



YAW Report

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Shalom Centre for Counselling and Development (SCCoDev), is a registered NGO in Kenya that is creating and holding trusted and transformed spaces for healing and reconciliation, and promotion of sustainable livelihoods in affected communities.

Healing Circle Meeting for Young Affected Women

Shalom Centre for Counselling and Development (SCCoDev) held a 5-day healing circle meeting for young affected women in Chelebei, Chongeiwo location in Mt. Elgon from 25-29 October, 2021. These women were identified and mobilized by a peace mother and a member of the local peace committee. A total of 18 accepted to attend.

How were they affected?

During the 2006-2008 violent conflict in Mt. Elgon brought about by unfair allocation and distribution of land in the Chepyuk settlement scheme, these young women were by then either young school going girls or just married though at a tender age. Almost all were tortured and repeatedly gang-raped by the militia. Some of the militia members were their own relatives.

One of them recounted how she was tortured and raped at the age of eight. Another who at that time was married with a 2-month old child, was captured with others while working in the farm as casual labourers, forced to have sex with the militia members and cook for them. When she was later released, her husband feared that she might be HIV-positive. It was only when she tested negative that her relationship with the husband slightly improved. Almost a similar case was another one who the militia forced her have their home as a militia camp. She was repeatedly tortured, gang-raped and threatened to be killed if she ever spoke up. Her husband was forced to become a member of the militia. After the conflict, he abandoned her claiming that she is HIV positive. She resulted to brewing and drinking chang'aa (a local brew) to make ends meet and forget the traumatic past. She was left with six children and has sired an additional two from other frustrating relationships.

There was also one who was forced to become a wife for the militia. She was continuously raped and lashed by the militia. When the military operation came to quell the violence, she got married to one of the soldiers in the hope that her pain will go. But this was not the case. The soldier turned to be abusive threatening to blow her with his gun since she was unable to sire children for him. When an opportunity came, she escaped back home. She is unable to sire children and bleeds perennially. She continues to be stigmatized because of this and is not at peace staying at the parents' home.

Among these women, there was one who looked lost in her world. The first words she spoke were about her father's disappearance during this conflict. Her father was captured and his whereabouts is not known even up to today. Yet another was raped together with her mother and grandmother who continues to bleed even up to today. She even witnessed her sister being raped and thrown to maize plantation. Though she survived, she went insane and nobody knows where exactly she is. Finally there was one who was raped and became pregnant. She gave birth to a girl who is with her mother. She is unable to live with and raise her since she is now married with two children and fears that her husband (who was orphaned and has no land to build a home) may not accept her.

Safe and Trusted Space for Trauma Awareness and Healing

The five-day healing circle meeting was able to create and hold trusted and safe spaces for



these women to become aware of their dark traumatizing past, confront and process it as they embark on their healing journey.

The first day was spent in creating a trusted space. The women were requested to introduce themselves, give the meaning of their family names, and share something good and unique about themselves and their expectations. The circle holders introduced themselves, SCCoDev and the purpose of bringing them together. The women themselves laid the ground rules and shared out roles for the smooth running of the circle meeting. Emphasis was laid on confidentiality (all that is shared remains within the circle) and respecting each other. It was also explained the importance of sitting in a circle. The first day turned out to be exciting and the women were quite vibrant.

Starting on the second day, every morning session the women were given space for self-reflection in a meditative silence. The lead circle holder posed different reflection questions such as how are you feeling today, what touched you most in the previous day, how is your mind, body and soul. Gradually the women gained confidence and started sharing about themselves, what they went through and how each day of the healing circle meeting helped them recover. Many mourned and grieved and they felt relieved.

The mid-morning and afternoon sessions were spent in creating awareness about trauma, its impact and coping strategies using portraits and appropriate stories using images they can understand easily. The women were able to strongly identify themselves with the portraits of the full basket and the torn basket in their journey of life. Their life before the conflict was like the full basket. Their life during and after the violent conflict was like the torn basket. A key coping strategy for these women was forgiveness – “I have forgiven the ones who did this to me. Before I didn’t want to greet them and their relatives but now I will go and greet them whenever we meet.”

Rekindling Hope

At the end of the five days, there was light at the end of the tunnel for many of these women. For instance, the married woman who was captured while working in a farm with others as casual laborers felt transformed – emotionally and mentally. She felt free and able to interact positively with her husband and children compared to the past especially how she treated her husband (reservedly and with little trust) because of what she went through. The young woman who is unable to sire children felt strong and confident enough to move on while accepting her condition.

These young affected women unanimously agreed to form a group of young peace mothers to support each other heal and better their lives. They were divided into three smaller groups and each allocated a peace mother as a mentor. This was well received.

At the close of the meeting these young women celebrated, singing with great joy demonstrating how transforming the healing circle meeting was. They appreciated and gifted the circle holders from SCCoDev who journeyed with them.

Call for Support

Holding a healing circle meeting for young affected women in this area was indeed timely considering the fact that elections are just about. Each coming election rekindles fear and anxiety in them looking at what they went through. Some even wish that the earth opens up and swallows them.



The healing circle meeting was the first of the kind as this group tends to be forgotten or left out. It was also unique as most of these young affected women reside where the militia camp was set-up.

We were able only to reach to 18 but there are still many more of them out there who lived either where the militia camps were or military camps and are in need of healing. We make an urgent appeal for financial support to reach to them. Further, we would need to sensitively reach out to their perpetrators who live with them and have a healing circle with them and after hold community reconciliation.

Some of these women need medical attention for their physical healing but are unable to raise funds. Almost all had their schooling affected at different levels. This was exacerbated by the harsh economic situation even after the conflict. They struggle to earn an income through selling vegetables in the market or casual work in the farms. Whatever they are able to get is hardly enough to meet their basic needs. This piles pressure on them and continues to break them apart. There is therefore an urgent need to empower them economically through vocational skills training and incubation.

Appreciation to Sufi Women Council

We wish to offer our sincere thanks as SCCoDev to Sufi Women Council for the Women in Action Appreciation Grant Award 2021 to our Team Lead, Dr. Tecla Namachanja Wanjala. The grant award fund was used to support the 5-day healing circle meeting for young affected women. It covered for mobilization, transport for these women, hire of the venue, meals and accommodation for the circle holders.



Closing the healing circle meeting on the fifth day. Present was the chief and the ACK Church ministers.

