Across Africa, women human rights defenders and other activists who are actively involved in promoting women’s rights in the areas of property rights, abuse, reproductive rights and sexual rights pose a challenge to tradition, culture, custom and religious practices. This makes their work in the protection and promotion of women’s rights complex and difficult often putting themselves at risk of being detested by their communities for promoting ‘Western’ or ‘alien’ cultures, and seen as responsible for the break-up of families.

Jane Rose Ondur, a domestic violence survivor and chair of Kirewa Women’s Forum women activists says; ‘Luckily enough we were not surprised when we started our CBO in our community. We had been trained by MIFUMI, the best women human rights organisation in the land and we were prepared for all the consequences.

I got called the name ‘onyeko-mon’—women Spoiler when we first started but that did not deter me because we knew the issues we were addressing were closely intertwined with our cultures that defined a woman, her roles and place in the community.

What we did was to devise strategies to effectively reach our community without looking like the outsider imposing new ideas or way of life to our communities. The advantage we had was that we were not outsiders but a part of this community. We spoke the same language and knew the issues affecting us as women because we talked about them at the well and in our gardens. We trusted each other.

We also clearly understood the other general factors affecting our communities. Our target group had been clearly defined but in order to help them, the community in which they live had to realize that there was a problem that needed everybody’s attention.

Today we are a respected community based organization working with Men and boys, and women and girls to as community watchdogs to offer solutions, alternatives and engaging in dialogue to prevent violence against women in our communities.

The change in attitudes has not been achieved 100 percent but we are getting there because we know change is a gradual process. At this stage what I see is so far, so very good.
PROVING MY TRAINER RIGHT

‘Don’t be in such a rush. Sex is not for entertainment. It should be a commitment. Be smart and save yourself for marriage.’

Our gender trainer had made us recite these same lines aloud each day after the training. They were imprinted in my brain like some rhyme. Little did I know some day they would scare off a young man who wanted to force me into a sexual relationship.

The karate and gender training classes had transformed me into a confident, smart and helpful girl in my village and school. When I joined secondary school I transferred the skills I had acquired to my new school. I did not get much support from the school administration at first. They did not give me audience each time I requested to meet with them about the importance of this sport.

The boys laughed out loud and the girls thought I was a crazy girl who had watched too many movies. The few members who joined were marvelled at the discipline of the sport and quickly picked interest. Slowly our numbers started to grow. I made all the girls recite out aloud the ‘true love slogan’ (like my trainer called it) before we started each session.

One particular night after night prep, as my friend and I walked back to the dormitory, a boy approached me from the back and reached for my breasts saying he loved me.

My trainer’s voice spoke these words through my lips as my self defence skills took control of my limbs.

**DON’T—BE—IN— SUCH— A RUSH. SEX--- IS ---NOT ---FOR--- ENTERTAINMENT. IT ---SHOULD ---BE --- A COMMITMENT. BE--- SMART ---AND--- SAVE --- YOURSELF ---FOR ---MARRIAGE!**

I had him pinned to the ground in under a minute. That night the head teacher was made aware of the instance and the next day during morning parade, he announced that the school administration had decided to recognise karate as one of the extracurricular activities in the school and every girl in the school could join.

Today there are 25 girls in the Sure Start club in my school.

Akidweng Karren

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GBV PREVENTION NETWORK, trains Africa on VAW communication Material

A five day workshop on developing effective communication material organised and facilitated by Gender Based Violence (GBV) Prevention Network and Raising Voices gathered participants from over 10 countries in and out of Africa.

The participants were members of the GBV Prevention network in the East, Horn and Southern Africa whose individual organisations are addressing various forms of GBV and Violence Against Women (VAW).

The training workshop that run from the 11-15 of May 2011 was aimed at building among members core competencies necessary for developing and using communication materials effectively to Prevent of VAW.

At the end of the training period, participants were not only fully equipped with skills in developing effective, positive communication materials for VAW prevention; they participated in developing their first informed communication materials in groups that will be used as tools in their various countries to enhance prevention programs and activism.

With the analysis wheel, the team was able to develop the DOs and DON'Ts list and checklist for VAW communication materials.

The analysis wheel proved to be of importance to all participants who committed to use it as a yardstick to check how effectively their material would communicate to their target groups or communities.

Even amidst the demonstrations and riots over fuel and food crisis in the city, the facilitators managed to treat participants to the beautiful sights and sounds of Uganda and later a quiet send off dinner.

Donna Tara Paricia and Mary Wafuoyoo, who represented MIFUMI at the training, conclusively put it that for communication material to be effective and cause people to want to do something about what they see, the community/ target group should relate with it.
Finding help for my father

Atubo

You do not know the adverse negative effects of polygamy until you have lived in or are a part of one. Looking back now I laugh at the irony in it all.

While the villagers admired and respected my father for having many wives and children, he was actually having trouble living up to it.

That is why I was not surprised when I went to show him with my excellent Primary Leaving Examination results that qualified me to join secondary school; instead of patting me on the back like any proud father, he came at me wielding a machete and screaming like a mad man.

His words were clear; ‘Get out my face you bastard, go ask your mother to show you your true father who will see you through secondary school. All my wives have started cheating on me and bringing me bastards to take care of. How sure am I you are all my children?’

Get out of my face before I send you to an early grave!’

My friends advised me never to talk to him in future if I became an influential person. I thought so too.

My father had accumulated a few assets over time that made him feel rich enough to marry one wife after another.

The women took care of him and made him feel like the king. By then the pressures of raising children in today’s world had not crossed his path. He lived large and flaunted his wives to all the villagers. When the children came in, the demands of the women who were all housewives increased. As the children increased in number and others grew older, so did their individual demands. He was left with nothing to show off.

Some of his wives (including my mother) had left for their maiden homes because he had become too violent to them. Those who stayed had to face it all in whatever form.

I was mad at my own father for denying me but then I started to feel sorry for him and kind of understood why he behaved the way he did. I knew my father needed help otherwise the next time he would not just be wielding a machete but actually chopping someone to death. I needed someone to talk to. So I visited the MIFUMI Men’s Movement. The gentlemen said they would organise to come and talk to my father.

A community meeting was organised and I confirmed that day that my father’s aggressive behaviour had a lot to do with the fact that he could no longer provide for himself and his family, he feared losing his status in the community and all these were accompanied by regrets of having such a large family. He was a disturbed man who if help did not come immediately he would be the one headed to an early grave.

My father was cautioned about his aggressive behaviour, he was asked by the community to deal with the fact that the children will not go away but instead stop having more. He was also advised to find ways of supporting his family. One community member suggested he and his family could start farming and he should let his wives and older children plant produce. He was offered counselling services to enable him adjust to his situation.

My father listened and took on the advice like a man. He apportioned me a piece of land on which I am currently growing tomatoes to raise my fees for secondary school.

My name is Atubo and this is my story.
Mifumi Primary School will for the first time represent Tororo District and participate in the Uganda National Junior Athletics’ Championships in Kabaroole, Uganda. They were the overall winners in the recent concluded Kirewa sub-county Athletics championship.

In the letter addressed to the headmaster of the school, the championship is slated to take place in Kabaroole from 25th April -1st May 2011. The pupils, parents and school administration of Mifumi Primary School were very delighted to receive the news of their participation. They eagerly wait to represent Uganda at the junior East Africa competition.

The students who qualified for the Nationals are Gertrude Akoth, Lucy Athieno and Tito Okoth.

Tito Okoth a primary six student of Mifumi P/S is the only boy who qualified for the National championships. “I am very happy for the chance given to me and hope to do better than I did at the sub-county.” He also added that his success did not come easily. “I had to do a lot of training that is why I emerged among the winners”. Okoth is to take part in the 1500meters race.

Lucy Athieno, a primary five pupil was recognised as the best at the district competitions. Lucy qualified to represent Tororo in the Junior National Athletics’ competition at 400 meters (one lap).

Visibly excited Gertrude Akoth says they emerged best because of the effort girls put into the competition for the district competitions. She attributed their success to the Sure Start project that trains girls in karate which helped build their confidence and determination to become winners.

Asked how she was preparing for the nationals, she said; “I will be doing a lot of training so that I emerge winner that day in the 4 by 400 meters race.

Mr. Bernard Onyango, the proud Head Teacher of the school disclosed that; “Two years ago Mifumi Primary School was recognized as the best model sports schools in Tororo district, going for the nationals indicates progress. I was requested by the parents to escort these pupils to Kabaroole. This is not just because I am a headmaster but also trusted. Special thanks go to MIFUMI Uganda for the support and facilitations it renders to the school in terms of clothing, food, scholastic materials, and finances among others”.