

Confronting Gender-Based Violence in Darfur

Theme(s):

- Gender-Based Violence

Type of Program:

- Awareness Raising and Capacity Building

Country/Region:

- Sudan (Darfur region)

Submitting/Executing Organizations:

- Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA)

Author:

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Project Cost [Amount and Source of Funds]:

- € 133,000 Oxfam Holland/Germany: Supported programs of local organizations and groups and local administration
- \$26,000 Ford Foundation: Contributed to the book documenting women's experiences
- \$50,000 UNICEF: Counselling and social support
- \$78,000 Open Society Institute: Capacity building of local organizations at the Bailial camp

Human Resources:

- Project Manager (woman)
- Trainers (2 men and 3 women)
- Administrative Assistant (man)
- Volunteers
- Coordinator of Activities in Northern Darfur

Partners:

Oxfam-Holland; Oxfam-Germany; Ford Foundation; Open Society Institute; UNICEF

Initiative Overview: The Darfur region in Sudan has witnessed what the United Nations qualifies as one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, resulting in the failure of human rights in general and women's rights in particular. This initiative covers the Sayha network project to combat gender violence in Darfur. Sayha is made up of a group of African organizations working together on gender violence. The network was created to carry out two types of intervention: direct services to female victims of violence (medical services, psychological and legal counselling) and indirect interventions to deal with the framework in which violence occurs (such as support and capacity building, awareness-raising about violence, and the amendment of laws and policies to confront violence).

Social Discriminatory Practices Targeted: The crisis in the region has made more than 4 million persons homeless according to UN estimates. Various forms of human rights violations were recorded by different sources, and are present in the uncontrolled crime of rape against women and girls and the deteriorating economic, social and political conditions of women living in the camps.

Socio-Cultural Context: In Darfur, women largely depend upon themselves to earn a living. In some areas, women represent at least 80% of the agricultural workforce. However, women are completely absent from decision-making structures and centres as social practices of religious and tribal origin limit their independence. For example, tradition prevents women from walking past a group of men, and women are expected to bow in respect when greeted by men. Women are not allowed to eat or drink in public places, even when they work in such places. Polygamy is widespread and enhances the social status of the polygamous husband.

Laws and Policies: The region's laws and policies are based on Sharia and influenced by traditions and customs. Women are subject to two systems: a traditional system managed by local councils and chaired by tribal leaders, and an official legal system. Both systems contain discriminatory laws against women such as the code of personal status, criminal law, nationality law, and property law. Neither system includes laws forbidding gender-based violence.

Objectives and Goals

Long-term objectives include empowering women to become economically independent and capable of protecting themselves, awareness-raising of gender-based issues among those working in the region (relief organizations, non-governmental organizations, and so on), and instituting partnerships with members of civil society. Short-terms objectives include service provision to violence victims and capacity building for networks and social forces in order to change attitudes towards gender-based violence by using innovative means such as theatre, arts and music.

Women and Conflict in the Region:

The conflict in Darfur has brought to light the region's massive violations against women, Women and girls are experiencing rape and beatings by the militia inside their farms and villages. Women end up shouldering the burden of losing family members, displacement, fragmentation, identity crisis, and insecurity. Their access to food, shelter, resources, markets and income is becoming increasingly limited. Although the overall women's situation is devastating and their needs are overwhelming, they are the heads of their households and community keepers; they struggle to keep their families, communities and identities intact in order to survive despite the armed struggle.

Good Practices

Innovative Approach

- SIHA implemented comprehensive and integrated activities:
 - Running a centre in Bilial Camp to provide medical, psychological and legal counselling and a service for the victims of gender-based violence
 - Capacity building for the various participants operating in Darfur to raise awareness about gender-based violence and teach how to deal with it in the various work areas, with training focused on the following areas:
 - Preparing strategies to address violence, providing services to victims of violence, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, coordinating efforts with partners, and advocacy
 - Establishing a network of local participants to share knowledge, consolidate capacity and create a ground for ensuring the sustainability of the centre's services
 - Consolidating local partner strategies and projects with resources and technical expertise to strengthen the capacity of civil society in addressing violence against women
 - Documenting women's experiences in the region for disseminating information, providing advocacy facts, and defending the rights of aggressed women



Participatory Approach

- Prior to activity implementation, Sayha had gone through several initial preparation phases:
 - Discussing the project among the network board members to determine the added value of combating gender-based violence in Darfur
 - Organising a workshop to determine a strategy for confronting violence against women in Africa and Darfur in particular; one of the network's proposed strategies was the creation of a committee of the non-governmental organisations in the region to monitor and assess the efforts deployed by the government to face violence; the network also underscored the importance of granting different types of compensation (relating to inheritance and property rights) to the victims who contributed to support operations.
 - Adopting the principle of consultation in creating the community service centre in Darfur

Overcoming Challenges

- Several challenges were encountered: The absence of security in the region leading to the interruption of services in some centres, widespread suspicion and absence of trust among women living in the camp, shortcomings and gaps in the Sudanese law on gender-based violence that led women to avoid reporting cases of violence for fear of reprisal, harassment of victims and their families by the local authorities when they attempted to report cases, and failure to bring criminals to court because many of them held powerful positions.

- Several strategies were adopted to overcome some of these challenges:
 - Assessing interventions
 - Implementing activities through local partners, training camp leaders on the ways of documenting and reporting cases of violence
 - Supporting contacts and activities through an extensive network of actors combating violence in the region

Immediate Successes

The initiative was widely welcomed by the target groups and the local community:

- 6,000 local community members received different forms of information (bulletins, posters, plays) on the negative meaning of violence and the importance of confronting it.
- 60 members from the local community and local authorities were trained on how to deal with reported cases of violence.
- The number of women benefiting from the training workshops increased by 55%.
- The initiative contributed to bridging the information gap by publishing a book in Arabic of women's stories with the title *Queens Without Crowns: Stories of Women Survivors in Darfur*.
- Alternative work solutions were created to limit the need for leaving the camp to search for wood, as wood collection was a generous source of income for some women.

Examples of Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation:

Input:

- Number of people from community and NGOs to be trained on addressing gender-based violence
- Number of posters and information flyers distributed to community with information on the negative implications of violence
- Establishment of reporting structure supported by civil society

Output:

- Number of training workshops held
- Increase in the number of women attending workshops
- Increase in knowledge of the community on how to respond to violence
- Establishment of theatre group

Outcome:

- Creation of alternative forms of work for women that does not require leaving the camp
- Improvement in the documentation reports of the police
- Acknowledgement of community of the value of the Center
- Higher rate of men working in women's projects
- Decreased number of violence cases

Monitoring and Evaluation

Two types of monitoring and evaluation were carried out: Internal activities (by project leaders) and external activities (by UNICEF). Internal and external monitoring was carried out through regular reporting, field visits, and meetings with the initiative consultants. Evaluation included meetings with partners and target groups.

Ensuring Sustainability

- Entering into partnership with and supporting local networks and organisations contributed to building the capacity of the participants willing to continue efforts after project completion.
- The activity implementation space was transformed into a support tool for other serious issues in the local community.
- The participation of aggressed women ensured developing generous income-generating projects as a means for guaranteeing sustainability.

Contribution to Social Transformation

- The initiative exceeded expectations for its objective achievement by contributing to capacity building and reinforcing the capacity of the local community to confront violence. The importance of combating sexual violence, especially rape, has become a message conveyed by religious and local leaders in support of victims.
- The use of theatre represents a major element of success in breaking the silence about violence through participation and dialogue among the members of the local community, women and men alike.
- The centre has become a public space for participation and work within a women's network in the local community.
- A group of supporting men was created. They now participate in women's activities outside the camp and accept to work in women-led projects.



Lessons for Replication

- The interventions undertaken as part of the initiative present lessons about the importance of adopting innovative project implementation methods. In spite of the fact that confronting gender-based violence took place in the specific context of Darfur, it is possible to benefit from the initiative's success and implement its methods in other contexts:
 - Armed conflict: By adopting a two-way approach that provides direct services during the conflict, and works on capacity building and providing the basic infrastructure that can be maintained after the conflict (exit strategy)
 - Local community: Using essential contribution and participation methods for building trust, ensuring interventions, and meeting the needs of the local community.

