

**EMPOWERING ABAGUSII COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE
HEALTH, ECONOMIC WELL BEING AND ADVANCE
THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUTH**



**HOPE FOUNDATION FOR
AFRICAN WOMEN**

**In partnership
with**



**Mothers who are actually intervening against FGM in their
community.**



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Introduction

This project is a partnership between HFAW and International Methodist Women, Children and Youth (IMWCY). HFAW is an international not-for-profit, non-partisan organization registered in 2011 that works with rural communities to reduce gender inequalities through economic empowerment, gender advocacy and education; promoting sexual, reproductive health and advancing human rights in Kenya through popular education model. One of our key projects is ending FGM through advocacy in schools, churches and trainings for key stakeholders such as the health and law enforcement officials to deliver skills and approaches that will support the work of our active community health and human rights promoters. For economic empowerment this project will also focus on finance and entrepreneurship skills. Part of IMWCY mission is to equip women and girls to be leaders, to provide transformative educational experiences and work for justice through service and advocacy. With a supportive grant of \$10,000 from the IMWCY, HFAW worked towards its overall goal of improving the health and economic wellbeing of women, children and youth living in Borabu Sub-county by reducing gender-based violence with focus on FGM/C, advancing their human rights, improving system response to GBV and FGM, and improving women's business skills. To achieve this goal HFAW strived to address three objectives namely:

- (i) To increase awareness about the extent of the problem of GBV and its impact on the community with a focus on FGM, Child abuse and early pregnancies
- (ii) To mobilize members of the community, school staff, health providers, and law enforcement officers to prevent or identify abuse, and strengthen their responses to reports of victimization and
- (iii) To improve the economic wellbeing of the recipients of KivaZip loans by increasing their financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Raising awareness of FGM, Child Abuse, Early pregnancies and rights.

As the mothers traversed through 4 schools, they discovered that they have so much to offer to their community and to themselves. They had completed talks with students at Itumbe, Nyaronde, Mwongoli and Nyansiongo DEB primary schools. Their events were scheduled on different days and spread through the month. The women spent a day in each school sharing with both teachers and students on various topics. Their presentations were based on popular education model which is very participatory and involved the teachers and students in question answer, role plays, skits/drama and educational songs on gender topics

"I have always heard people talk about "circumcision" of girls but I have never known what it is. After you taught us today I feel sad for the girls. I have to dialogue with my parents to avoid this practice on my young sisters. I will even take them to the chief if they try to do this thing (meaning FGM)."

Explained Mosoti, a pupil at Itumbe primary School

I really didn't know that spending all the time fetching water from the river and doing all kinds of things at home is child labor. I can already see how this work is hindering my schooling. Some days I have to babysit so that mother can go to the market. I am willing to say no to my mother to allow me finish school first.

Says Moraa in grade 8 at Nyaronde primary school.



The key topics included discussions about FGM and encouraging the boys and girls to denounce it ones and for all. There were skits about early pregnancies and how girls become sexual prey to young men and especially when they get rides from the now very common motor-bike riders which ply in their neighborhoods as taxis. The health promoters dramatized the now too commonly known story much to the amusement of kids and teachers how ones the girl become pregnant and confronts the owner of the pregnancy, who more often than not will be a rider rejects the girl saying “Iam not your ATM machine”. This then becomes a reminder to the girl that the money and the rides she has been getting were not for free. In other words, she allowed herself to become pregnant by allowing sex for small money or rides.

Our biggest accomplishment which has led to our success is the fact that mothers in the villages are doing the interventions. This in itself is the first draw. People in the neighboring of the schools stream to the fences to find out what these mothers are up to and when they watch the drama, they come to ask how they can join organization. They are very encouraged by the work of these women. Importantly is the fact that it is the women who know who in the village is “circumcising the girls and who in the village understands what about FGM. That helps these mothers design the language of intervention not only the children at school but mothers in the homes. It is a very profound and unique way to end FGM. From the four schools, the following was achieved:

- Over 1599 children and youth in Itumbe, Nyaronde, Mwongori and Nyansiongo primary were reached with anit-FGM and anti- child abuse messages, as well as issues related to early pregnancies and child rights. Students learnt that FGM/C need not be tolerated, they were informed of their rights, abuse prevention strategies and made known where they can get help i.e. parent, teacher, police, Kenya child helpline number '116' among other places.
- HFAW team met with 46 teachers and school to discuss their role in preventing, identifying abuse and potential for FGM/C, and brainstormed ways they can assist children to get help from parents, medical and legal entities.
- 147 parents were reached in local Pentecostal church school with messages to combat abuse, sexual assault and consequences of FGM/C, their role as parents including their rights how and where to report gender-based violence (GBV).

Another big accomplishment is sharing information beyond the kisii community. The HFAW popular education work is beginning to be noticed. Recently HFAW got requested for a speaker to share the views of HFAW and how well the anti-FGM advocacy is working in Borabu SubCounty. We sent one of the Health Promoters, Gladys Nyasuguta Nyariki to represent HFAW. This is an extraordinary move; other organizations would probably send



Itumbe primary-Health promoter interacting with students



Giving their own views-Mwongoli primary school giving views after the training



and the work they are doing. This was a parliamentary presentation which earned her immediate invitation to West Pokot, another community with 100% FGM prevalence rate where she went to share how we are using popular education. She discussed with the elders there and led them in declaration to end FGM there. Gladys could not have had the confidence to speak up if it were not for the IMWYC which helped us to mentor the CHHRP

Challenges

- It was during exam time and we found invigilators from other schools that we had not scheduled for requesting us to do the same in their schools. However funds and time could not allow us.
- We realized that in one school teachers wanted to resist our teaching to children and youth to know their rights. These are because these teachers often use corporal punishment on children and youth and feared that there will be a rebellion in school when the children and youth get to understand their rights. With humility the HFAW CEO and health promoter leader explained to the teachers that we were following the Kenyan constitution and had had permission from the Ministry of Education. They asked us to show them the letter of permission and we did. They allowed the training to take place and later came to the Health and law enforcement training which provided client centered approaches. At the end of it the teachers were very pleased with the information received.
- In almost all the schools teachers wanted to be given handouts in the form of money. We explained that we did not have any handouts; we were in the community to intervene on issues affecting children and youth. HFAW team had a wall clock gift for the teachers and healthy biscuits for the children in each school we visited. They showed appreciation and we also appreciated their allowing us to interact with them.

Recommendations

- If funds become available there is need for scale up the project to more schools in the next phase due to the demand from other schools. Borabu Sub-county has 77 primary schools and we have only reached 7 schools since the beginning of our advocacy. This year we reached four schools which is the highest we have ever done in a year.
- There is also need for a comprehensive training and awareness to teachers on alternative discipline modes to remove the fear of how to discipline kids without corporal punishment.
- There were visible cases of child neglect such as kids walking without shoes and others wore torn clothing. This is not a deliberate neglect but is caused by poverty in some homes. Teachers made requests to HFAW to buy kids shoes. However, the request was beyond HFAW capacity



Gladys with a Member of Parliament in the parliamentary meeting



Gladys advocating against FGM in West Pokot with the elders there



Training for Health and law enforcement officials about GBV and FGM client centered response

Our training for health and law enforcement officers (the chiefs, sub-chiefs, police, nurses, counselors, community health workers, clan elders, and church elders) coincided with our 16 day of activism against GBV that is celebrated every year from 25th November -10th December. The 50 participant's attended this highly needed training by a county prosecutor, a gender and psychology expert, HFAW CEO and HFAW's Training specialist. It was important to include speakers from prosecution office to explain the GBV and anti-FGM law and what really happens when someone commits these crimes.

The law enforcement and health providers training started with a survey that sought to understand how they have been handling SGBV cases. This was followed by intense conversations. One of the chief explained how he used alternative dispute method. "When a woman came to me with a broken leg and explained that her husband battered her and did the act, I called a meeting with clan elders and we resolved for the man to slaughter a goat for the men, a sign to show he was remorseful and he will not batter his wife again." The prosecutor explained how harmful this method was particularly to the victim and that slaughtering goats is not allowed in the law. She explained that the chief could be prosecuted; there is legislation against such resolutions. She emphasized the need for use of the law especially in sexual and GBV offenses.

The gender expert of the day explained the DO's and DONT's towards a survivor of GBV and sexual assault. The trainees reported to have learnt and understood the reason behind behavior of their clients. 'I never knew my posture could affect my relationship with a victim of SGBV, I also never understood why a survivor of rape case told me the perpetrator had color red clothes on the first day and the next time she told me the same perpetrator had color purple clothes but now I know why, I will be more empathetic to such cases next time, thank you for the training' said a police officer attending the training. This could not have been successful without participation by our mothers who engaged the participants using Popular Education model dynamics. They used skits and songs to



Group photo includes community health wokers, local health counsellors,chiefs and subchiefs,police and nurses



Health promoters educating through drama durin glaw enforcment training



Participants watching the CHHRP in action



emphasize training messages as well as enhancing their training delivery skills as they educate the community. However, need for more trainings among the groups were identified for example one health provider stated that 'I have never seen a Post Rape Case (PRC) form' confirming that that was one source of breakdown in the system of delivering a client centered care to a SGBV survivor. An administration police commandant also requested that what they had learnt was critical knowledge for his officers. He requested us to train 100 of officers working with him this year. A teacher who had attended also requested HFAW to visit her school and enlighten pupils and teachers in her school.

During an informative discussion of FGM some participants openly supported the practice. One participant even went further to suggest that women who are not circumcised and who are married in the Kisii community from the non “circumcising” communities should be made to undergo the practice. This was shocking because all the participants in the room are the ones expected to support the survivors and bring perpetrators to justice. The prosecutor diligently walked the participants through the different laws which had legal implications.

Even though the participants were very sure that FGM/C was illegal, they did not take the law seriously and so had not informed themselves of any details even though some of the people in the room were expected to implement the law. The prosecutor shared some section of the law with underlying consequences and this time everybody's attention was drawn

“If a person, including a person undergoing a course of training while under supervision by a medical practitioner or midwife with a view to becoming a medical practitioner or midwife, who performs FGM/C on another person, commits an offence. The person will pay a fine of Kenya shilling 200000 and three years jail term.” Said the prosecutor. She went on to talk about aiding someone to conduct FGM and even calling someone a demeaning term like the commonly used “egesagane” was a crime. To this the room was a beehive of conversation where people said that in this case everyone will be in jail because everybody was committing the crime. She highlighted how it is also a crime to contribute food or any gift or even when the FGM was done on their premises while they were ware.

Health providers were concerned that reporting anyone could cause enmity because “when I report someone and she is my neighbor, how do I relate to that person afterwards.” The prosecutor explained to the participants to understand the law but also to inform themselves the real consequences of this practice on women. We engaged them in conversations about the causes of gender inequality and the implications on the woman and girl child, the implications on not just the girl but the whole community. “There is no community which progresses when half of its population are subjected though one of the worst forms of discrimination.” Said the prosecutor. Conversation after conversation, drama and songs got people wondering why they have not done something to end FGM and GBV. The law enforcers now wanted more of these trainings to all the policemen in the sub county. It was clear that the response against FGM and GBV and need for good services was paramount.



Clan elder raising questions and offering views



A woman in the audience asked a very emotional question after realizing that really FGM should never have been done in the first place. “And us who have undergone the practice, what happens to us now, do we get thrown in the fire? She asked. The prosecutor and the other experts in the room discussed the value of handling survivors with care, and understanding and to be sensitive to those who are surviving this practice. Social change communication in SGBV issues was also integrated as a positive approach to be used by these service providers. This is a new approach that encourages advocacy against SGBV and FGM without harming the survivors. One of the most important lesson from this training is that the magnitude of the need is so large; we have only began but we have a long way to make a dent in reaching out with enough information and to all providers who need it and giving clear guidelines that can be practical implementable policy in the offices.

Finance Literacy and Business Training

This two day finance and entrepreneurship training was planned due to the realization that it will be impossible for women to make significant growth enough to kick out poverty without finance literacy. Finance literacy is so critical in ensuring that women are able to make proper financial decisions and planning but also for real inclusion in financial sector. In the recent past many financial institutions have victimized women with high and exploitative interest rates as well as subjected them to fraudulent financial behaviors.

For the participants to understand and grasp content, the facilitator used case studies, group work and in some instances her own personal story. The training was very participatory as the participants were active throughout the training. This training was hands on, conversational and based on real village life examples and lifestyles.

Speaker Carol, a middle aged woman who works in a local financial institution and speaks local language was invited to handle this topic in Kisii language using hands on methodology. As she emphasized the value of practicing saving, Gladys challenged her. “But Madam how is it possible to save? Our incomes are very low; we hardly are able to cater for our basic needs? We are poor”. Carol went on to state that “I see wealth all over you. I am from this region and I know each one of us is rich. Let me ask you something,” Carol continued. “What do you have in your garden”? She said bananas, “and what do you have in and around your home?” She said the number of goats, cows, trees, chickens, and children and “I dig in my family garden”. Carol asked if there are participants in the room with similar or more things. Everybody raised their hands up. The woman went on to argue that “those things do not make us rich. We have no school fees, medicine, and money. Every day we wake up and struggle. The rich people are not like us.”



Expert Carol from Equity bank explaining her points on budget



An environment where people share ideas and experiences



Carol went on to explain in simple terms issues concerning budgeting, savings, debt management and capital building including access to credits. Let us talk about budgeting. She asked Alice who rears chickens to explain how much money she invested and how much profit she has made so far. Alice explained that she just keeps buying chickens when she gets the money and sells them when she gets a customer. She might find a customer interested in eggs and she will sell. She will use the money in buying milk for the children. She confirmed that she has never kept a single record of anything. Carol explained how it is impossible to build wealth with random activities, no budgets and no planning. It turns out that most activities ranging from agribusiness are considered way of life and is treated as “they come and go” without any seriousness.

Carol asked where the bananas go since everybody seems to have them, Agnes explained that just two weeks prior, “a relative visited from Nairobi and carried in her vehicle because in Nairobi there are no gardens and people seem to be buying everything.”, Then Carol walked them through some costing and it turns out the bananas, if sold could have earned her Kenya shillings 10,000. That is equivalent of \$100, money that is impossible to raise from women who earn a dollar a day. The women seemed shocked. They asked who will buy their bananas since all villagers own their own bananas. Carol then explained that she could have connected with people in Nairobi and those bananas could have earned her perhaps 20,000 shillings (\$200). The room went quiet with shock.

When Carol explained how women could save milk, maize, chickens etc. and save, Erick complained. “Madam, do you want our wives to begin denying children milk so that they can sell and save?” Everybody laughed and applauded. Carol commended the man for his great question and explained how saving is possible without starving the children and the family. How many litres of milk do you harvest? Carol asked Joyce. Joyce said she only gets three a day. Is the cow well fed? Joyce said there is drought and there is no fodder. Did the cow get enough water? Was the cow inseminated by a veterinary doctor? And so many other questions that were important that no one was paying attention to. It turns out that Lawrence keeps only one cow but is able to harvest slightly more than 15 litres a day. “Lawrence can you explain what you are doing to get more milk?. And he went into details of how he even keeps fodder during the rainy season and use during the dry spell. He explains that he has to sell all morning milk and everybody has more than enough to use from evening milking. There were rounds of applause in the room.

Raise up your hand if you are here and know someone who harvests 15 litres of milk, Carol requested. Everybody raised their hands up. Story after story of how people took things for granted, misused or underused resources, never planned, never budgeted, had poor loan repayment record and did not even inform themselves where to sell products when they had plenty left everyone in the room thinking that they are poor. Carol used discussion groups, and question and answer method as well as Manila paper work to make her points clear. She also used her own personal stories. “A few years ago, my husband passed on and left me with four children. I was desperate and felt poor. But that was a wakeup call for me. I have saved, I have budgeted and I have taken loans and repaid them. I am educating my children in good schools and I am never stopping.” She went on. “I was in worse situation than you are. You can do more than what I am doing.” She emphasized to a pin drop silence.



Women displaying topics covered in finance literacy training



Alice sharing her views and concerns in finance literacy class



At the end of second day, people were emotional.” Madam, when we were invited to this training, we thought it was a waste of our time because such math education should be for the children, but now I am grateful” said Eucabeth. “You have spoken to our hearts and in a way we feel very sad how ignorant we have been” She continued.

HFAW provides holistic program combining economic empowerment with self-driven community interventions by the community women themselves such as tackling GBV beginning with FGM. But HFAW understands that for transformative communities we need strategies that help people change their mindset. For economic empowerment to occur we must provide avenues for credits but women and communities have to learn how to budget, save, make effective loan repayments and build capital. They have to access mentors, learn to network and be able to develop strategies for real markets beyond their village. We have only taken the first step in unlocking one barrier to success and after just this one training we saw people thinking hard and wondering about things they often don't think about. Karen emotionally expressed “For the first time, I know the meaning of these words on my T-shirt. Very true that poverty is in our mind, we have so much and we think we are poor.” She continued.

Lessons Learnt:

- Participants learnt the basics of budgets, business planning, savings and debt management as well as diversification
- The biggest accomplishment from this training is the realization that they have so many assets and resources but the thinking that they were poor was a mindset that was dependent and lacked skills to drive them to action.

Challenges:

- The believe by the women that someone has to hold their hand in order for them to get somewhere. There is constant request with “can you help us do this and that? Can we be able to carry a successful business without you (meaning HFAW and the expert trainers)
- The lack of a pro-poor institutional banking service for rural women is a continuing challenge. It is why we have begun putting together women driven credit society.

Other Accomplishments:

Because of the IMWCY grant we are able to work in other projects and with other partners to eradicate FGM and move the economic empowerment agenda forward.



Networking

1. During the course of this grant HFAW worked in partnership with a government agency, The Anti-FGM Board (which is in charged with the responsibility of ending FGM) and VinBell Foundation (works to mentor youth) to conduct an effective anti-FGM roadshow that traversed through two counties of Nyamira and Kisii.
2. Because of high levels of corruption in the country and community we organized a walk to raise awareness about electing leaders of integrity since 2017 is an election year. We used this opportunity to invite local county leadership to raise some funds in conjunction to global giving crowd fundraising to support the creation of a credit society which will help women access low interest credits. The funds from IMWCY and global giving helped us push the women's economic empowerment agenda forward.

Capacity Building

3. We also worked with The Girl Generation(TGG) in two levels of capacity building. First HFAW staff, TeresiahGitau, Agnes Matagaro and Grace Mose attended The Girl generation forum and shared the method of popular education. TGG promised to include us in their agendas they really liked the grassroots work we were doing. Months later TeresiahGitauattended and more comprehensive training on using the social change communication and Do No Harm approach to end FGM. We then conducted training for our CHHRP with experts from the TGG to help them learn how to use this methodology of a combination of SCC and popular education.
4. The growth we have experienced in the 2016 grant cycle has encouraged us to add a new team member Lunar Odawa to help with coordinating our projects.

Resource Seeking

5. We are seeing more resources from other local and international funders to support this important work. Last year we applied for the Self denial with you, our partner, The Methodist Women for the economic empowerment project. We also applied toyou again, IMWCY for the school advocacy program. Additionally we applied to the UNDEP and all these applications are pending. We are currently writing to the Global Fund for Women and African Women Development Fund.
6. **Next Steps:** Our biggest ambition is to ensure that we expand the impact of this program. This is not just training; it is an intervention. The depth of education conducted in participatory process touching on key community issues such as gender violence, FGM, child abuse and early pregnancies, as well as training for health and law enforcement officers and finance literacy and entrepreneurship are all coming together to create a transformation in this communities.



HFAW and The Girl Generation in capacity building training; observing International Women`s Day



7. **Challenges:** Our program implementation is not without challenges. Traveling from Nairobi to the villages is always a huge challenge. We are learning on how to reduce costs by using public means. This time we saved funds and bought a JPEG camera for our photos! Our other challenge is that we do not have salaries for our staff. We continue to give stipends and depend on the good will of our volunteers. We are aware of this challenge and continue to work diligently to build our resource base and staff capacities. Additionally we continue to rely on Epes, our mentor organization for ideas, support and technical assistance.

Conclusion

HFAW's work in rural Kenya is extra-ordinary. We feel the urgency and heightened interest from the ordinary women in the village, health and law enforcement professionals and teachers. Our plan to help women access credits will be a real game changer. We think that our project is shifting the paradigm, changing people's mind set from waiting for help from outside to becoming real agents of change. Both HFAW staff, the CHHRP has real commitment and determination to make a difference.



HFAW women who participated in a walk to raise funds for economic empowerment and raise awareness on electing leaders of integrity in 2017

Reported by:



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