

Building Community Commitment

An essential first step for eliminating violence against women is the acceptance by governments that it is a priority concern. Laws and policies are critical. However, the effectiveness of laws and policies depends ultimately on the willingness of people to accept them. States cannot get behind the closed doors of homes where domestic violence is most prevalent, or change deeply rooted cultural norms that subordinate women. Though states can act as a catalyst for change and social action, they are most likely to succeed when they have the support of community-based efforts to address the experiences, histories and beliefs of their citizens. Most importantly, states need the help of local initiatives to evoke empathy with their cause and inspire personal commitment.

A case in point is the experience of Kenya. In 1983, President Daniel Arap Moi issued a decree prohibiting the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). However, elders from a tribe in northern Kenya adamantly opposed his decision, forcing Moi to retreat and seek new ways of addressing the problem (IPPF 1997). Seven years later, a grass-roots organization, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), held its first national conference on FGM, bringing women from four regions of Kenya together. At the end of the conference a group of more than 50 of these women refused to leave. “The women said they would stay in Nairobi until they came up with a plan of action for their communities,” reported a MYWO staff member. “They made a commitment to the cause, and they weren’t leaving until they found a way to follow it up.”

One week later, the women went home. Back in their villages, they worked with MYWO to conduct community needs assessments; they then used these results to find entry points for changing the practice of FGM in their communities. “You need a lot of patience, and a lot of time to change things,” said the MYWO representative. “But that’s how it starts – with people like these women coming together.”

Over the past two decades, the global women’s movement has brought violence against women to the forefront of the human rights agenda, altering both state and individual commitment to gender-based violence prevention. At the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, violence against women received recognition as a human rights issue. Later that year, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women cited violence against women as a “violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women.” The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action reiterated these statements and called both government and communities to action.

With the backing of international support and state policy, grass-roots activists have spurred local commitment. Networking between countries and regions has fostered zero-tolerance zones, youth clubs that promote peace and non-violence, men’s initiatives and community-

based public awareness campaigns. More than half of the Trust Fund projects are community-based initiatives. With few exceptions, the grantees have extensive experience as service providers and grass-roots organizers within the communities they try to change. Their projects build on a continuum of interventions to create community awareness and commitment. The impact of these efforts cannot be easily summarized; we must listen to the individual stories, challenges and voices of the people who have pioneered the change.

While change begins with the individual, it cannot happen fully without the consent of groups. In fact, psychological research on public and private behaviour suggests that integrating the individual into a group is a prerequisite for change. “Only when individuals’ private conversions are brought into public awareness – only when they realize that their new attitudes are shared by their peers – will they feel at liberty to act on them” (Hogg and Terry 2000). With gender-based violence, this means letting go of entrenched behaviours and seeking new standards to replace them. It also means finding individuals who are willing and able to take on the role of leaders, and press the agenda forward.

A key challenge in working with communities is creating a sense of responsibility for violence against women. Unless people feel personally affected by a problem they are not likely to become stakeholders in the solutions. How do we mobilize support when people don’t realize the extent of the problem, or don’t believe that the problem is theirs? The most obvious way is by making them understand that it is. The arousal of empathy and compassion has a unifying effect. It binds people to a moral ideology that they feel is important to their own well-being.

In fact, to a large extent it is the lack of empathy that makes violence possible. Researchers have attributed this to a separation from feeling and emotion that people, and men especially, learn from a young age. “Without feelings, we cannot feel for other people, and therefore we can do anything...even if it means torturing another” (Bloom and Reichert 1998). On the other hand, research also indicates that those who have separated themselves from their feelings can re-establish the connection – often through nonverbal actions related to the arts (*ibid.*). Drawing, painting, drama, poetry and dance can help people express their emotions and bring communities together. These kinds of activities can rekindle a sense of empathy and have a healing effect on individuals.

It is hard to quantify change and harder still to explain the extent to which change has occurred in ways that others can appreciate. The numbers and percentages of people who attend training, form youth clubs and organize support groups are not nearly as memorable or impressive as the individual stories of the people involved. Thus, the case studies that follow start with personal stories. These are provided as a basis for an analysis of the strategies. And the strategies, through both their successes and failures, lead to lessons and tools that guide projects toward community commitment.

The case studies in this chapter illustrate the ways in which Trust Fund projects in Kenya, Nigeria and Honduras built community commitment to stop violence against women and girls. Despite the different issues they address, and the strategies they employ, the projects share a number of similarities. They start with individuals and use the power of groups to effect change. They take care of survivors and establish mechanisms for them to seek support. And they use creative means to invoke a sense of compassion and commitment in others.

The projects created safe havens for victims, secured male participation and relied on the community to guide the process. In Honduras, the local Family Counselling Office formed community watchdog groups to protect women and girls. In Nigeria, an NGO formed youth clubs to support non-violence for women and peace. The clubs use sports, drama and poetry to educate the community about the harmful effects of FGM and other traditional practices. And in Kenya, a group of mothers in a small village worked with two organizations to create an alternative to FGM.

All three of these projects are full of unexpected achievements, mistakes, plans gone awry and spontaneous efforts that have saved them in moments when it seemed they might fail. They are ambitious, and they remain, even after the grant money is depleted, in process. Like the story of the women in Kenya, who agreed not to go home until they could bring solutions with them, these projects and the people in them persevere, take risks, and thrive – even in the face of adversity.

“Changing attitudes is like changing people entirely. It doesn’t come easy. You have to give people some thing if you want to take something away. You have to fill the vacuum with something that is justifiable according to their own beliefs and traditions.”

– Bernadette Wanyonyi,
Executive Director, MYWO

CASE STUDY Creating Alternative Rites of Passage in Kenya

You could not pick her out in the crowd of mothers and daughters, their voices and laughter rising in the mid-day heat of this small village in the central region of Kenya. She is one of the older women and sits close by her youngest child. When the meeting begins, the woman and the little girl quiet down and become more serious, though by no means sombre. They are part of a group that have joined for a weekly gathering of the alternative rites of passage project – a community initiative that supports the ritual coming of age ceremony without the practice known as female genital mutilation (FGM).

The project was initiated by the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO). The project allows families to celebrate their daughters’ initiation into adulthood, without performing the ritual circumcision. PATH and MYWO used a grant from UNIFEM’s Trust Fund to expand the alternative rites ceremony in one community in the south-central part of the country and launch it in two other communities.

The woman and her youngest daughter are recent participants in a project in one of the communities. The little girl is perhaps too young to understand the significance of her mother’s presence at the meeting. Her mother, now trained to teach fellow community members about the dangers of ritual cutting, was for many years a circumciser herself. The tragedies of several girls who died as a result of the circumcision she had performed left her with a sense of desperation and motivated her to inquire about the programme. She decided to enrol her youngest

Creating Alternative Rites of Passage in Kenya

PROJECT NAME:	Efforts to reduce the incidence of FGM through Alternative Coming of Age Initiation Programme
PROJECT DIRECTOR:	Michelle Folsom
ORGANIZATIONS:	Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO)
DATES:	1997 - 1998
TRUST FUND GRANT:	\$30,000*
OBJECTIVES:	To help communities abandon the practice of female genital mutilation by developing an alternative ritual.

* Additional funding received from Australian AID, UNDAF, UNIFEM, WHO, and several private foundations.

daughter and leave her profession to join the alternative rites group. As a respected professional in the community, she influences other circumcisers to stop the practice.

Stories like these, because they are about individuals, are often overlooked when evaluating a project. Through this woman's experience we begin to understand how the project grew to include 1,500 families. Through these families we can see how the project played a catalytic role in a much larger initiative that brought together six UN agencies and three NGOs to expand alternative rites throughout Kenya. It is in these stories of individuals that we see how one person's efforts can make a difference. Communities change because individuals change.

Background: FGM in Kenya

Pressure to eradicate FGM is not new to Kenya, yet the practice remains prevalent. More than 50 per cent of the country's 14 million women have undergone the ritual circumcision (WHO 1998).¹ During the colonial era, there were attempts to prohibit the practice. In a group interview, several women participating in the PATH and MYWO project suggested that such attempts to ban FGM forced the practice underground. As a result, the ritual was practiced secretly in many communities. In order to avoid detection by authorities, some communities began to circumcise girls at earlier ages, sometimes as young as infancy. Today, girls may undergo circumcision any time from shortly after birth to some time during their first pregnancy (Amnesty International 1997).

After winning independence from British rule, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, publicly supported FGM, insisting the practice was critical to maintaining social cohesion (*ibid.*). This stance made efforts to challenge FGM more difficult, as it propagated the belief that attempts to change the practice were a way for Western countries to control Kenyan society (Althaus 1997).

Myths about FGM are widespread throughout Kenya and the other 27 African countries that practice the ritual (Amnesty International 1997). Girls who are uncircumcised may be considered dirty and promiscuous or be suspected of witchery. In parts of Africa, some people believe that if the clitoris touches the head of the baby he or she will die. And in some villages, men are taught that if their penis comes into contact with the clitoris, they will contract an illness (*ibid.*). Challenging such myths, which are passed down from one generation to the next, means risking exclusion from the community.

While there is no law banning the practice, in 1997 the Kenyan government adopted a National Plan of Action to Eradicate FGM. The plan, initiated by the Ministry of Health with the help of WHO, set goals for phasing out FGM over the next 15 years. "Now we have a type of blueprint for change," said Abdullahi Abdi, Chief Executive Officer of Northern Aid, a national NGO that works closely with the Ministry of Health. "One of the first steps we have taken

¹ There are four types of FGM as classified by WHO. Type I, clitoridectomy, involves partial or total removal of the clitoris; Type II, excision, includes the clitoris and partial or total removal of the labia; Type III, infibulation, the most extreme form, involves partial or complete removal of the external genitalia with stitching of the vaginal opening; Type IV refers to any other procedure. Of these, Types I, II and III have been reported in Kenya (WHO 1998).

is to encourage people to talk about it.” This man knows personally how difficult it is to bring about change in communities where the practice is sacred. His own two daughters were circumcised by his sister without his knowledge.

“When I found out, I hit the roof,” he said. “But it was too late; the damage was done. I am under a lot of social pressure because I talk about it openly in my community.”

Circumcision by Words: One Woman’s Call to Action

The alternative rites of passage project, also known in Swahili as “Ntanira na Mugambo” (circumcision by words), began with a call from a small group of mothers in the community of Tharaka. Having endured the ritual themselves, the mothers understood first-hand its physical and psychological dangers, including infections, blockage of the menstrual flow, urethral or anal damage, infertility, HIV/AIDS, depression, anxiety and in some cases death.

In addition to the health implications, the mothers were concerned about the impact of the ritual on their daughters’ education. Typically, the coming of age ceremony takes place when girls reach puberty, between the ages of 12 and 15. In Tharaka, as in other districts where it is practiced, ritual circumcision symbolizes adulthood, making young women eligible for marriage. As a result, after the circumcision, the rates of secondary school enrolment for girls tend to decline, contributing to a 3 to 1 ratio of men to women in Kenyan institutions of higher education (UNDP/Government of Kenya 1999). Limited education further stifles women’s economic opportunities, leaving them with few alternatives to the traditional gender roles that perpetuate FGM and other practices that are harmful to women.

The women from Tharaka, led by a young mother, Annicetta Kiriga, reached out to local and national NGOs for support. The Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), together with one of the country’s oldest grass-roots women’s organizations, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), started a project in 1990 designed to document the extent of FGM in Tharaka and surrounding communities and to understand the reasons why it has persisted for centuries.² The project adopted what they call the auto-diagnostic approach, a qualitative research methodology that works with community members to conduct their own assessments. As a locally-based organization, MYWO was perceived by community members in Tharaka as “insiders” who understood the cultural and social significance of the practice. Consequently, community members were candid in their responses to MYWO’s questions.

The research revealed that men and women in the communities wanted to stop FGM and no longer believed the nationalist or gender-related myths that surrounded it. “The women from Tharaka felt cheated and were ready to fight,” said Executive Director of MYWO, Bernadette Wanyonyi. However, they did not know how to go about changing the practice. This provided a starting point, she added, “We realized that the women in these communities were strong entry points to starting interventions on FGM.”

In 1996, together with the group of women from Tharaka, PATH and MYWO used their research findings to design a programme that embraces all the vibrant traditional festivities of the ritual such as dancing, singing, feasting

and gift-giving. However, it replaces the actual circumcision with education for girls in self-esteem, health and women's empowerment. PATH and MYWO work with girls and their families to teach them about the dangers of FGM and help them face opposition to the project from the community. At the same time, they work with community religious leaders, circumcisers, men, boys and village chiefs to secure a community-wide commitment to stopping the practice.

The New Ritual: Kenya's First Alternative Rites Ceremony

On a summer day in late August, 28 girls from Tharaka hurried into their new blue print dresses and white lace hats that had been presented to them as part of the gift-giving tradition – a highlight of the ritual coming of age ceremony. They had just completed a week-long intensive training on reproductive health, women's empowerment, and communication skills, facilitated by selected elders in the village. The elders, who are typically responsible for taking care of a girl after the circumcision, had instead been trained by PATH and MYWO. They, in turn, facilitated a training on health, women's rights and motherhood for the girls, who would need and remember the lessons for a lifetime.

The day had been a long time coming, and had not been easy for any of the girls. They had endured months of taunting from their peers and their neighbours for participating in the alternative rites project. Their families were criticized, and boys refused to talk to them. At times, many of them had considered leaving the project. Today, they hoped, would be their chance to show the community that they were no different or less mature than their circumcised peers, and that they could become young women without having to endure the circumcision.

A large crowd had gathered in the centre of the village to witness this perplexing display. Journalists, politicians and NGO representatives sat near thatched huts filled with cauldrons of food prepared for the traditional feasts. The girls began their march through the village. The crowds could hear them singing and cheering minutes before they could see them, but the girls had no idea what kind of reaction to expect from the community.

As the small parade turned the corner of the dusty street, the mothers could not contain themselves. They ran towards their daughters and embraced them. Together they sang a song to a familiar tune about the rites of passage as they marched towards the crowds of spectators (MYWO 1999).

This was the first of many such ceremonies in Tharaka. Within a two-year period the number of girls who participated in the project rose from 28 to almost 1,000. While the growth rate is astounding, in each village the participants faced opposition from other families, teachers, peers and religious leaders who continued to support FGM. It has been a challenging road for the girls and their families. Yet not a single one has changed her decision to be a part of the project.

Challenges and Strategies: Reaching the Community

The members of PATH and MYWO recognized that gaining widespread acceptance and support in the three communities, Tharaka, Kisii and Narok, was the most critical challenge they faced. The process of cultural change is not pas-

sive, especially when it relates to gender roles and traditions. Instead it requires the active consent and participation of everyone in the community. Recognizing this, the organization designed a number of strategies to secure community acceptance.

Working from Within the Community

The research on FGM in Tharaka, Kisii and Narok substantiated the belief that change had to come from within each community. Results in all three communities revealed that women wanted to stop the practice of female circumcision. PATH and MYWO used this opening to begin their work at the local level. “We need to have the support of institutions and leaders at the national level,” says Wanyonyi. “But interventions should start at the community level because that’s where the change needs to take place. We help communities build consensus and make their own plans for the interventions that they will carry out.”

From the outset, MYWO and PATH put the project in the hands of community members. In the process of conducting their research, the two NGOs identified people in the community whom they trained to lead interviews with their peers. They chose individuals who were well respected in the community and had expressed concerns to MYWO and PATH about FGM during their initial meetings with communities. In addition, the organizations worked directly with religious leaders and men and boys in the communities to sensitize them to the dangers and harms of FGM. These two groups were often completely unaware of what the procedure actually involved. “Most of them know that something is cut, but they don’t know exactly what,” an MYWO staff member explained. In one training, she recalled, a religious leader asked, “Why is it that nobody ever told us that this is what is happening?”

Community members designed the alternative rituals and decided how and when to hold them. Respected members of the community, such as teachers and religious leaders, were chosen for a training of trainers (TOTs), who in turn worked with peer educators to organize meetings and advocate for the programme in their respective communities. Peer educators included parents, schoolboys and young women who had been through the alternative rites of passage project.

PATH and MYWO ensured that elders, religious leaders, teachers and boys had an important role, helping them understand the importance of the alternative ritual and solidifying their commitment to making it work. By training people to conduct workshops for peer educators, the project maintained existing social hierarchies, which proved essential to its success.

Starting with Mothers

Although women’s groups were active in Kenya’s struggle for independence, the highly educated male political elite that came to power thereafter excluded women from the political arena. Currently, only 6 of 202 members of parliament are women (UNDP/Government of Kenya 1999). This national-level gender gap is mirrored in communities, where women have little official decision-making power. At the household level, however, where women make up 75 per cent of the agricultural labour force and are the exclusive caretakers of children, women



A participant in the alternative rites project and her daughter in Tharaka, Kenya.

have informal decision-making power. In fact, PATH and MYWO's research found that men believe women perpetuate FGM. They noted in interviews that women make the decisions about whether their daughters should be circumcised.

Since the call to action had originally come from mothers in Tharaka Nithi, PATH and MYWO began their efforts to organize with them. They were ready to begin, but needed the resources and support to do so. "It was very important to have everyone involved," said Michelle Folsom, director of PATH's Kenya office. "But we started from the point that women were the primary stakeholders. Therefore we began the project with them." Establishing a process through which women encouraged each other helped build a strong foundation for the project. Gradually they extended the programme to men, boys, religious leaders, chiefs and other groups.

Kenyan women are known throughout Africa for their activism. The women in Tharaka, Kisii and Narok exemplify the strength and tenacity of the Kenyan women's movement. They walked miles to get to the first alternative rites of passage ceremony, held in the capital of the district, and battled their husbands and other members of their community who did not support the project. One mother from Tharaka describes the story of her involvement in the group. "When it first began I

was very much against the project. My friends began to tell me about it. I could hardly believe that they approved of it at first. As time passed I came to understand the purpose, and now I am one of them. My daughters are 10 and 2 years old. I will prepare to bring them through the alternative rites project.”

This strategy helped secure a commitment in Tharaka, Kisii and Narok, but created problems as well. The women challenged their husbands’ decisions in ways they had never done before. In some cases this heightened incidents of domestic violence. “When we come to these meetings it is a sacrifice,” said one of the mothers involved. “We leave our children and husbands at home, and our husbands want their food on the table, and they do not want us to attend meetings. Sometimes they end up beating us or chasing us from our homes. Our participation is a big challenge to them.”

PATH and MYWO realized they needed to take measures to ensure women’s safety. They increased the number of training sessions for male community leaders and educational sessions for village men and boys to strengthen their commitment to the project’s goals. Wanyonyi said, “The importance of involving men in what we do is really key. When we are talking about FGM, if you leave one side out and concentrate on the other, you create problems. You have to address them hand in hand and protect women.”

Tailoring the Project to Each Community

The success of the project in Tharaka, Narok and Kisii suggests the alternative rites project could be replicated without difficulty. But experience suggests otherwise. PATH and MYWO are convinced that the project worked because it was tailored to the needs of each community.

In Kenya, as in other African countries where FGM is prevalent, every community practices the ritual differently. In Tharaka, girls are typically circumcised between the ages of 12 and 15. In Narok, the ritual usually occurs right before a young woman is married. In Kisii, girls are circumcised between the ages of 6 and 10. In both Tharaka and Narok the ritual is performed by an elder who specializes in circumcision, while in Kisii, girls generally go to a local health clinic, where health workers perform the practice. Village members’ reactions to the project varied among the three communities. In Tharaka, where 73 per cent of the women are circumcised, villagers were more amenable to the project than they were in Kisii and Narok, where rates of circumcision among women exceed 96 per cent (PATH 1997).

PATH and MYWO worked with villagers to design a project that moved at a comfortable pace. In Tharaka the community decided to maintain the tradition of seclusion – the period of time when a godmother or a selected village elder stays with a young woman to help her heal from the circumcision. In their alternative ritual, they arranged for the seclusion to take place prior to the ceremony, transforming it into training on health and women’s human rights. The seclusion ended with a public march through the district capital. In Kisii and Narok, however, where FGM is more prevalent, the families of the girls in the project did not feel ready for an open ceremony. They do not include seclusion in their ritual, and organize small tea parties instead of public ceremonies.

“In Tharaka, because the girls are older, they have a say in the project.

In Kisii, it's only the parents. So we had to target them differently," Wanyonyi notes. "In Kisii it's been so hard for them to leave the practice. Sometimes they say, 'Why are you so worried about us? Go start your project in the provinces in the northern region.'"

One difficulty faced by girls in all three places is community opposition. Community members who disapproved of the alternative rites of passage spread rumours that the young women participated in demonic rituals such as drinking blood, injecting their clitorises with a special serum, and practicing witchcraft. It was especially difficult for the girls, who were ostracized by their peers in school. One young woman from Tharaka describes what it was like. "There used to be a river next to my school, and we would go swimming there. The other girls wouldn't let my sister and me swim with them because we were not circumcised. And they wouldn't sit with us in school," she says, her quiet voice trembling. "The teacher in our school who teaches science and reproductive health asked us to leave the class because we are still children to him and we do not have the right to learn these things."

Battling the humiliation the young women endured was one of the project's most difficult challenges. PATH and MYWO organized community support groups for the girls and their families, allowing them to share such experiences and support one another when attacked by their peers.

Finding the Right Concept

PATH and MYWO recognize female genital mutilation as a human rights issue and a form of gender-based violence. Yet they were careful to present the issue delicately by ensuring that they did not preach or condemn communities for the practice. Communities refer to the practice as female circumcision (FC), and do not see it as a human rights concern but as a means of girls' initiation that is fundamental to the community and to the future of their children. The terminology of "female genital mutilation" (FGM), on the other hand, implies an act of violence. An outsider to the community trying to convince mothers and fathers that they are brutalizing their daughters creates animosity and may jeopardize the possibility of carrying the discussion further.

"FGM is internationally accepted, but we use FC at the field level, especially when we first enter the community," explains Folsom. "It's only after we have begun the community intervention that we use the term FGM." Naming the concept is a highly contested issue even among staff members from MYWO and PATH. Some activists insist on presenting FGM as a form of gender-based violence. A staff member from MYWO argues, "Let's call it mutilation because that's what it is. And that's what people need to know. Let's call a spade a spade."

Despite this controversy, PATH and MYWO agreed to use the term female circumcision. Their research showed that community members objected to the practice because of health complications and high school-dropout rates. Many of them did not know exactly what the practice itself entailed. As a result, the NGOs trained peer educators to teach the community about FGM, using anatomical models to make the case clear. Once everyone understood what was involved and what girls endured, the trainers gradually introduced the human rights perspective.

Professional Groups in Mali Vow to End FGM

In Mali, a project to mobilize community support to eliminate FGM began by identifying sources of resistance. The Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes Maliennes (APDF) looked at each of the religious and professional groups with interests vested in the FGM ritual procedure and designed workshops that brought leaders from each of these groups together to discuss what FGM actually entails and take a collective vow to end it.

One of the most important groups was the women who performed the procedure, known as “cutters.” “Our goal was not to criticize, but to listen to them and have them listen to us,” explains APDF president Fatoumata Sire Diakite. “They heard the testimony of mothers who lost their daughters from complications due to FGM.” At first the cutters didn’t believe them, she said. “Then we brought in medical doctors, who tried to dispel the myths that surround FGM,” and detailed some of its effects on women.

Workshops included women in the community who regretted having had the operation, local religious leaders, who acknowledged that FGM is not an Islamic practice, condoned by the Qur’an, men of different ages, business executives and members of the City Council. At the workshops, everyone made a promise. Older women and men of all ages promised not to permit their daughters, nieces or granddaughters to undergo the operation. The religious leaders who participated promised to take the issue up in the mosques. An important executive stated publicly that no daughter of his will be circumcised, while a City Council leader said he will respect his two wives and not circumcise his two daughters. Perhaps most significantly, 40 of the cutters made a sacred “blood pact” that they will not circumcise anyone again.

The government’s National Plan of Action also addresses the practice in a way that is sensitive to Kenyan culture and tradition. Abdi notes, “You have to be careful not to present it to the community in a way that addresses it as a human rights issue. If you do that, people feel right away that you are imposing something on them that is foreign.” Folsom agrees, “You really need to see it from within the community’s context rather than saying, ‘You shouldn’t do this because it’s against a UN Convention or because we believe it is a violation of human rights.’”

Dispelling Opposition

The project’s initial research made it clear that dispelling opposition would require a variety of approaches for different target groups. Given the need for men to consider uncircumcised women eligible for marriage, getting buy-in from men and boys was essential. Equally important was the need to address circumcisers, who typically hold a very high status in the community and whose livelihood depends on the money they receive for the practice. And, while FGM is not a religious practice, religious leaders often support it in communities. As there was no single way to address these groups, PATH and MYWO designed strategies to work with each one separately.

Project staff believed that the way to reach men was through their peers. They chose influential men and boys and trained them as peer educators. Peer educators, in turn, organized workshops for other men and boys to teach them about the dangers of female circumcision and to gain their support for the alternative rites of passage project. One young peer educator from Tharaka notes, “It’s hard to change people. You have to convince other men, and be their friends to help them understand that the practice is bad for girls.” His colleague adds, “Unless we get hold of men, female circumcision will remain a problem. Men need to be trained by other men.”

The workshops for boys were the key to their commitment. They have pledged to marry girls who are not circumcised and to stand by their sisters to help bring an end to the practice. In the most recent initiation ceremony in Tharaka, a large group of schoolboys asked for permission to walk alongside their sisters and classmates with signs supporting

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION AFFECTS GIRLS' HEALTH AND EDUCATION



DON'T EARN FROM IT !

Amasa na Utcheleze !

Poster produced by MYWO and PATH targeting health-care professionals in Kenya.

the alternative rites of passage project. "I think girls need education and they need to stay in school. So they should not be circumcised," a young man explains.

According to PATH and MYWO staff, research on circumcisers showed that they were less concerned with losing the income for their services than losing their social status within the community. As more community members join the alternative rites programme, circumcisers feel increasingly threatened, and in some cases attempt to sway opinion about the project. While PATH and MYWO managed to bring some circumcisers on board, this issue is still a challenge for them.

Conclusion:

From Three Communities to a Country-Wide Effort

Opposition to the alternative rites of passage project remains pervasive in communities, yet people are gradually

beginning to accept uncircumcised girls and let go of the myths that perpetuate the practice. Even young women who have been through FGM have started to change their ideas about it. In a video of the alternative rites of passage project, a teenager who has recently been circumcised asks quietly, "Is there any way to undo the circumcison?"

While there is no way to undo what has been done, PATH and MYWO have increased their efforts. Building on the results from the "Ntanira na Mugambo" project, Northern Aid, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and WHO have joined them to launch a larger programme, under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), that brings the alternative rites of passage project to communities all over the country. Under the new initiative, UNIFEM will chair the committee responsible for guiding and evaluating the project. This shift from a small local-level project with Trust Fund support to a country-wide effort highlights the catalytic role that organizations can play in the process of change.

Sometimes all it takes to start is one small effort. The commitment in Kenya began with key individuals such as Kiriga and other mothers in the community. They established a support system and brought other women and men to the project. Their efforts have helped almost the entire district of Tharaka give up the practice. One of the field workers from MYWO notes,

“Now in Tharaka, you hardly hear of anyone wanting to circumcise their daughters. It used to be the other way around.” Though it may take years, even decades, the goal for PATH and MYWO is to hear this result echoed in communities throughout Kenya.

“We want children to look at things positively, and to look at things for themselves – not because they heard it said, but because they will be convinced that these are the right choices to make for themselves.”

– Theresa Akumadu, Executive Director, WOPED

CASE STUDY:

Mobilizing Youth to Take Action against Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

When the representative from the Ministry of Finance showed up in the doorway of their office, they could not help but act surprised. Less than two weeks earlier, he had attended the inauguration ceremony of Nigeria’s first Peace and Anti-Violence Education (PAVE) clubs – an initiative organized by the Women’s Centre for Peace and Development (WOPED) to promote peace and stop violence against women. Even before the ceremony began, the representative looked visibly disgruntled, as though he had better things to do with his time than speak to a bunch of students in a recreational group.

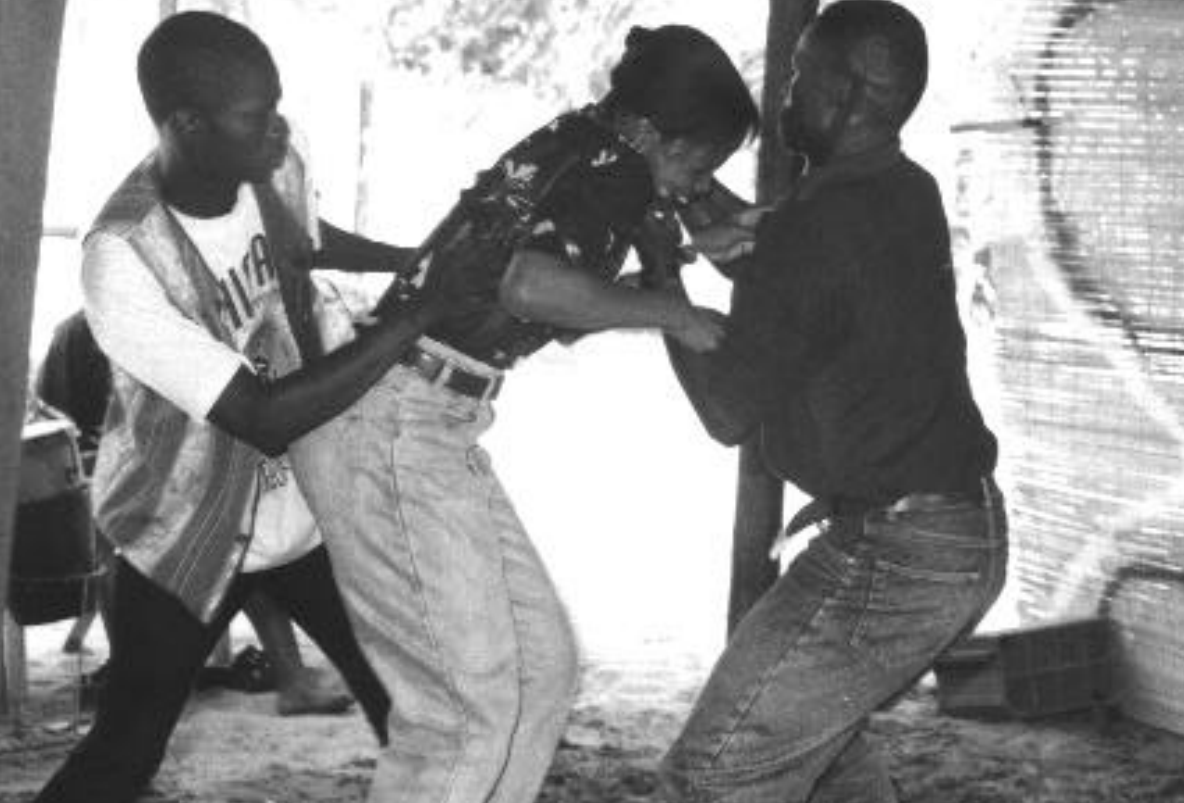
What he didn’t know was that PAVE clubs are more than just a recreational group. They are the result of a UNIFEM Trust Fund supported project called Social Advocacy on Violence Against Women for Communities in Southern Nigeria. Their purpose is to organize high school students to prevent violence against women and girls and to encourage parents, friends and other community members to do the same. The clubs have gained momentum over the past several years. In addition to the seven districts where WOPED began, two other communities have started clubs of their own. Students from the nine clubs correspond with each other and meet on an annual basis, creating a youth network to stop violence against women throughout the southern region of Nigeria.²

WOPED invited the press, human rights

Mobilizing Youth to Take Action Against Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

PROJECT NAME:	Social Advocacy on Violence Against Women for Communities in Southern Nigeria
PROJECT DIRECTOR:	Theresa Akumadu
ORGANIZATION:	Women’s Centre for Peace and Development (WOPED)
DATES:	1998 - 1999
TRUST FUND GRANT:	\$34,600
OBJECTIVES:	To organize youth groups in secondary schools that use sports, the arts and peer training to teach their communities about gender-based violence prevention.

² While there is no strict separation between the way women’s human rights are perceived in the North and South of Nigeria, the Northern regions are characterized by an adherence to Shari’a law and a recent resurgence of religious fundamentalism.



A rape scene during a PAVE-organized drama session at Badagry in Nigeria.

activists and government officials to the first inauguration with the hope that they would have some inspiring words about women's rights to share with club members. As the ceremony began, the representative from the Ministry of Finance listened to guests and PAVE club members (known as PAVERs) make presentations on rarely discussed forms of gender-based violence such as female genital mutilation, widowhood practices and women's inheritance rights.³ After a few minutes, he pulled aside WOPED's executive director, Theresa Akumadu, and told her he was appalled at such a display, and that the topics were inappropriate for young people. Akumadu quietly explained the purpose of the clubs and urged him to stay and listen to the youths' speeches. He sat down begrudgingly and listened, but shortly after the ceremony ended he disappeared. Akumadu heard nothing from him – until he came to her office two weeks later.

Clearly ill at ease, he entered the office, sat down and began to talk. He explained that he had been haunted by one child's speech about her family's struggle to survive after her father had died. The girl had described how their land had been taken away because her parents had married according to customary law, under which women have no inheritance rights. He said the girl's story had moved him, and made him reconsider the future of his own two daughters. He had decided to re-marry his wife under statutory law, so that she and their daughters would have the right to inherit his land. Then, as awkwardly as he came in, he thanked his hosts and made his way to the door. Akumadu and the staff watched in silence, still trying to hide their shock.

³ FGM is prevalent among most major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Amnesty International 1997). Widowhood practices are based on the belief that wives are to blame for their husbands' deaths, no matter the cause (Korieh 1996). Women's inheritance rights are limited under customary marriage law. The male family members of the deceased have the legal right to the man's property. This can leave the widow and children with a lack of shelter and economic support (Nigerian NGO Coalition 1999).

Background: A Problem Deeply Rooted in Tradition

It is difficult to separate violence from cultural and religious tradition in Nigeria. From the time they are young, girls are taught that their roles as women are part of their cultural and religious duty. Their futures as wives, mothers and valued members of the community depend on their adherence to expectations of them as women. As a result, women share the very attitudes and norms that oppress them. In cases of gender-based violence, they are expected to accept the brutality and try to be more supportive wives. Those who do not, find themselves alone. "Women do not get support from other women," says a women's group activist. "Instead of supporting each other they find each other guilty until proven innocent."

The law offers women little more in terms of protection. Legislation pertaining to marriage, divorce, property rights and child custody are of three major kinds: statutory, customary and religious (Shari'a). In the southern region, with a largely Christian population, there is no religious law. Most southern communities abide by a combination of statutory and customary laws, and the lines between them are easily blurred. Women's rights activists argue that statutory law, under which women can own property, seek legal divorce and inherit land, is by far the most favourable to women (Nigerian NGO Coalition 1999). Customary law, which views women as the property of men (Akumadu 1999), supports polygamy and gives women no inheritance rights.

The northern region is predominantly Muslim. The practice of bride-price – a sum of money paid by the husband to the bride's family – is common, especially in the villages, where girls are often married as young as 12 years old. Marriage and family law is largely the province of religious or Shari'a law, which like customary law, grants women certain protections (largely economic) as long as they are strictly submissive to their husbands. In the rare circumstance that a woman is granted a divorce by a religious court, she must first pay back the brideprice (Benninger-Budel and Lacroix 1999).

Although life can be hard for married women, for widows it can be brutal, even deadly. In some areas of the North, widows are viewed as complicitous in their husband's death, no matter the cause. To expiate their guilt, they are obliged to partake in numerous rituals of abasement, which may include shaving their heads, eating from broken plates, staying in confinement and drinking the water used to bathe their dead husband (Osarenren 1998).

While the national government has passed a number of laws aimed at protecting women from violence, the way in which these are applied also differs among regions. Communities in the North refer to the Penal Code, section 55 (1d), which states that "nothing is an offense which does not amount to infliction of grievous hurt upon any person and which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife...." In this case, "grievous" refers to permanent disfiguration of the head or face, deprivation of any member or joint, or a fracture or dislocation of a bone or tooth (Akumadu 1999). The southern region recognizes the seemingly more humane section 351 of the Criminal Code: "Any person who unlawfully assaults another is guilty of a misdemeanor and is liable, if no greater punishment is provided, to imprisonment for one year" (ibid.). While advocates primarily battle the northern law, neither

code provides sufficient legal protection or recourse for survivors of gender-based violence.

Despite regional differences, communities in both the North and South have many forms of gender-based violence in common. In a 1992 study by the University of Jos in Nigeria, 67.7 per cent of women interviewed throughout the country stated that their husbands had attacked them (CRLP and WOPED 1998). FGM is practiced on almost 40 per cent of the female population of the country (WHO 1998).

The roots of these practices are buried so deeply in cultural tradition that challenging them means questioning individual and collective identity. Finding ways to change them require the perspective of those who understand the meaning and significance of the traditions.

Finding a Way to Begin the Project: No Time Like the Present

While change is not a process that happens overnight, there are times when the tragedy of a single woman or girl alters the way people view violence against women. These stories are a rude awakening for the public. One incident that remains in the minds of Nigerians and resonates through the women's movement after 10 years is the story of a child from a small village in the northern region of Nigeria. At age 9, Hauwa was promised in marriage to a local cattleman by her father. At age 12, when she started menstruating, her father forced her to live in her husband's home, since she was now old enough to have sex. Hauwa twice ran away to her parent's home. The third time she tried, her husband caught her and chopped off her legs with an ax laced with homemade poison. Hauwa made it to the hospital, where after refusing food for four days, she died (Harden 1989).

Tragedies like this one are rarely heard in Nigeria, not because there are few child brides, but because most young girls do not run away. They accept their fate because they have no choice. WOPED had Hauwa's and other stories in mind when they began their work in 1994. Their plan was to give young people choices and to alter the way people of all ages think about violence against girls and women, so that stories like Hauwa's will one day be consigned to the past.

In the years that followed, Akumadu and WOPED's seven-member board of advisers became well-known in communities throughout Nigeria for their work on the rights of women and girls. In recent years they have started training judiciary, police and staff of the Social Welfare Department on violence against women and children. They also work directly with survivors through vocational programmes.

The idea to start PAVE clubs came to WOPED at the time when the military rule met its demise in Nigeria. The transition to a democratic government opened up possibilities for this country of 104 million, scarred over four decades by six coups d'etat and 10 governments (UNDP 1997). WOPED felt that working with the next generation of Nigeria's future leaders was critical. "The basic idea was to contradict age-old views about women and gender roles," said Akumadu. "We wanted to work with youth to make them into role models, by giving them a positive perspective and molding their outlook."

Members of the Peace and Anti-Violence Education clubs (PAVERs) became more than role models; they became community organizers. WOPED

began by working with school directors, who chose approximately 20 students to be involved in the clubs. WOPED and the school directors designed a curriculum to teach PAVeRs about such issues as peace in the family, traditional practices that are harmful to women, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault, teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.

After introducing the issues, WOPED trained the clubs, together with one teacher from each school, on facilitation and peer education skills, and organized a public inauguration ceremony for the whole village to see. The PAVeRs use innovative techniques to train their peers and other community members on gender-based violence prevention. Through music, art, sports and poetry, they catch the attention of their friends, parents and community leaders. They turn these recreational events into opportunities to educate their communities. Together PAVeRs wrote, directed and performed dramas on gender-based violence prevention at bus stops and in marketplaces throughout the country. They arranged intra-community soccer tournaments with other PAVE clubs, where they addressed spectators at the beginning of the game about issues related to violence against women and led seminars and peer workshops on rape, domestic violence and FGM.

The nine clubs have more than 200 members, whom WOPED brings together on an annual basis to provide new training techniques and share innovative ideas for organizing initiatives in their communities. Through the clubs, WOPED has formed a network of young men and women activists that publishes articles on violence against women in local newspapers, organizes training sessions and drama performances to teach their peers about gender-based violence, and is committed to passing the message on to the next generation. “I will gather the young ones,” wrote one young woman, “and pass this information to them, so that they will learn to respect the rights of women and girls.”

WOPED supported their initiatives with young people by training pressure groups of adults.⁴ The work of PAVE clubs has inspired these groups as well. Members of the Nigerian Union of Road and Transportation Workers organized their own peer training on violence against women. Solidarity groups of women in two communities have formed to demand that authorities intervene in cases of violence against women. The long-term effects that would render stories like Hauwa’s a problem of the past have yet to be seen, but the prognosis is good. As one PAVEr said, “I learned that through my life and my way of living I can encourage others to become peacemakers and to be respectful of women’s rights.”

WOPED’s work with PAVeRs extended beyond community-based efforts. They incorporated PAVE clubs into national poetry competitions and drama performances to educate the general public about violence against women. And they joined other women’s rights activists through the 16 Days of Activism and the UN Inter-Agency Regional Campaign. WOPED was inspired by the

⁴ Pressure groups include adults in communities that have authority and/or perpetuate violence against women. WOPED organized training sessions for Nigerian Road and Transportation Workers, parents, circumcisers and religious leaders.



PAVERs at work in
Owerri, Nigeria

success of PAVE clubs community drama performances, and used this idea to develop an interactive play at the University of Lagos as part of the Regional Campaign. The performance received wide public recognition and press.

From Community PAVE Clubs to the National Theatre

It's not drama, it's real, and the audience knows it. The story is in no way unfamiliar to the more than one hundred people who have come to the afternoon performance at the Art Theatre at Lagos State University. The curtain opens with a man making arrangements to sell his teenage daughter, Chinenye, to a young man who plans to add her to his harem. She begs her father not to do it, but he is desperate and needs to money to start a business. Chinenye beseeches her mother to help her run away. But her mother explains that they have no place to send her and that the community would ridicule the entire family. She has no choice but to marry.

Within days of the wedding, Chinenye realizes that her new husband abuses all of his wives and knows that she will be the next. It is not long before the beatings begin, and Chinenye, frightened and bruised over her entire body, seeks help from the police. When they learn who her husband is, they quickly dismiss the case, calling it "a family matter."

Chinenye runs away to her uncle in a distant region of Nigeria. Her uncle takes her in and allows her to go to school. She flourishes there, and after many years, she becomes a commissioner in the region. Her husband never discovers what has happened to her, and presumes her dead. Years later, seeking an important contract, he comes to the ministry for help and is escorted into her office. Seeing the child-wife he had bought from a poor man long ago, he faints.

The play gets a bittersweet laugh out of the audience, since most stories, they know, do not end so happily. The performance is followed by something the audience is unaccustomed to: a chance for them to talk about the issues and brainstorm ways of dealing with violence against women and girls in their respective

Young Women in Russia Learn to Protect Themselves

Eliminating gender-based violence requires changing individual minds as well as social customs and beliefs. This makes it vital to reach young people before stereotypes become internalized and attitudes hard to change. In Russia, the educational system recognizes the need to incorporate courses in sex education and personal safety in high school and even some universities. However, such courses typically fail to include any discussion of sexual violence. The result of this lost opportunity is that stereotypes of women who experience gender-based violence remain unchallenged, and many women never learn about the legal, medical and psychological services that exist.

Syostri, the Moscow Sexual Assault Recovery Centre, found that most women who call their hotline for help have no knowledge of sources of support to help them confront gender-based violence. The women who call the hotline accept the belief that they must have caused the violence, which tends to mute their anger and intensify their feelings of depression and helplessness. Syostri brought together teachers, parents and students in a series of workshops around the country to design a manual on protecting against sexual violence for use in personal safety courses. They discovered that girls as well as their parents are eager for information about preventative measures and support services. In planning how young women could arm themselves against sexual violence, the workshops provided a way to open a broader discussion of the issue of gender-based violence among parents and teachers as well as the wider community.

communities. Finding ways to describe the tragic situation endured by many women and girls, without angering people, is key to changing people's behaviours. With a touch of humour, people are less likely to be on the defensive about the issue, and more willing to discuss it candidly in the small group sessions.

Challenges and Strategies:

The Right People, Place and Time

When WOPED began the project, they anticipated the difficulties of working with young people, who are constantly changing, and do not possess the voice that the community typically looks to for leadership or guidance. The goal of the PAVERs was to incite change for the future. To do that, the youth needed permission from their parents, community leaders and teachers to steer the project. WOPED used the Trust Fund grant to develop training, supply the nine clubs with equipment and materials they needed and bring them together to share ideas and activities. Throughout the process WOPED employed a variety of strategies to help PAVERs along: they found a supportive and stable institution in which to start the clubs, worked with adults, made the activities gratifying for people of all ages and used the media to reach other communities.

Finding Fertile Ground

After a great deal of debate among WOPED staff on which age group to begin the PAVE clubs with, WOPED decided to work directly with 210 young men and women between the ages of 12 and 17, recruited through local schools. No one can argue the value of working with children, who are, after all, the leaders of the next generation. But how does one justify a strategy which delays abatement of violence against women for another generation? And if the idea was to influence young people, why recruit from

secondary schools, attended by only 20 per cent of school-aged children? And why work with groups only from the southern part of the country?

WOPED's decision made sense for three reasons: it targeted young people on the verge of adulthood, it rooted the project in educational institutions, and it focused on communities that were not governed by customary law. WOPED planned to set the message of non-violence against women in the minds of

young people just before they came of age to marry, vote and enter the labour force. “I will be leaving secondary school soon,” said one PAVER leaving for university. “And I am happy to have this information with me as I move forward.” By rooting the project in schools, WOPED hoped to create a responsibility within educational institutions to address gender-based violence. And they chose to begin with schools in the South to pilot the project and understand how to improve it before launching it in the northern regions, where they expected more opposition.

WOPED started the PAVE clubs in secondary schools that were not well funded but had high academic standing. They reached students with potential and ambition who did not have access to the same opportunities as their peers from wealthier communities. The directors and teachers presented the club as an honour for students who, as PAVERS, became role models for their peers. School directors chose youth who were already leaders among their peers and who had a strong academic standing. As a result, the other students wanted to be a part of the group. Anyone could join as long as they had permission from the teachers and proved that they were trying to become positive role models in their schools.

The clubs are now in their third generation of PAVERS, and WOPED has been bombarded with requests from schools throughout the country to help them start PAVE clubs of their own. WOPED hopes that as the government becomes more stable, the state will assume responsibility for PAVE clubs and replicate them in schools nationwide. “We wanted to work with young people at just the right age for us to influence,” Akumadu explains. “And all schools in Nigeria have clubs for youth, so this is a good avenue for us to make our work sustainable.”

Old Tune, New Words

Finding new ways of reaching people doesn’t mean doing away with the old ones. In fact, often the old ones are the best way to get their attention. Through traditional songs, dance and theatre, PAVERS brought people together and engaged them in discussions and training on violence against women and women’s human rights. “We learned that people are bored with speeches about violence against women,” said Akumadu. “What actually makes people change is an attempt to evoke empathy through drama, dance and song.”

In training and planning sessions with the clubs, WOPED taught PAVERS how to facilitate discussions, organize community events, and pace the project by starting with a topic like peace in the family and gradually introducing more sensitive issues like FGM, and widowhood practices. They started with an issue that would bring the community together – peace. PAVERS organized “Soccer for Peace” sports tournaments with other communities. Before the matches started, two club members addressed the audience. One discussed using the school as an instrument of peace, and the other explained how peace and women’s rights are linked. PAVERS also wrote and directed dramas about girls unsuccessfully seeking help after being raped and about the physical and psychological struggles that young girls endure prior to and after FGM.

The PAVE clubs found that drama, sports and music not only created a sense of empathy in spectators, but also gave young women the courage to

speak out. Women and girls in the communities began contacting WOPED for help or showing up in the office. While the project helped many women break the silence, it created a new problem for WOPED. “Sometimes the kids will come to us and it is difficult to help them,” says Akumadu. “We don’t have the capacity to deal with all of that.”

In response to the problem, WOPED now designates a staff member who acts as a point person for the boys and girls in the clubs after the initial training. At the beginning and end of sessions, they inform PAVERS that there is someone available to speak with them privately should they feel the need. WOPED cannot help everyone who comes to them, but in many cases they are able to step in and provide assistance. For example, after several of the PAVE clubs sessions, one young woman stepped forward and asked to speak to a WOPED representative. She explained that her family insisted that she undergo female circumcision and pleaded with WOPED to help her. Together they organized a meeting with her parents, who agreed to forgo the ritual. Several of this young woman’s peers followed her example – changing a tradition that has persisted for centuries, one person at a time.

Getting to the Pressure Points

PAVERS had a powerful impact on their friends and classmates but little influence over their elders. Recognizing the need for parents, village chiefs and other individuals with power to support the PAVE clubs, WOPED organized training sessions with key pressure groups. “We chose the groups because in rural communities they are the custodians of custom and tradition,” Akumadu explained. “They are respected by their people and their rules are not contradicted without dire consequences.”

WOPED invited two important groups of men – *Ndi Nze* (village chiefs and titled men) and members of the Nigerian Union of Road and Transportation Workers. The *Ndi Nze* enjoy a great deal of respect in the community, making change difficult if not impossible without their consent. In a 1999 study on road and transportation workers, 90 per cent of hawkers reported that drivers and other men frequently made sexually suggestive advances, resulting in sexual intercourse (University of Ibadan 1999). Both groups made commitments to work with the men in their communities, and members of the road and transportation union subsequently organized a similar training for their colleagues.

Groups of women who enforce rituals also agreed to come on board the project. *Umudadas* (women’s social leagues) and traditional birth attendants uphold tradition in the communities. Their roles are to ensure that community members adhere to rituals like FGM and widowhood practices. Before the end of the training the participants had already begun making arrangements for a similar training in their communities. “When I get home, I will teach other market women everything I learned here,” said a woman who took part in the training. “I will tell them not to circumcise their daughters and to send their daughters to school.”

The training concluded with a graphic video on FGM in Nigeria showing girls writhing in pain. Akumadu recalled turning on the lights and looking around the silent room. “I couldn’t believe it,” she said. “They were all in tears.”

Tapping the Media

WOPED, like other women's organizations, found that the media did one of two things when covering stories about gender-based violence: they sensationalized the issues or ignored them. WOPED used the project to educate both journalists and the public. They bombarded the media with information until they got their attention.

When they wanted reporters to cover a story, WOPED called, sent press releases and then called again. They invited reporters to events that were innovative and visually stimulating. Soccer matches with boys carrying signs about women's rights, the inauguration ceremonies for PAVERS and theatre performances caught the interest of print and TV journalists. Furthermore, Akumadu is a well-known activist in Nigeria, and over the years she has become a public figure. Reporters seek her views about the rights of women and children.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in 1999, WOPED organized poetry contests through PAVE clubs, with winning poems printed on posters and hung in public markets, bus stops and schools. The competition culminated in a daylong event attended by reporters from television and radio programmes as well as newspapers. Some of the poems presented the pain of young girls who suffer from violence, while others spread a message of hope and strength. Okocha N. Benita, the first prize winner, received an award for her poem on rape, "The Scars of Past Years."

Something has happened to me
The thing so great
That I cannot weep
For I have wept so much
That the tears have run dry...

Why did it have to happen to me?
I cried out for help
But no one came to my call.
He had taken my dignity
Taken it all...

It is not the great catastrophe
That terrifies me
That scares me to death
I am not the way I used to be.

Conclusion: How Far They Have Come

It has been several years since the first PAVE clubs began. When WOPED initiated the project, they could not predict that schools would continue the clubs after the grant was exhausted and that new clubs would start. They did not know that new clubs would form and develop into a youth network, or that men from the Ministry of Finance and the Nigerian Union of Road and Transportation Workers would use the information gained in training to change themselves and those around them. Also, they could not predict that sharing new information gives rise to new needs – only some of which can be met.

Specifying the change or quantifying the number of people who were reached by these methods is an almost impossible task. In the case of WOPED's project change is most visible in the stories – in the small, or not so small transformations that guide one person to travel a new path and inspire others to do the same.

“Never have we been given such important lessons.” CASE STUDY:
“ This will help us defend ourselves as women.” **Moving from Awareness to Responsibility in Honduras**

— Project participants

Moving from Awareness to Responsibility in Honduras

PROJECT NAME:	Participatory Education for Peace in the Family
PROJECT DIRECTORS:	Carlos Miranda and Emilia Gutiérrez
ORGANIZATION:	The Municipality of Comayagua, the Family Counselling Office and the Human Rights Commission
DATES:	1998 – 1999
TRUST FUND GRANT:	\$36,107
OBJECTIVES:	To train and mobilize community watchdog groups who protect women and children from domestic violence.

They had heard the story many times. Some of them had been through it themselves. A woman in their neighbourhood had been badly beaten by her husband, and had confided in a neighbour that she was desperate for help. The couple had recently moved to Comayagua, a city of 50,000 located just north of the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa. The neighbours sympathized, but there wasn't much they could do. Typically these problems were considered a family matter and no one else's business.

This time, however, was different. The Messengers of Peace, a self-appointed committee of women who made it their job to intervene in cases of domestic violence, heard the woman's story and decided to take action. The Messengers of Peace are a product of a year-long project initiated by the Mayor of Comayagua, the Family Counselling Office (FCO) of the Ministry of Health and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) with a grant from UNIFEM's Trust Fund. The Messengers went to the woman's home and provided her with information on legal and social services to help her escape the situation.

The Messengers of Peace are not social activists or community organizers. They are mothers, wives and daughters, ordinary community members looking for a way to help other women and their children in one of Honduras' most troubled regions. Through the project they were empowered with the information and means to take action. Their mobilization serves as a reminder that, sometimes, monumental change starts with small steps – a discussion among friends, meetings, training and a small home in the community where people begin to make a difference.



Poster created by a student in Comayagua, Honduras

Background: Domestic Violence and Machismo in Honduras

Violence against women is part of the social landscape in Honduras. Early in their lives males begin to learn that machismo defines manhood, and is fundamental to peer acceptance. Young girls are taught to be submissive and to keep their ideas, thoughts—and most importantly, their pain—to themselves. “Women are like shotguns: they should be kept loaded (pregnant) and indoors.” So goes a saying in Latin America. If women are indoors, it is easier to keep them silent.

Today, gender-based violence and the silence that surrounds it remain prevalent in Honduran society. Police reports from 1996 show that 16 per cent of all reported crimes in Comayagua were related to violence against women (Municipality of Comayagua 1998). More daunting is the suspicion that police reports represent only a fraction of the cases; many more stay behind closed doors. A recent study shows that four out of ten women in Honduras have been physically abused at least once by their partners (*Tiempo* 1996). The Honduran government operates one shelter that can accommodate up to ten women and their children. In this country of 6 million, there are six private centres opened to offer medical, legal and psychological services to survivors of gender-based violence.

Even with services available, however, many women choose not to seek assistance. Only one in five women who have been battered reports the problem to the authorities (*Tiempo* 1996). A study of domestic violence in Comayagua suggests that women stay in abusive situations because they want to hold the family together or believe that their children need a father present (Municipality of Comayagua 1998). They may fear further retribution, or risk the little economic security they have. As a result, the majority of women suffer in secret.

While domestic abuse is often hidden behind closed doors, violence is anything but hidden on the streets of Comayagua. For many young people,

jobs are scarce. Few can afford to attend college or university because of the cost of books, food and travel. During the day young men loiter in the streets, and in the evening youth gangs turn those same streets into unsafe places. Gangs and related drug crimes were considered one of the most colossal problems by the community (Municipality of Comayagua 1998). After dark, women take precautions in such ordinary tasks as buying something from the local market and walking to a friend's home.

Changing Old Behaviours and Meeting New Demands

In 1997, a young woman, Luisa, came through the doors of the Family Counselling Office (FCO), bruised and pleading for help. She had been living with an abusive partner for 15 years and could bear the violence no longer. It began with insults and threats soon after she and Jorge settled down together. Jorge became angry and jealous – suspicious of Luisa's every move. Then things got progressively worse. Jorge beat Luisa, tried to strangle her, humiliated her and brutalized their two children. On several occasions Jorge's beatings left her hospitalized. As a result, she developed severe nervous disorders.

Stories like Luisa's were not new to the local FCO, an institution established in 1993 to provide social services to battered women and children. The FCO programme is part of the Ministry of Health. The regional office provided full support to the project, affording it the half-time attention of one of their employees, Emilia Gutiérrez, who acted as project coordinator and hosted the project team in her office.

In 1997, the Law against Domestic Violence was passed, requiring authorities to remove men from violent households and to provide social services to women and children. The law was a significant milestone for women's organizations that took the lead in the late 1980s in protesting violence against women. However, it gave rise to a new problem: an overwhelming number of women coming forward for the first time, seeking support, services and refuge from violent situations. The HRC, established in 1997 to provide investigative services and legal advice to citizens on human rights abuses, is hindered by the lack of special courts authorized to implement the new law and affordable lawyers for women who choose to seek legal recourse.

With increasing numbers of women seeking assistance in 1997 and 1998, both the FCO and HRC became overwhelmed. Staff from both organizations felt that if they were only responding to violence as it occurred, they were not doing enough. Moreover, they recognized the need to find ways of reaching men and getting them to stop the violence. A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) consultant, Yvette Van Dok, in Comayagua explained: "Their [FCO and HRC] experiences with women and children and with victims of domestic violence shocked me deeply. I was impressed by the motivation of the staff to do something about the problem."

The organizations took action by launching a project in three communities to train people on violence prevention. Through recreational activities they engaged the community and got men involved. The community formed watchdog and self-help groups for women and children.

Although the three communities chosen for the project have their differences, 21 de Abril, Primero de Mayo and Primero de Mayo Sur share several important characteristics: all are densely populated, semi-urban neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and violence. “Our work was needed most in the poorest communities of Comayagua,” said Mayor Miranda, who hopes to extend the project to other communities in the municipality.

The project led to a decisive change in community members’ attitudes to domestic violence. Children in the fifth and sixth grades have emulated the Messengers of Peace by starting the Children of Peace, a group that promotes non-violence in schools. The Children of Peace use peer training and art exhibitions, and make class pacts in which they agree to tell a teacher or another adult if another child is in any kind of physical or emotional danger. Men have formed additional football teams and tournaments to get their peers on board. And while violence clearly remains a challenge in Comayagua, the project has helped shape the communities’ outlook for the future. One mother describes her expectations for her daughter, “She will be able to defend herself, and she will learn to be independent.”

Making a Trade:

Football for Training on Gender-based Violence Prevention

The deal seemed like a good one, so none of the men were about to complain. All they had to do was show up and listen for a few hours and then they would get all the equipment and uniforms they needed for a full-fledged football (or soccer) tournament. They hardly had to pay attention during the session. At least that’s what they thought.

From the perspective of the FCO, Mayor Miranda and the HRC, the deal was the only way to get men to attend a training on violence against women. After trying numerous strategies to encourage male participation in training, they came up with the idea of a football tournament. Through donations from local banks and the support of radio stations, the team bought sporting equipment and uniforms for a community-wide tournament in Comayagua. They used the tournament to get and keep men involved.

When the men came to their first training they did far more than listen. The training required their active participation on discussions about peace in the family, machismo and violence. Much to their own surprise, the men did talk, and many of them had a lot to say.

The first training was followed by subsequent sessions over a period of several months, each one dealing more directly with violence against women than the one that preceded it. The men incorporated the information from the training sessions into the tournament by carrying placards with messages of anti-violence and peace, and by addressing the audience at half time about the issues. While some of the men clearly endured the training in order to play the game, others took the messages to heart. By the end of the project a group of teammates requested additional training from the project team.

Challenges and Strategies: Building a Long-Lasting Commitment

The planning team in Comayagua knew from the outset that in order to reach the entire community they needed a broad strategy that would interest people of all ages. Also, they knew that commitment could only come from the community members themselves. The team used a variety of methods to get the attention of community members and they used their participation to build a long-lasting commitment to protect women from violence.

Understanding the Communities' Needs

The FCO and HRC dealt with women survivors on a daily basis and understood first-hand the severity of their problems. Yet when the team met to discuss the project they unanimously agreed to start by asking community members what they needed. This process facilitated community support and set up a system to monitor the impact of the project. Having the opportunity to voice their concerns made individuals feel that their needs were important to local authorities. The information provided insight into the community members' attitudes towards violence. It enabled the team to compare responses from the middle and end of the year to gauge the impact of their work.

This strategy established trust between communities and state institutions. In the last century alone, Honduras has been plagued with almost 300 internal rebellions, civil wars and changes in government (U.S. Department of State 1999). Although democracy has endured in Honduras, it is still fragile and efforts to build civil society are in their infancy. Relationships between the state and community are fraught with suspicion, and trust needs to be carefully nurtured.

In Comayagua, the Mayor and staff from HRC and FCO knew that as representatives of state institutions they had to establish a trusting relationship with community members. The project gave them a way to build bridges into the community, understand people's priorities and learn how far they had still to go. Four social workers were hired and trained intensively on gender awareness, human rights and participatory education. They administered questionnaires that were developed by the project staff to a target group of men, women, children and young adults.⁵ They wrote down observations throughout the year and compared them to participants' initial responses, and they conducted home visits and weekly community meetings to support community members.

Throughout the project, the staff worked extensively with women in the communities, giving them the space they needed to openly discuss their rights, and learn new ways of asserting them. At the end of the project, the staff returned to find out what had changed. Many of the men felt that the project had given them a different perspective on machismo and women's rights. The women felt that they had gained information and tools to protect those rights.

⁵ The project team hired a sociologist to investigate, monitor and evaluate the project. She also helped design the project approach and assisted in developing training materials and methods.

“We were unaware of many things,” said one woman. “Now we can defend ourselves.” A teenage girl added, “I have stopped feeling afraid to speak.”

Training Facilitators

When the Comayagua team began to discuss the training, one thing was clear: men listen more to men than to women. Reaching men meant finding inroads to the social systems and structures that shape attitudes and behaviours. By training men as facilitators to lead workshops for their peers, they believed that the project would get the buy-in it needed to succeed.

The team decided to train facilitators from each target group – men, women, young adults and children - who in turn would organize their own groups and replicate the training. But they did not anticipate how hard it would be to recruit facilitators. The widespread apathy among community members, particularly among the men, forced the team to find alternatives. Instead of training individuals who would organize their own training groups, they went to groups that were already established. They reached children through primary schools and a shelter for street-kids; young adults through churches and colleges; and women through microcredit groups.

In a series of six two-day workshops, social workers and an experienced facilitator trained 47 young adults, 40 men and 40 women. The team worked with fifth and sixth grade teachers to lead sessions for the students. The team developed training materials for each target group and focused sessions on peace in the family, women’s human rights, gender relations, sexuality, domestic violence and masculine identity. Participants explored their own feelings, thoughts and biases and received information on legislation and services provided to women and children. They learned to candidly discuss issues that are normally taboo in Honduran society. Gradually, the participants began to view the issue of domestic violence as a social problem in their homes and communities.

In the first months the facilitators trained approximately 685 community members, a little less than half of their original target. The team had not anticipated that they would have to try many different strategies to get community members on board. Even with the methods that worked, people were less interested in participating than the team had expected. While the training results were not what the team had originally hoped for, they succeeded in reaching the majority of community members through recreational events like football tournaments and children’s drama performances.

At the beginning of the project the team trained women by organizing handicraft and baking classes in order to build trust and get them involved. This approach caused some controversy among the project leaders, some of whom felt that offering football for men and baking for women enforced gender stereotypes. Given the traditional roles that men and women adhere to, the team decided to start with the classes, helping the women in the group sell their products at the football tournaments. Another group of young women took a less traditional approach by starting a football league of their own.

Community Caravans in Trinidad & Tobago

Over the last two decades, projects to respond to the urgent needs of women survivors of gender-based violence have sprung up in many different communities. These tend to start in cities, rather than rural areas, and usually lack awareness of other, similar groups. In response, the Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad & Tobago sought to provide an integrated system of support services through the creation of a network among existing social agencies that deal with victims of gender-based violence.

The project developed a programme of “community caravans,” using techniques of popular theatre as well as games and video presentations to address topics ranging from developing self-esteem and understanding human sexuality to basic support skills and legal resources. The caravans went primarily to rural communities, many of them served by few telephones and limited public transportation. Events took place over a three-day weekend, targeting different sectors of the community from Friday to Sunday. The caravans were particularly effective in reaching men, who were always ready to express their opinions if not inclined to attend workshops and meetings on a regular basis.

The Rape Crisis Society also used the caravans to train people in the communities to become counselors themselves, using the skills learned in the caravans to help other women in need of such services.

From Training to Commitment

Following the training, participants formed their own community watchdog groups to protect women and stop domestic violence. The Messengers and Children for Peace strengthened peer groups and gave women and children the ability to take action against violence. “Now we know that we have rights,” said a boy from Children for Peace. “If an adult abuses someone, a child can report that abuse.”

For men and young adults, the groups were not as easy to form. Young adults were the least willing to take the project further. Attendance was erratic during the training, and the majority of those who attended seemed uninterested. Their reaction could have been simply teenage rebellion. However, the team suspected that some other force was at play. That force – a powerful one – turned out to be one of the local Catholic priests.

Originally, the team had gone through the church to get young people on board. At the outset, the priest supported their participation, but as the training progressed he changed his perspective dramatically, insisting that the materials, which challenged traditional gender roles, were inappropriate for good Christians. By the time this problem surfaced, it was too late for the team to find new ways of reaching young adults. They continued to work to the extent possible with the groups they had formed.

The shift from participation to commitment is the essence of the project’s achievements. The watchdog groups among women and children are evidence of a commitment to protect each other and stop the violence. Recently, a group of men who were involved in the football tournaments have started organizing their own watch-

dog group to stop violence against women and children. Such commitments illustrate that communities can change, even without elaborate programmes. What change requires is buy-in, information, time and the belief of individuals that they have the responsibility and the power to take collective action.



Women's soccer team marching through Comayagua, Honduras, prior to a tournament.

Linking with National and Regional Institutions

When the team asked community members to define their needs, they ended up with a list that the municipality had neither the funds nor the capacity to address. But by reaching out to other organizations, the team found a way to meet at least some of the communities' priorities.

With support from the UNIFEM-led campaign on violence against women in Latin America, A Life Free from Violence, the team secured a spot on national radio and distributed their educational materials to other municipalities. The publicity boosted the morale of the community members, some of whom participated in the campaign's activities in the capital city.

The team forged links with the National Centre of Education for Work (CENET), a national institution that specializes in vocational training and grass-roots organizing.⁶ CENET provided job-skills training for community members while the FCO trained CENET on human rights, domestic violence and community development. This partnership was particularly helpful for women, who because of high unemployment were stuck in households already teetering on the edge of poverty. CENET has continued training in the urban neighbourhood. And Mayor Miranda is committed to directing more resources to job training as well as the improvement of local infrastructure and other community development initiatives.

⁶ CENET is the result of a contribution from the Dutch Development Corporation, the ILO and the Honduran government. It specializes in integrated community development from a participatory educational perspective; trains groups to start enterprises and administer loans; and provides literacy training from a human rights perspective.

Making the Medicine Taste Good

In recent years the global women's movement has emphasized the need for male commitment and responsibility. However, reaching those who perpetuate gender-based violence, or feel it is not their problem, can be difficult. Had the team in Comayagua invited people to participate in training on domestic violence, they would have been lucky to fill a single room with men. They averted opposition with two innovative, yet simple strategies: peace and sports. They addressed a concern everyone cared about through a medium everyone enjoyed.

Peace has significance in a community like Comayagua, where violence is pervasive. The team named the project to reflect peace in the family. The change emphasized a goal (peace) as opposed to a problem (domestic violence), touched upon an issue that most community members cared about, and encouraged men to participate without the feeling that they would be blamed for a problem. "In our society, violent conduct is considered normal in marital relations," says Emilia Gutiérrez, from the HRC. "The concept of peace allowed us to approach the issue in a more subtle manner."

Football and other recreational activities such as women's crafts circles and children's play groups are ways of attracting the community to the project and encouraging them to talk candidly. The information sessions at football matches were paced slowly so as not to offend or shock the community. The league spokesperson began with issues such as health in the family and peace in the community, gradually introducing women's and children's rights, masculinity and domestic violence. The matches also afforded women the opportunity to sell some of their homemade crafts and foods.

While the football teams were an innovative way to get men involved, they created a struggle between the project staff and tournament members. Often, the team came to Saturday morning training sessions to find the rooms empty. "The men wanted to play, and we wanted to train," writes Lis Joosten, a UNIFEM consultant to the project. The project team renegotiated the deal with the footballers many times before they successfully got men to participate. The men became more involved after two of their teammates began actively promoting the training courses. The project staff felt that the training had reached these two men, who volunteered to take the lead to recruit others.

Despite their success in reaching the community, the football matches had some problems with youth gangs, who targeted the recreational events and forced the league to postpone the second tournament. The team brought gangs on board by inviting members to join the new football league. These efforts did not end the problems with gangs, but they enabled the football leagues to continue their tournaments and begin dealing with the problem of gang violence. The local police and the Mayor have observed a decrease in community violence since youth gangs came on board, and attribute it in part to the project. One of the male team leaders remarked, "These kids (gang members) lack a responsible father, someone who talks, listens and gives advice." Lis Joosten echoes his remarks: "We came to the conclusion that if you take them seriously, they stop playing the game of 'youth gang.'"

Making the medicine taste good was more than just semantics and games. The team understood that the only way to change domestic violence is to alter

the beliefs of those with the power to change it. In Comayagua, reaching men and youth gangs was equally important as working with women and girls. The team found inroads to the people they needed to reach, and began with them at their own pace and in their own way.

Conclusion: Change in Comayagua

In the neighbourhoods of Comayagua, things might not look any different than when the project began. Gangs still make the streets unsafe. Neighbourhoods are stricken with poverty, and unemployment rates are high. And still, behind the closed doors of people's homes, women like Luisa live in fear of the moment that will set off the next round of abuse. However, while the exterior has not changed, the people have. The Messengers and Children of Peace and the ongoing men's football leagues are tangible evidence of commitment and responsibility, as are the 90 per cent of participants who said the project had changed the way they thought about domestic violence.

The changes were due to the combination of strategies, and to the team's ability to try new strategies when their plans failed. By listening to the community's perspectives and helping them transform information into action, the team nurtured a sense of commitment and strengthened ties to local authorities. Finding cost-effective and innovative ways to reach the community at large maximized the impact of their work. Knowing when to retreat and when to begin again were crucial to their success.

Changing Communities' Responses to Violence against Women: Lessons from the Three Case Studies

The three case studies in this chapter yield a number of common insights. First, they strive for balance between influencing the community at large (men in particular), and supporting women directly. Second, they reach those with power, and train them to work directly with their peers. And third, they pace their work – using innovative techniques to attract participation in the project and educate the community about gender-based violence. Once the community members are present and willing to listen, the project leaders can begin the next steps towards more long-lasting solutions.

The insights that follow are a collection of the most prevalent strategies that emerge in the three projects. Combined, they can guide specific interventions to help communities move from information to commitment.

Using Shared Values to Reach the Community

Too often information about violence against women reaches only those who care about the problem. The challenge is reaching those who don't. In both Nigeria and Honduras, where political instability and social conflict have left a deep desire for peace, the projects used this shared value to secure widespread participation of community members and to reach new audiences. In Nigeria, 210 PAVERs launched their clubs by promoting peace in their schools, and in Honduras, 685 people participated in workshops about peace. Participants included parents, teachers, religious leaders and other influential community members, all of whom were essential in getting a community-wide commitment to end violence against women.

Getting Men and Boys on Board through Sports

Securing male commitment in efforts to stop gender-based violence means overcoming apathy, denial and outright opposition. Project teams in Nigeria and Honduras found an innovative and cost-effective way of getting males on board by organizing football tournaments. The games engaged men and boys, and brought together other community members of different ages, gender and socio-economic status. They began the football season by promoting the concept of peace to capture the community's attention, and gradually linked it to the need to prevent violence against women and promote women's human rights. The teams turned half-time into an opportunity to educate the community through placards and speeches. After the tournament ended in Honduras, one of the football teams requested additional training on women's human rights.

Replacing Rituals with Alternatives

In countries where FGM is prevalent, young women face enormous pressure to undergo the ritual from family and friends as well as community members. Those who abstain are considered unclean, disobedient and dangerous. Given the importance of the ritual in the community, and the problems with forgoing the practice, alternative rites offer a possible solution. In the three communities in Kenya, people accepted the project because it modified the ritual in ways that were not harmful to women, while recognizing its important role in community life.

In each community, project leaders worked with community members to design their own alternative ritual. They built on research they had conducted to design a programme that fit the needs and pace of the communities. While the elimination of the ceremonial excision was common to all three, only Tharaka implemented the human rights-based seclusion period. In contrast, the other two communities decided that they were not yet ready for the change. In Tharaka, FGM is now rarely practiced. The programme has more than 1,500 families involved.

Identifying Peer Leaders in Vocational Groups

Peer leaders in professional or occupational groups can influence their peers in ways that other community members cannot. In Nigeria and Kenya, the projects trained individuals from influential professional groups as peer leaders who in turn, organized workshops for their colleagues. In Nigeria, the project invited members of the Union of Road and Transportation Workers to their training for key community members. In Kenya, organizers convinced a few circumcisers to come to meetings, and recruit others. In both cases, professionals found they gained a new role in the community.

Helping Women Assert their Rights: Combining Information and Services

Making a woman aware that her human rights have been violated isn't much help if she is unable to do anything about it. If women are to put what they learn into practice, they need access to services that can help them. Organizations can anticipate an increase in demand for services as a result of information and training. Responding to these needs as quickly as possible is critical to the project's success. Two of the three case studies did not expect this increased demand. In Kenya and Nigeria, the projects were caught by surprise – either by requests for help, as in Nigeria, or by the need to support the young women participants, as in Kenya. Both projects quickly responded to these new requests, ensuring the project's sustainability in the long run. As a result, the projects have continued to grow and have not lost any participants.

Establishing Support Groups

Individuals who try to take a stand on violence against women by themselves may jeopardize their own safety and risk being ostracized by the community. In Honduras and Kenya, strong support groups enabled individuals to influence men and other community members with power, by ensuring their safety and supporting them in their efforts.

In both cases, the staff started by organizing groups and nurturing them until they were ready to challenge their communities. In Kenya, one staff member from PATH noted that the alternative rites of passage project would never have worked had only one family agreed to it. It succeeded because Annicetta Kiriga and a group of women from Tharaka joined together to take action, and brought others on board. Similarly, in Honduras, the Messengers of Peace were able to assist their neighbour who had been abused because they were organized and they stuck together. Had one woman gone to the house alone, she would have put her own safety in jeopardy.

The Broader Perspective: Building Community Commitment in Trust Fund Projects

The projects in this chapter represent the most common types of interventions sponsored by the Trust Fund. Over 50 per cent of all of the Trust Fund projects try to make a difference at the local level by working directly with community members. Some organizations aim solely to raise public awareness and educate the community. However, as the three projects in this chapter illustrate, results tend to come from interventions that aim for local, cost-effective solutions.

A number of community-based projects sponsored by the Trust Fund achieved long-lasting commitment by forming watchdog and support groups that have a specific goal and engage community members. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Network of Zimbabwean Positive Women initiated a community education project to teach people about HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. Similar to the alternative rites project in Kenya, the initiative in Zimbabwe organized support groups for the women who participated in training in order to protect them from attacks by other community members. Another Trust Fund project, started by Earth Rights International on the border of Myanmar and Thailand, created “action groups” in refugee camps, which developed a plan for their communities to stop violence against women.

As reflected in the chapter, most Trust Fund projects face the challenge of getting the buy-in they need from community members at large. Almost all of the Trust Fund grantees working on community based projects meet with village chiefs, religious leaders or other important community members to get their support before beginning their work. Once they have the support to begin, they use a variety of innovative techniques to engage the community. From debate competitions in Mali to drama performances in Nepal to art exhibitions in Argentina, over 25 per cent of Trust Fund grantees working at the community level utilize artistic and recreational activities to reach men and women of different age groups and backgrounds, and to secure their participation in training and education on gender-based violence prevention. These efforts have been the groundwork for long-lasting community initiatives such as local watchdog and support groups.

While the results of the projects are impressive, not all them succeed in the way the organizations implementing them had hoped. Some attempts are unsuccessful or lead to outcomes the projects had not anticipated, while others stay directly on the course they had planned. Overall, the projects in this chapter, like the other Trust Fund projects that focus on communities, elucidate the value of starting small with a clear goal in mind. They find ways to focus on women while engaging the entire community, and they are guided by experienced activists who know when to lead and when to let community members steer the process.

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