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“Addressing barriers to free children from sexual abuse in Rwanda”

1. Introduction:

Women for Water and Climate Cooperation Network (WWCCN) is a non-profit making organization created with the aim of empowering women in the water and climate sectors by promoting gender equality and sustainable resource management. To achieve this noble goal, WWCCN offers skill-building workshops, run awareness campaigns, and create networks for women leaders. Collaborating with various partners, WWCCN focuses on gender-inclusive climate action and advocate for investments that prioritize gender equality.

2. Activities Conducted:

WWCCN actively collaborated with the Nyamirambo sector to identify and address various community issues, particularly focusing on the women survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi. These women were selected due to the significant abuse they endured and the ongoing challenges their children face in the post-genocide period.

2.1. Awareness Session on Types of Abuse, with a Focus on Sexual Abuse Against Children

MURWANASHYAKA Evariste, the Program Manager of CLADHO, facilitated a comprehensive session on the different types of abuse. He identified physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, economic and financial abuse, and neglect, emphasizing the growing concern of digital abuse due to increased internet access.

Evariste underscored the responsibility of parents to protect their children from sexual abuse and highlighted the crucial role of men as allies in combating this issue. He warned of severe legal consequences for perpetrators of sexual abuse and clarified that such abuse includes not only sexual intercourse but also inappropriate touching, taking and distributing nude photos online, asking a child to touch private parts, and sending pornographic materials to minors.

He encouraged parents to openly discuss sensitive topics such as sex with their children to prevent them from acquiring misinformation from the internet or potential abusers. He stressed that breaking the social norms that discourage such discussions is essential to ensure children are well-informed and make healthy decisions, thereby preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

2.2. Discussion on the Importance of Men's Engagement in Combating Sexual Abuse

Mr. Evariste, along with the WWCCN Executive Director and local authorities from the Nyamirambo sector, emphasized that engaging men is key to challenging harmful notions of masculinity that promote dominance or aggression. They advocated for men to intervene when witnessing inappropriate behavior among peers and to promote healthy communication, consent, and boundaries to foster respectful relationships between young men and women.

2.3. Distribution of Gas Cookers to Beneficiaries

As part of efforts to protect the environment and align with the Rwandan government's measures to reduce the use of firewood and charcoal, gas cookers were distributed to women survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi. This initiative aims to alleviate the financial burden on families caused by rising prices of traditional fuel sources and to support the government's push for environmentally friendly materials. Additionally, providing gas cookers helps reduce the unpaid care work burden that women face in their households.

Through these activities, WWCCN demonstrated a commitment to addressing critical community issues, promoting environmental sustainability, and supporting the well-being of vulnerable populations.

3. Beneficiaries Reached (Disaggregated by Gender):

The awareness session was held at the Nyamirambo sector, where the message was conveyed to a diverse group of individuals awaiting services from the sector. Meanwhile, gas cookers were distributed to 20 pre-identified women survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi, with a particular focus on widows.

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Audience	13	25	38
Beneficiaries of gas cookers	0	20	20

4. Outcomes Achieved:

The primary outcome observed was an increased awareness among parents regarding various forms of sexual violence. Initially, their understanding was limited to sexual intercourse alone, but they now recognize that inappropriate touching, sharing nude photos online, and similar actions also constitute sexual violence. Another notable outcome is parents' newfound willingness to engage in discussions about sensitive topics with their children.

Additionally, the provision of gas cookers is anticipated to significantly decrease both the time spent and the expenses associated with using charcoal and firewood. This transition not only enhances efficiency but also mitigates financial burdens on households.

5. Lessons Learned and Best Practices:

Key lessons learned and best practices identified from the awareness sessions and discussions include the recognition of significant gaps in communication between parents and their children, as well as the persistence of entrenched social norms and negative perceptions of masculinity. Throughout the project implementation, it became evident that deep-seated cultural norms continue to present challenges, emphasizing the need for ongoing educational initiatives focused on fostering a shift in parenting practices and societal mindsets.

6. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the dialogue with the Nyamirambo community proved to be highly beneficial, and we anticipate positive impacts on both the residents and their children. The active participation of local authorities signifies a promising commitment to integrating this education into their programs and effectively disseminating the message to the population. The enthusiastic endorsement from local authorities extended to their request for regular similar activities, demonstrating a keen interest in ongoing engagement.

Appendices:



Photo: Widows beneficiaries of the distribution of gas cookers



Photo: the Program Manager of CLADHO delivering his message



Photo: the Executive Director of WWCCN delivering her message



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