

Gender-Based Violence in Central African Republic

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Abstract—Gender-based violence has been defined as all forms of violence against women¹ and is almost and commonly culturally rooted. According to a study conducted by Mercy Corps in June-July 2009 on the matter in Central African Republic, men as well as most of women tacitly accept the hegemony of men. This unfortunately leads to all kinds of abuses that put women under pressure and servitude. As result, women are morally, psychologically and physically affected throughout their lives, from the cradle to the grave, and totally kept away from contributing to the economic livelihood of their families. Our research aims at drawing attentions on the need to promote in all the country women's rights and gender equality as keys to prevent violence. It depicts reasons of women's behindhand as first cultural, with the ambiguity of central African people's approach to good and bad punishment. It then found that the perpetuation of women's lower condition is educational because of an outdated or a lack of girls' education policy. Consequently the study suggests a door-to-door sensitization of all central African social strata, the promotion of girls' schooling and the strengthening of women protection laws.

Index Terms—Culture, gender-based violence, human rights, women.

I. INTRODUCTION

The sustainable and harmonious development is a continuous process, and the needs of men and women must be met through greater access to education, training, employment, science and technology for all stakeholders of a company. In April 2000, the World Education Forum held in Dakar emphasized the urgency of ensuring education for girls and women as one of the key elements for the elimination of poverty². That is to say that access to education, training, science and technology can bring forth the development of a nation³. Indeed, education for all and adequate training are empowered to improve the lives of individuals and communities, especially the most vulnerable groups.

The educational system in general and education in particular are a real concern of the government. Indeed, the indicators show persistence in inequality between boys and girls every year.

In higher education, girls are three to four times less than boys and only 2% of girls complete their degree in medicine. 73% of students in core 2 and 90.1% of teachers would be

implicated in acts of sexual violence within the institution and on the way to school especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. Economically, women and girls face many challenges that predispose them to the informal sector. On the social and cultural basis, tradition and custom prevent women from having the right information about their rights and opportunities of access to jobs and positions of power, especially for elected office.

Due to unfavorable economic environment for business and unemployment as well, the weak private sector has limited the creation of jobs for women and girls.

The low level of education and training hinders employment opportunities for women and girls; and even in the case where they are trained, inadequate training limits their access to the labor market.

Faced with these challenges, the Government of Central African Republic has made considerable efforts by mainstreaming gender⁴ in national legal instruments and policies and programs⁵.

The commonly accepted notion of gender dictates that women should submit to their husbands, as most men attribute to themselves the title of head of household with the right, if not responsibility, to "correct" their wives.

The result is a high rate of violence, with 27% of women on the four areas covered by the study admitted having experienced physical violence during the past year, 33% of women admitting normally being excluded from financial decisions in their household; and one in seven signaling having suffered sexual violence, 6% of the total signaling being raped by one foreigner, and 12% having been forced to have sexual intercourse by their husbands.

Other violations of women's rights are also widespread, including violations of human inheritance, widowhood practices, the desertion, female circumcision and early marriage or forced.

The study found that attitudes and beliefs of the population with respect to violence against women is the main factor that perpetuates violence. Over 50% of the population surveyed said it is acceptable to use violence against women in certain circumstances, although 90% of respondents of both gender male and female indicated that beating a woman was "bad." This disparity between what the respondents considered "bad" and what they considered "acceptable" is rooted in cultural beliefs that men have the right and responsibility to discipline their wives. Many more women than men - 71%

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¹ Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993

² Gender mainstreaming in the strategy paper poverty reduction

³ Adoption in 2005 of a national policy document on fairness and equality in access to training, employment and occupation.

⁴ Adoption in December 2004 a new constitution which reaffirms the equality of gender and that includes the quotas system for women.

⁵ Implementation of a sectoral committee "gender equality and poverty reduction" responsible for developing strategies in programs in gender led by the ministry of social affairs, national solidarity and family. Implementation of local points gender in almost all ministries, to the effect of ensuring the effective consideration of the principle of equality and equity in programs and projects.

against 33% - thought it was acceptable to use violence against women when they have not done their housework properly. Finally, the study interviewed people about the habit of seeking services in cases of abuse of rights. Most men and women interviewed see domestic violence as an internal family matter, and seek the assistance of local authorities or the police only in cases of rape.

Violence against women is almost common in cultures where gender roles are strictly defined and the concept of masculinity is linked to dominance, honor and endurance. Girls and women internalize low value which they earned from the society, which then contributes to an unequal power relationship in the private and public spheres. To conduct this study, I propose to examine the laws protecting the rights of women and their application to cases of gender based violence in Central African Republic.

II. LAWS PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

A. *The International Law*

There are various documents that develop human rights in international law. The basic document for human rights is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶. The Declaration and the obligations contained therein were adopted by the Central African Republic government and other UN Member States. International laws have been created specifically to protect the rights of women and protect women against sex discrimination. In particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly⁷ and signed by the Central African Republic government.

B. *Regional Laws*

Several African countries have adopted regional instruments in addition to international laws to further emphasize their commitment to human rights. The commitments made at the regional level in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere in the whole world emphasize the importance and universality of human rights.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples represents the commitment of African countries for the protection of human rights in Africa. The Central African Republic has renewed its commitment and responsibility to protect human rights when it ratified the Charter in 1986.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women reinforces the importance of women's rights in the continent and urges the countries parties to the Protocol to protect those rights. It takes into account the issue of culture and promotes the right of women to live in a positive cultural context and ensuring women's participation at all levels of authority associated with the cultural sector. The Central African Republic has expressed its commitment (and willingness to follow the steps leading to ratification) when it signed the Protocol in 2008.

⁶ International Carta magna, ratified by United Nations Organization in December 1948.

⁷ 18 December 1979.

C. *The Central African Republic Law*

Through these three laws, many forms of violence against women are outlawed, and there are penalties for those who commit these acts. Women can take legal action to seek enforcement of the Central African law.

III. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Since its independence, the Central African Republic has experienced periods of political instability followed with disastrous consequences on the development and well-being of the population. The Central African women are the main victims of political and economic difficulties experienced in the country. The gender inequality is striking: the lack of access to health services, educational and social base is a daily reality for the majority of Central African women. Feminized poverty and violence against women is widespread throughout the country. The marginalization of women and minority groups is obvious, limiting their ability to voice their needs in society, at the family level to national level.

Social practices, cultural, legal and policy in the country limit the opportunities for women to participate in public life of the country and limit their economic opportunities. These barriers include lack of education, lack of access to credit, limited knowledge of commerce and other vocations, and lack of joint initiatives to make their voices heard. Civil society is extremely limited and low capacity of most associations do not have clearly defined organizational structures, no clear vision and mission, and do not have the knowledge necessary for planning and implementation of development actions. In addition, the Central African women lack of clear leaders in government and civil society to act as spokesman for the needs of women in the country.

IV. THE REFERENCE SYSTEM OF CASES OF VIOLENCE

To better support victims of violence, a referral system should be implemented. This contribution covers the following areas:

A. *Medical Assistance*

It is important to discuss with the victim of an emergency medical care to undergo a consultation, examination and treatment on HIV AIDS, sexually transmitted infections STIs and suturing wounds.

B. *Psychosocial Assistance*

Following a traumatic event, the victim develops psychiatric disorders and feelings of individuals. His psyche is injured or traumatized. The service orientation of psychosocial support should be done. If patient develops severe mental disorders, a specialized management should be considered. Using a trained professional like a doctor, a psychologist is essential.

C. *Legal Assistance*

Use physical force or authority to harm someone is punishable by the law of Central African Republic. If a

victim of violence has a complaint, he must indicate the steps to follow to move towards justice without taking a position.

D. Socio-E

The abused person is in a socio-economic difficulty. It is necessary to help him find his socio-economic integration through concrete actions such as: - Find studies dropped if the victim is a student or scholar; - Give the victim transportation costs, travel to the place of medical care or other assistance and the costs for treatment; - Build up mutual understanding and trust between the victim and the rest of his family members and / or the community. In conclusion, all these different forms of assistance are to support and contribute to the social reintegration of a victim of violence based on gender. Since the survivors of gender based violence have multiple needs, it is therefore essential to ensure coordination between different service providers to respond to their needs.

V. PREVENTION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The realization of women rights in Central African Republic requires many interventions at different levels. First, women must be educated to understand their rights and begin to claim them. Second, men must change their beliefs and values that sustain and generate violence, and should understand the value and contribution of women in the development of households and communities.

Increasing awareness on the rights of women and changing belief systems leading to violence are a critical first step in preventing violence. In addition, it is important that when women begin to understand their rights and to recognize that these rights have been violated, they have access to fair and effective judicial structures to claim and defend successfully. Victims who choose to file a complaint of their cases should have access to legal advice and representation cheaply, and often need psychosocial support to help their rehabilitation. In addition, local law enforcement and justice must understand and fulfill their responsibilities in protecting women's rights and justice effectively through a coordinated response. Thus, an important next step in the effort to promote and protect women's rights is to ensure that women have access to legal structures for their rights and that these institutions become more open to better serve victims women's needs.

It is used for an immediate response to violence to reduce negative consequences, such as HIV or sexually transmitted diseases. The comprehensive prevention involves multiple actors and multiple actions. It should include governmental actors sectors of education, health, military, security forces, justice, and all organizations and community members. Some prevention efforts require the cooperation of multiple actors.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

It would be pretentious to affirm that the laws protecting the women are completely effective or are not. In fact, laws have a history which renders service since their dedication to the International Community and in Central African Republic. The law as a legal instrument can know (and it is the case

here) certain degradation with the effect of time like evolution of the world. Accordingly, we allow ourselves to suggest a harmonization on the level of the legal mode of protection. It is then necessary to reinforce the punishment of the infringements made on the women in order to dissuade the possible delinquents.

Standards of human rights must be brought up to the knowledge of peoples. Awareness campaigns for the general population must be conducted in all walks. These campaigns can be achieved through organizing seminars, symposium and open days on issues relating to human rights and women right in particular. While the mercy corps has already done an outstanding job with regard to the dissemination of the rules of international humanitarian law, these efforts must be doubled. All NGOs must participate in the dissemination of fundamental rules of human rights in Central African Republic. The national daily must actively participate in this outreach.

Therefore, government needs to focus on effective promotion of peace and the respect of women rights in the community. This promotion requires the consideration of the people's demands, the pursuit of their well-being as well as the establishment of an effective democratic regime in view of ensuring the social, civil and political rights and encourages women to go far in studies to control their rights.

VII. CONCLUSION

The activities of women's rights were very successful, especially when conducted in tandem with the Access to Justice Program to give women the opportunity to defend their rights in case of violation. However, men's attitudes continue to hinder the rights of women in the communities. Future actions should focus primarily on changing the behavior of men to change gender norms and attitudes that continue to tolerate violence.

The approaches include the development strategies of women's economic opportunities (especially in technical trade training or access savings and credit) with training on women's rights allowing women to claim their many rights. Poverty is a pervasive reality in Central African Republic, which prevents women from claiming their rights.

Similarly, economic development activities targeting men may be a good entry point to start training on gender concepts, masculinity, and women's rights, ensuring the investment of men in program activities.

Strategies for the networking of local women, capacity building in leadership and advocacy, as well as solutions to encourage women's participation in the process of local decision-making should be encouraged. For now, there is no women's association in the country with the ability and knowledge to be the spokesman and advocacy tool for women's needs. This must be encouraged both locally and nationally, to ensure that women's voices are heard in the Central African Republic.

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