

ACFODE BUILDING PEACEFUL HOMES AND COMMUNITIES IN KISORO DISTRICT

Action For Development (ACFODE) is an indigenous, voluntary, non-governmental women's interest organization founded in 1985 with the aim of advocating for gender equality and equity in all spheres. The organization's mission is to empower women and influence legislation and policy for gender equality in Uganda.

Since 2009, ACFODE has been implementing a project focusing on the prevention and handling of cases of sexual violence against girls and women in Kisoro district, as well as enforcement of women's rights at national level. The project interventions are based on a baseline conducted by the organization in Kisoro and Pallisa districts, which highlights the high prevalence of defilement, rape and sexual harassment in the districts. The study reveals that 90.6% of acts of sexual violence are perpetrated by local community members, with 87% of the affected families being drawn into poverty as a result (ACFODE 2009).

An alarming 70% of women have experienced physical and/ or sexual violence in their lifetime (DHS 2006), and various studies find a strong statistical association between the socio-economic status of households and the risk of gender based violence, particularly intimate partner violence. ACFODE has therefore endeavored to maintain a strong working relationship with the leadership in Kisoro district to ensure the prioritization of the project and its activities in the local government's development agenda.

The fact that Sexualized Gender Based Violence (SGBV) ultimately obstructs participation in development, undermines the goals of development and hinders progress towards Uganda's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) prompted ACFODE to strategically design interventions aimed at empowering both men and women to form Combating Defilement, Rape and Sexual Harassment (CODERASH) committees within their communities that are charged with the responsibility of raising awareness about SGBV, and influencing their community members to shun the practice by reporting and following up on the reported cases.

THE DISTRICT INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS' PERSPECTIVE

My name is Arigye Odo, and I have been in partnership with ACFODE since 2010 when the project was introduced in the district. My passion for the fight against sexualized violence in Kisoro drove me to partner with ACFODE in order to effectively address

the alarming state of affairs in the district, which was characterized by increased high school dropout rates especially among female students. These girls were being forced to either marry older men, or relocate to towns to be exploited in bars and as prostitutes. I therefore welcomed ACFODE's innovative approach to the matter, which calls for the mobilizing of community members to become Community Facilitators (CFs) equipped with knowledge and skills to combat rape, defilement and sexual harassment in their respective communities on a voluntary basis.



SGBV trainings are targeted towards teachers, parents and pupils in order to reach a wide demographic with the message of peace and enlist different types of opinion leaders to become CFs. The CFs are trained on Uganda's laws regarding SGBV, and proper use of referral pathways in case of SGBV. Their presence ensures the existence of constant watch dogs within the communities.

We also initiate anti-SGBV clubs in schools to reach out to the youth with the message of peace. The clubs are regularly engaged in music, dance and drama competitions at both school and sub county levels, using arts to depict real-life situations of SGBV, thus enabling community members to identify the different forms of sexual violence, their causes, the nature of perpetrators, how to avoid them and how/where to report them.

Currently, through a strong partnership between ACFODE and local administrators such as school administrations, Sub County Chiefs, Community Development Officers and Sub County Chairpersons, the rate of sexualized violence and school drop outs in the communities we are operating in has tremendously dropped. The exposure we have given sexualized violence through seminars, workshops, sharing of experiences, community policing and music dance and drama competitions, has greatly influenced the down ward trend of cases of sexualized violence.

A COMMUNITY FACILITATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Robinah Nkurikiye

Ruth Nkurikiye is the Local Council 1 Chair Person of Kiburara Village, Gisorora Parish in Nyakabande Sub County. In 2010, through ACFODE's project, "Prevention and handling of cases of sexualized violence and enforcement of women's rights on the national level", she was engaged in a training workshop on Gender Based Violence (GBV), and prevention of sexualized violence and was commissioned as a Community Facilitator in a CODERASH committee.



As CFs, we are tasked to promote the rights of young girls and women and aid them in identifying ways of protecting themselves from sexualized violence, for instance; by not walking alone at night, avoiding alcohol and being cautious during events that occur at night.

Our CODERASH committee has been actively involved in the community since then; spreading the gospel to community members mainly through village groups, village meetings and churches. Our efforts have seen more women within the community become more knowledgeable about their human rights, and gaining confidence to even participate in politics and confidently air their views in public.

Personally as a Local Councilor, my capacity to perform my duties has been strengthened through this project because due to my advanced knowledge on sexualized violence, such as the existing laws on sexual violence, referral pathways and reporting procedures for reported cases within the police and health units, the locals are more confident in my ability to mediate their domestic problems and they always seek my counsel soon after a case has been identified in their midst.

As part of my role, I follow up the perpetrators to ensure that they implement the agreed terms. This role, which I perform voluntarily, has earned me names like 'Rwubaka' and 'Kibumbarugo', which simply translated mean 'Home builder' and 'Mediator.'

BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVE

Christine Dushimamana

Christine Dushimamana from Kiburara Village gained confidence and knowledge of SGBV from interaction with ACFODE's CFs when her local women's group hosted them during one of their regular meetings. In her absence, Christine's 16 year old daughter, who suffers from a mental disorder, was almost defiled by her 18 year old step brother.

Thankfully due to Christine's renewed awareness on SGBV response mechanisms, when her 11 year old daughter reported the situation to her, she immediately approached the scene, which the perpetrator had already fled and attempted to get a description of the assailant. *"I was alarmed because my daughter could not explain exactly what had happened due to her illness, so recalling our sessions with the CFs, I ensured that she did not take a bath or change her clothes in order to preserve evidence. I then contacted Robinah, who helped me to rush the girl to a health unit for emergency care."*



After a thorough examination and assurance from the doctor of her child's safety, Christine worked with Robinah to ensure that the assailant was given a stern warning. Robinah confronted the boy and his mother, firmly explained to them the nature of the crime, and its consequences in case there was a second attempt and warned the boy never to repeat his negative actions. Christine says, *"Am grateful to ACFODE for empowering our leaders to be able to help us to fight sexualized violence in our communities and I am thankful for the fact that the peaceful environment is enabling us as women to take part in developmental economic activities, such as creation of reusable sanitary pads for sale. This is boosting our families and communities."*

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