission to be away.

Staff facilitated the topic of prioritization of issues while emphasizing why it was impractical to address numerous issues at the same time. In 5 groups followed by plenary presentation alcoholism, poverty, FGM, gender based violence and HIV/AIDS became the top priorities in that order. We then embarked on the topic "understanding of the issues" that had been prioritized. Here staff engaged participants with print picture clips of issues asking them to discuss what they were seeing, what the causes were, how the issue is affecting us and what we can do to address it collectively. It was satisfying to see ordinary people come up with creative solutions to their own problems.



group discussion on prioritization of issues

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The topic of GVB was facilitated through open round circle discussions which ended up with deep sharing similar to that of FGM. It was clear that women are yearning for help in this community. Men became allies in the fight against GBV. The topic of alcoholism came up over and over appearing to indicate that men under stress due to poverty and lack of livelihood for their families is what is causing all kinds of problems including GBV. They said that the men felt undermined by their women who were now breadwinners in the families. The women felt that "absent men" still demanded respect even if they were not playing their role as heads of families. Absent men are those men who live with their wives but help them with nothing. The community had a complex way of evaluating their issues and alcoholism trumped all issues and topped the list of priorities as the leading cause of almost all gender issue that the community was suffering from. They later changed their top priority to FGM, since it socialized women to accept the importance of addressing injustice first.



Open circle discussion

The afternoon session was spent tackling the topic of human rights. We had prepared portraits of human rights abuses in the country which staff showcased as the discussion progressed. All kinds of human rights abuses were viewed ranging from killings of people who resisted political oppression( such as Robert Ouko, J kariuki, Tom Mboya), political prisoners( such as Koigi Wamwere), beatings of women who agitated for change (such as Wangare Maathai), gender based violence(including domestic violence, rape and husband battering), FGM, child labor, corruption, land grabbing, gender discrimination in the constitution to mention a few.

HFAW then engaged participants in groups to discuss human rights abuses in their village. Lots of details were brought up including killing of wives, battering of wives, FGM, land issues, political manipulation by corrupt leaders, lack of basic needs, lack of understanding of their human rights to mention a few. Participants were shocked to learn there were many protections of their rights in the 2010

constitution. By the time we were done with these session many people felt the urgency to stand up for their rights. Joyce who actively participated stood up and said" from today I will not let anyone play with my life." We had begun the session with the string and bottle dynamic where staff educated the team the importance of being united in one accord to fight for their rights. The web also served as an introduction of the day which was observed as being an eye opener on different fronts. "When Joyce invited me I did not care but she insisted...then I just decided to just come to satisfy Joyce but now I am so grateful to her that she insisted that I come. I would have regretted if I had not joined the training." Said participating pastor.

May 22 was began with "understanding the action plan" After a slow explanation of what it was and why it was important participants were asked to state some key elements such as how to state the general objective, specific objective, activities, product and impact. Participants were then aligned in groups to arrange the action plan prints which we had brought with us from EPES. Participants were determined to get the arrangement right but his was obviously a challenging topic for them.

HFAW engaged the participants in explaining why we used dynamics. Men and women were allowed to be creative in leading the audience in different dynamics they will employ when they will be sent to do their own training. It was the most interesting time the group ever had seeing how people brought up dynamics that were funny and interesting as the same time. The egesingororo song was danced to in the most original sense. Staff had light moments remembering how they performed egesingororo at Chile in what this group would have termed rudimentary.



The fun part-music and dance





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We ended the day with a thorough circle discussion of why we used resources. Staff showcased all the resources we have used and asked the trainees to speak to the impact this has had on them. Some said this made learning to be more practical, learning became real and interesting, easy to understand, visual to name a few. As for the nature and cost of materials it became clear that materials didn't have to be expensive. Items in the environment that would be considered waste could become useful training aids. "I picked this calendar in a garbage dumpster and did you see how good it became as a teaching aid" HFAW Mary explained. The trainees were again engaged in thinking through and making of the materials they will use during their training. Together with this emphasis was made on participatory training. People learn more when they are engaged and when they are having fun.

April 23 was used to train on how to do a successful campaign for an issue such as raising awareness. We had originally planned to hold a market activity but had to postpone due to the changes in our schedule to 21th. To do a market activity we needed to arrange so many things such as public address, security plans and authorization from the authorities but since we had not done this we changed our training. We taught them how to make posters and messaging for their priority issue which is alcoholism and plan to do it as one of the June session. It was a live exercise to see participants use magazine and newspaper cuts to make creative posters in readiness to use next month.



Unity in sticking into the bottle



preparation for market activity against alcoholism

Staff also discussed our unique evaluation methodologies. That a dice, a list of questions on a manila paper and a string will be used to evaluate was an amazing experience for them. The fact that participants didn't have to write surveys seemed very interesting in itself. Again staff explained that this was a more creative method of getting honest answers about sessions and were encouraged to use similar methods during their own trainings. We ended the day with the string evaluation which showed how we had become one. One participant used the evaluation to suggest that we do not go back to Nairobi but continue with the training. HFAW staff would later observe that in their lives they had never seen participants ask for more after such a long and intensive day. After the evaluation staff provided homework in anticipation for June.

## Challenges

It has not been so smooth sailing for HFAW. The distance from Nairobi to Kisii is 5 hours' drive west of the country. This distance means that it is not only exhausting but expensive to travel this far each month some sometimes twice. In addition, our meager resources have meant that we have to hold meetings in extremely humbling environment such as classroom or a church space. We had to wrestle to access electricity for our training. We had to improvise things such as use of white sheet for projecting our power point on the wall. We have had to do with humbling accommodations and food. But we are not deterred. Just like the participants we very much look forward to our next sessions. HFAW/ EPES partnership project was launched with a great vision. We have encountered many challenges which could have discouraged any major organization from moving forward, but along the way have made major progress. Every one of these challenges has provided many learning opportunities and rather than get discouraged our resolve has been strengthened and our vision is much clearer.



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## Next Steps

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Action plan and preparation for market activities

We plan to engage staff in a market activity in June. In addition we plan to do more work on the action plan with the goal of coming up with a master plan that will help us scale the pilot to 5 wards. We will engage the participants in not only understanding the plan but doing it themselves. Then we will work out modalities and logistics for implementation of a scale up project before the end of the year subject to success in finding funding. We will encourage the participants to work in teams of 6 with an alternating plan that will allow HFAW staff to engage and mentor the process as we continue to build capacities of these women and men. We also intend to cover an additional topic of gender construction and the negative impact this has in our communities and the urgency to dismantle it. We plan to recap with the participants where we began and where we need to go next. Participants have successfully demonstrated this far that they will walk our steps from how we started in their own wards.

We also plan to hold our graduation at the end of June to try and meet the deadline for our June budget. Subject to funding we plan to hold it outside the training venue near Lake Victoria in a memorable site that can serve as a reminder for ground breaking training. Our country representative had asked that we try to complete the plan in time to allow him request for funding to help us scale the project. Again subject to funding we could also hold an additional public graduation to present the graduates to the larger community and reveal our achievement and next plan. That can also provide another opportunity for keeping the momentum for the project.

## How EPES Can Help

HFAW is deeply indebted to the support we have received so far from our mentor organization EPES Foundation. We have received a transformative training in Chile, an initial pilot grant and numerous technical assistance along the way as we plan and implement this pilot. HFAW is a young organization that will continue needing the support of EPES in capacity building, fundraising and technical assistance. HFAW is ambitious and highly motivated. Key to our success lies with holding ourselves accountable to our community, our mentor EPES and our other funders who will join hands to help us.

## Conclusion

HFAW has begun a very serious endeavor which we believe will transform not only our county but country and continent. We feel the urgency and heightened interest from the ordinary people in the village. This chapter holds key to a paradigm shift on gender perspectives and women issues in our country. We want to break the subordination of women in Kenya ones and for all. HFAW has more passion to continue supporting this community for we have seen a much more determined brand of participants than we could ever have imagined.



Addressing FGM issue



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