

ZAMBIA NATIONAL WOMEN'S LOBBY MEN'S NETWORK PROJECT

Men's Campfire Conference Report
15th -16th December, 2009

'I have never beaten my wife since I married her 40 years ago and I have loved her in the many years we have been together', said Headman Amon Nyeleti, a participant of the Men's Campfire conference

1.0 Introduction

Gender violence is one of the critical concerns affecting women and children in Zambia especially in rural areas. Women in rural areas are more vulnerable because there is very little information and facilities to deal with violence.

As a response to gender based violence and promoting gender equality, the Men's Network Project has continued to engage men in communities to find ways of ending gender atrocities in communities. During the 16 Days of Activism, the Men's Network Project organised the second Men's Campfire Conference in Nyamphande village, 110 KM east of Lusaka with the support of the Non-Governmental Coordinating Council (NGOCC).

2.0 The Men's Campfire Conference

The first Men's Campfire Conference was held in Kasenga in August, 2009 with the support of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) based in Nairobi, Kenya. Since the first conference, a lot of interest has been generated not only in Zambia but also in other countries. So far, Namibia has requested information on the Men's Conference. This report gives highlights of the campfire conference

The second conference was held from 15th to 16th December, 2009 as part of the 16 Days of gender activism. This annual event presented an opportunity to mobilise men in the community to challenge their socialisation and be part of the campaign to end violence.

Men from all walks of life between the age of 21 to 70 years left the comfort of their homes to attend the evening conference. These included teachers, religious and traditional leaders and youths. This group of people is very critical because of their influence among their peers in the community.

Members of the Men's Network facilitated the discussions which started around 18:00 hours till late in the night.

To provoke the discussion, the participants were asked what they understand by *gender*? Answers came from **in all forms as, beating of women by men to simply lock the men by the police for assault**. Men agreed that a lot has been said about gender violence but very little has been done as to why men are being called as perpetrators and not part of the solution.

While other men agreed that there is so much violence on women, they also complained that the fight against violence was selective because men are hardly given a chance to explain to law enforcement why they beat their spouses until they are visited by the law. The men also lamented that the courts of law find men guilty before trial commences wondering why everyone in the fight for gender equality think that men are always abusive.

During the debate, one man narrated how one day he left K20,000 to his wife for breakfast before going for a drinking spree. His wife took the money but later followed and found him drinking with his friends under a tree. She grabbed the beer and poured it on him. The

poor man in his confusion wondered why he was being “baptised” with beer as a way of being disciplined his wife.

Zambia Police Service Gender Analyst who is also a member of the Men’s Network, Mathews Kameli, explained that violence by either women or men was unlawful and should be discouraged.

Men agreed that time for them to keep silent when women are being abused is long gone and they should gather the courage to report to police. About men being battered by their spouses, the participants noted that men find it difficult to walk into a police station to report for fear of being teased by their friends that they are weak.

A traditional leader in the area, Headman Amon Nyeleti, told the conference that excessive drinking and among women and men in his village is one of the leading causes of violence. To deter violence behaviour in the village, the headman has introduced a fine of K50, 000. The headman called for both women and men to work together to bring development in the area adding that, ***‘I have never beaten my wife since I married her 40 years ago, and I have loved her in the many years we have been together.’***

Sergeant Mathew Kameli, a member of the Men ‘s Network and Gender Analyst in the Zambia Police Service, told conference that ***‘the role of the police is to ensure that the law is enforced at national and house hold levels adding that certain power relations between men and women perpetuates gender violence’.***

Gender violence brings low productivity and retards community development. Couples therefore need to dialogue instead of resorting to physical confrontation each time they have some differences.

During the discussions violence was also identified as a leading cause to the low participation of women in community affairs. The men noted that abused women are not able to actively participate in community’s activities including decision making at the local levels. Men attributed this trend to negative cultural practices that do not regard women as leaders. Jealous husbands who do not allow their wives to participate in community activities were also a source of concern.

3.0 The Open gender dialogue

There were two activities that were held during the same period, the campfire and the open gender dialogue. While the Men’s Conference was held during the night, it was necessary that the women were not left out in discussions. The Men’s Network Project working in collaboration with the Citizen Forum jointly organised the open gender dialogue during the day. This was to give both men and women platform to engage each other in the discussions.

The open gender dialogue was characterised by music, dance and drama by the Liseli Sisters and a local theatre group depicting gender violence in the community. The music was especially composed for the event to denounce gender violence. The music gave an

opportunity to the community to get the messages on violence and entertainment. Both men and women including the young people could not avoid the dance floor

During the open dialogue, a traditional leader, Headman Nitibatiba, said that most of the cases he presided over in his village were related to violence on women. The headman blamed the sharp increase of such cases to beer drinking and negative traditional practices. He said men should not be beating their wives but instead respect them as equals. The traditional ruler was worried that most of the marriages were breaking down as a result of excessive alcohol.

A male participant, 66 year old Edison Banda, opposed that gender equality will never be attained as long as men paid lobola (bride price). He said gender equality can only work in America where people are civilised and not in countries like Zambia where culture does not support gender equality.

4.0 Success

The evening discussions have proved to be very popular for men as this is the best time that they meet in their peer groups. Men acknowledged that male involvement in fighting gender violence is critical. The involvement of influential men such as chiefs, teachers and religious leaders to speak out against violence is slowly gaining momentum in the campaign. The men also registered the fact the women should given an opportunity to participate as leaders in their communities.

It was encouraging to note that men came out in the open to denounce negative traditional practices as leading causes of violence. The men proposed continuous sensitisation in the area for both men and women on women's rights. The men who participated in the conference are part of the network to mobilise other men in the area against gender injustice.

5.0 Media Support

Since the first Men's Campfire Conference was held in August 2009, the concept has continued to receive media support due to its uniqueness. So far the campaign has been covered on ZNBC radio and TV before and after the conference. Other media houses continued covering the event afterwards. The media has been a supportive ally in the campaign against GBV.

6.0 Challenges

Though the conference registered tremendous success, there were some challenges that were encountered. These were both in terms of budget implications and unforeseen challenges. These include the following;

6.1 Negative cultural practices- are rampant in the area and need a concerted effort to root out. Some men in the area do not regard gender equality to be working and this has a very strong influence on the young people. The men appreciated the evening sessions and there was limited time to fully exhaust all the issues of gender and masculinity.

6.2 Budget constraints- The fact that the campfire was organised alongside the open dialogue in the same area coordinated by the Citizen Forum meant that resources had to be shared and this resulted into budgetary shifts. For instance, the Men's Network had to take care of additional fuel costs, accommodation and other unforeseen costs that were not in the budgeted. But the beauty was that, despite the budget shifts all the activities were successfully done. Though the number of media personnel budgeted for was three, the campfire generated a lot of interest from the media and it was **very important** to accommodate them as strategic allies in the campaign. Though this resulted in budget shifts, their support was overwhelming as can be seen from the news coverage in the newspaper cuttings attached.

The fact that the funds were not released in good record time affected the arrangements. The conference had to be pushed forward on two occasions. ZNWL secured airtime for radio discussions on Radio Christian Voice, but the funds for transport refunds for guests were not released by YWCA as the coordinating organisation of the 16 Days. This greatly affected the radio programmes and as such affected our working relationship with the radio time due to the loss of time. The air time is still available and the Men's Network is eager to conduct the radio discussions.

7.0 Lessons learnt

Despite negative cultural practices, there is overwhelming response from men in the community to be part of the campaign. One important lesson learnt is that organising a campfire conference is cost effective as the community is also involved. The community also owns the process. Women need to be separated during the discussions especially when talking about sensitive culture issues. Usually men are dominant in the open dialogues

8.0 Recommendations

ZNWL has so far conducted two campfire conferences in Kasenga and Nyamphande and the response has been overwhelming. It is therefore recommended that a comprehensive training be conducted for the two communities to own the process and to take lead in fighting against violence in the communities.

While it is important to have the funds channelled into one coordinating organisation, it is also important to take note of the delays that might arise when accessing the funds. It is therefore recommended that funds for activities should be given directly to individual organisations to make it easy to carry out activities without delays. In addition, this will ensure that organisations that have received the funds are held to account for the funds.

9.0 Acknowledgments

ZNWL would like to thank the Non-Governmental Coordinating Council (NGOCC) and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) for financing the first and second campfire conferences and the Young Women Christian Association for providing the leadership of this year's 16 Days campaign. We also thank Reverend Siwale of Nyamphande Orphanage Centre and his team for serving as foot soldiers to mobilise the community.

We pay tribute to the Zambia Police Service Victim Support Unit , in particular Sergeant Mathews Kameli, an active member of the Network to be present at the campfire conference. ZNWL is also grateful to our wonderful colleagues in the media who braved the night mosquitoes bites to support the campaign, these are Ms. Chisenga Mumba, the only woman in the campfire conference Joseph Chitembo from Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), Kennedy Phiri, Muvi Television, Arthur Mwansa, Zambia Daily Mail, Darlington Mwendabai, Times of Zambia and Allan Mtonga from the Post Newspaper for their great support and personal interest in the campaign. We are proud of them as supportive allies.

We also pay tribute to Simon Kabanda of the Citizen Forum and his members for sharing his space and limited resources with the Men's Network. Many thanks to our gallant members of the 'ZNWL Gender Battalion', Golden Nachibinga, Gilbert Kaira and Clement Sifukwe, for the leadership they provided during the conference. They braved the mosquito bites and stayed awake after mid night to ensure that all went well. We are proud of their bravery and commitment.

The Men's Campfire Conference in Pictures



Members of the Men's Network Project, from left to right Clement Sifukwe, Sergeant Mathews Kameli and Nelson Banda, Coordinator of the Men's Network Project



The Liseli Sisters performing during the open gender dialogue against gender violence



Golden Nachibinga, a member of the ZNWL Men's Network addressing the audience



The women came in great numbers to attend the gender dialogue with men