Combating Violence Against Women

Gender violence and UNESCO role in the establishment of National Gender Research and Documentation Centre in Tanzania

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Background to the Problem
Tanzania like other countries in the Great Lakes Region experiences violence against women especially in rural areas. It is one of the countries whereby majority of women experience extremely patriarchal practices; whereby men control decision making positions and processes in the public, community and at family level. In Tanzania, most women engage in agriculture or petty businesses and more often they bear the burden of raring children, paying children’s school fees, uniforms and sometimes feed the entire family. With limited resources accruing out of their economic activities and burden of taking care of children women continue to live in a vicious cycle of absolute poverty. In most cases, family poverty force adolescent girls to enter into early sexual relationships and thus creating and perpetuating violent relationships and poverty.

Women in Tanzania experience sexual, physical, emotional and psychological violence in the form of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early/forced marriages, denial to education, socio-economic discrimination, social exclusion, and spouse inheritance. Factors that encourage violent practices include; traditional
laws, parental attitudes to family care, teachers attitudes, and historical imbalances between men and women. Reasons for FGM include jealous, historical and cultural beliefs that there is no equality between men and women as far as sexuality is concerned. Violence against women can also be caused by women giving birth to single sex (especially girls), and polygamous environment. Consequences for this are; deterioration on the status of women and in some cases serious psychologically stress. Other consequences are social exclusion, transmission of diseases, wounds, deaths, and poverty.

To change the violent environment upon which women find themselves is a process; change happen with time through sensitization and awareness creation, increased positive social interactions; and involvement of all stakeholders all over the country. The change process may also involve counseling for men and women, women empowerment, provision of justice, change in socialization process and campaigns against discriminative traditional and cultural practices. In order to realize this, there is a need to have adequate information, capacity building and psychological assistance. The government intends to address this problem through; increased budgetary allocation to activities directed and changing peoples’ mindset on gender issues, gender mainstreaming activities and awareness creation.

To achieve sustainable peace and create a safe environment for women it is important that the government undertake activities that protects women against domestic and Gender Based Violence (GBV); such as sexual harassment, family violence and rape. The pertaining cultural patterns in some society in Tanzania have made women, girls and youth vulnerable to violence, gender inequalities, which sometimes lead to internally displaced persons. Tanzania has been a home to millions of women who have limited resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment.

In view to this situation, there have been efforts to find out the magnitude and impact of gender based violence particularly violence against women and children in Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar. Initially the Ministry had commissioned the National Bureau of Statistics to conduct an in-depth study in the country. The study was expected to facilitate the understanding of the nature and effects of violence against women in the country. Specific objectives of the study were to:

• Determine various types of violence against women in the country;
• Analyze the causes of gender based violence with specific emphasis to women, the elderly, children and albinos;
• Analyze the health, physical, economic and other social effects of violence against women; and,
• Formulate strategies and interventions for addressing (violence against women) the problem.

The idea behind the survey is to come up with national variations of the problem which will facilitate the preparation of national specific interventions for addressing gender problems in Tanzania.

Apart from the aforesaid research initiatives, the UNESCO National Commission and various non-governmental organizations have carried out research on Gender Based Violence particularly in areas where there are...
frequent violence incidences. These areas are: Kagera, Mara, Mwanza, and Shinyanga.

Challenges in addressing gender violence in Tanzania
- Inadequate resources to carry out research in specialized areas.
- The impact of globalization which increases inequalities in access to resources, information and power among communities, leading to increased levels of gender based violence and inequality.
- The link between violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly in conflict situations where women are subjected to rapes.

Government initiatives to eradicate gender violence in Tanzania
A number of human rights instruments in Tanzania have been adopted that oblige state parties to take measures necessary to eliminate gender based violence. Among them are the Tanzania Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) and Tanzania Lawyers Association (TAWLA) to mention a few. International initiatives include; the United Nations Conventions on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-1979). In 1993 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women which further define this phenomenon and recommend measures to be taken to combat it.

A meeting for Legal and Technical Experts of the Great lakes Region in charge of Women Gender and Peace Building was held from 16th - 19th/02/2010 in Arusha, Tanzania. The meeting was jointly organized by the government of Tanzania (Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children in collaboration with UNESCO UNIFEM and UNFPA). During the closing ceremony, the UNESCO representative from Cluster office, reaffirmed UNESCO’S commitment to support the government of Tanzania through the UN system.

The country has taken various measures to prevent violence against women and children. Such measures include:-
- Formulation of the Poverty Eradication Strategy and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty with the aim of giving guidance to stakeholders in poverty eradication. It is believed that, if poverty is eradicated, there will be a reduction of violence at the family level.
- Formulation and adoption of Women and Gender Development Policy of (2000) which paved the way towards eradication of violence against women.
- Review and amendment of discriminatory legislation such as Special Provisions Act of 1998, which aims at safeguarding the dignity and integrity of women and children. In addition, The Land Act No 4 and 5 of 1999 are also measures that have been taken to address issues of violence against women and children. The laws provide equal rights to land ownership for both men and women.
- Creation of a conducive environment to NGOs fighting violence against women and children by facilitating their establishment through registration.
- Training of law enforcers such as members of the Police Force, Magistrates, Community Development workers and Media Personnel on how to combat violence against women and children.
- Sensitization of the public through media, seminars, workshops, community theatre, peer groups and drama on the need to fight gender based violence.
- The launching of Say No to Violence against Women and Children. The campaign was launched by the President of United Republic of Tanzania Hon. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete; on 24th May 2008. Following the launching, the campaign is still going on all over the country.
- The National Plan of Action for Prevention and Eradication of Violence against
Women and Children (2001-2015) has been developed. The Plan of Action provides actions to be taken by different Stakeholders in that regard.

Apart from National initiatives, Tanzania is collaborating with other countries in the Great Lakes Region to address the problems of gender based violence. During one of the regional meeting held in Mombasa in 2009, to address the problem, it was agreed that violence against women still persists in most countries and gender discrimination is still a reality in most families.

During the Mombasa meeting, it was observed that, laws to protect rights of women against abuse are in place but the problem is linked to customary laws. There are major weaknesses in the system that lead to persistence in violence against women, these include; lack of awareness, lack of proper coordination, overburden on part of the police, and weak research. Mr. Pierre Sane, the UNESCO Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences, reiterates that poverty and culture are challenges that can be confronted through positive interventions since culture is not static and poverty can be alleviated. It was further observed that, violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon and there is need to investigate through empirical research the root causes of violence.

Furthermore, the Government of Tanzania has signed the Protocol on the Protection and Prevention of Sexual Violence on Women and children in the Great Lakes Member States, (2006) whereby, Member States are directed to form National Committees on Violence against Women and Children. In this regard there is need to harmonize the activities to be implemented under the Great Lakes Region Protocol into the existing National Plan of Action to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women and Children.

Regional and National Gender Research and Documentation Centre

UNESCO notes that, there is still a social, political and cultural instability in the Great Lakes Region. Therefore, women need to be empowered and to be free to choose their own destiny. UNESCO has therefore assisted member states of the Great Lakes Region to establish a Regional Gender Research and Documentation Centre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a network of such centres in all participating countries including Tanzania. As part of the implementation of this programme UNESCO, through the National Commission of the United Republic of Tanzania in encouraging the establishment of the National Centre so that it can contribute in sharing gender data from public and private researchers.

With the assistance of UNESCO Tanzania is planning to establish such as Centre in Tengeru in Arusha region. This will be a National Centre which will document and disseminate Tanzania gender data and information to all stakeholders and share it with the regional and other similar national centres in other participating countries. The Centre will facilitate access to data, and provide technical assistance through capacity building in gender research and will make sure that research findings are disseminated and used widely to address the problem of gender violence. The Centre will also work jointly with all other partners and stakeholders involved in gender research and activities in the country. For instance, it will work in partnership with the media to create awareness to the public, and ensure that rural women are not left out in any interventions directed at promoting peace justice and understanding and combating gender violence.