

Violence against women and girls – a development issue: Governments and all stakeholders must act now!

New York, 6th March 2013

ACORD's first CSW57 event on 6 March "Challenging and Preventing Hidden War Crimes" with film screening and panel debate was a smashing success. The event attracted a record attendance of 110 participants (20 men and 90 women) and there were lively discussions.

The panel discussions kicked off by Dutch government, UN and ACORD panellists and subsequent comments by participants centred on the implementation of laws on violence against women (VAW), working with perpetrators such as child soldiers and men in uniform as ambassadors against violence, changing mind-sets, especially of men and boys, and budgeting or putting a cost on violence against women in a bid to illustrate its negative socio-economic impact.



Photo: ACORD's Salina Sanou

The first panellist, Salina Sanou, ACORD's Head of policy and advocacy, gave an initial introduction to the documentary film "Hidden War Crimes" which was screened. She explained that the film was a result of ACORD's work in the Great Lakes Region funded by the Dutch government's MDG3 Fund. While it was filmed in Uganda and Kenya, it highlights issues that represent situations experienced by women in the Great Lakes region as a whole and beyond.

Sanou noted that the role of the governments in acting on VAW is very minimal and civil society can no longer wait for government to act. She also stressed that governments should not be applauded at all for their role in preventing and eradicating VAW, because they lack the political will to do so.

"While there are good laws in most countries for tackling violence against women, the gap lies in their implementation" Salina Sanou, ACORD

Sanou emphasized the central role of women as key actors in the change process to stop all forms of violence, since they are living the bitter experiences. "Women need to come out and act since violence hurts them. They need to take their lives in their hands," she said to the audience in attendance at the United Nations Church Centre in New York.



Photo: Participants at 6th March event by ACORD

Salina Sanou also emphasized the fact that more work still needs to be done to change the mind-set of men, so as to bring them to the centre stage of preventing VAW. Men are mostly the perpetrators. Approaches such as 'Men talking to Men' and 'masculinity attributes and values' are therefore being employed by ACORD and its partners to adequately address VAW tackling its root causes. She further highlighted that influencing school curricula is another area that ACORD uses as a

vehicle to promote and encourage positive gender concepts and respect for women from an early age.

Next out was Irma van Dueren, Head Gender Division, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Van Dueren emphasized the need to address and break the silence around gender based violence in spite of the laws in place and commitments by governments.

“Sexual violence is not any other crime - it should be treated as a unique problem that has to be given serious attention”, stated Irma van Dueren.

She further explained the role of the Netherlands government through the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in addressing some of the unique aspects of sexual violence including;

- Gender sensitization sessions for the legal sector to strengthen its understanding of the manifestations of sexual violence in different contexts and how to tackle them
- Training for the security sector including the peacekeeping missions to emphasize the importance of understanding the consequences of their actions and decisions on women and girls.

Van Dueren emphasized the need for establishing mechanisms for early warning, as a mean to tackle subsequent cases of violence. “It is disappointing that new cases of violence are arising in areas like Syria and Egypt, yet a lot is already being done to prevent violence”, she noted.

Van Dueren further commented on the need for evidence and data for reading the signs of violence against women in various situations in order to effectively and timely address them.



Ngoné Diop, Chief Gender and Women in Development, African Centre for Gender and Social Development and an ACORD Board member, talked to the issue of influencing pro-women policy and gender budgeting.

Photo: Panellists Ngoné Diop from the UN and Irma van Dueren, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“The film is living evidence that violence affects not only women, due to the inequality trap, but entire families and communities. **The important question having viewed it (the film) is; “What do we do?”** How can we, actors, contextualise and tackle violence against women in a comprehensive manner, she asked.

In addressing violence against women, Ngoné highlighted three critical aspects of violence; protection, prevention and empowerment. She further noted that women and girls victims of violence need support as an entitlement and the responsibility falls on all actors.

“Women need support, but they are not begging. They need support in order to build their capacity to face different challenges, to act for change and that is why we are here,” said Ngoné Diop.

She further explained that effective change on violence against women will depend on a thorough analysis of the underlying factors that fuel violence and understanding the traditional conceptual framework. “Using the human rights framework which is wonderful, has helped achieving a lot, but we need to combine it with the political and economic spheres by focusing on violence against women as a development issue that needs to be budgeted for”.

Moving forward Ngoné Diop emphasized the need for conceptualising violence against women as a development issue in order to cause governments to act. **“Violence has socio- economic cost implications and this is a strong message that needs to be brought to the centre of economic transformation”.**

The subsequent discussion and debate with participants culminated in the following main comments and recommendations:

- Change men’s mindset and attitude on considering women as subordinates
- Recommendation on emancipation through education of both boys and girls on respect and responsibility through training of the young generation to change society.
- Need for guidance to training institutes particularly those training women leaders what needs to inform their curriculum- advocate for curriculum change.
- CSOs have to push governments to do more around genderbased violence. Governments should be shown the

reality of what is happening to women while they sit back and reluctantly deal with situations of conflict.



Photo: Dennis Nduhura, ACORD Uganda Country Director moderated the discussion



Photos: Lively debate at ACORD’s side event on Hidden War Crimes



The priority theme for the 57th Commission on the Status of Women is Prevention and Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women. ACORD’s engagement in CSW57 is guided by the priorities set in its strategic plan 2011-2015. The main purpose of the engagement is to: Build knowledge on positive gender relations and effective ways of addressing gender inequalities with a view to improving women’s status, development and influence.

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