

Title: The Polyclinic of Hope (PoH): A holistic Approach Towards Addressing Gender Based Violence	
Region/Country: Rwanda	Division/Branch:
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Date: April 28 th , 2008	
Primary Subject Area: Gender Based Violence	Additional Keywords: During Conflict – 1994 genocide in Rwanda
<p>Lesson Learned:</p> <p>The POH project is a learning process and has a lot to share with traumatized people in post conflict situations. The first lesson to learn was on providing health services to the women; what was discovered was that in order for the health of the women to improve, the POH had to take on other services apart from medical care and support as well as psycho-social support and counseling leading the integrated holistic approach used at the center.</p> <p>When the POH started, it was a project reacting to the emergency situation and the implications of the aftermath of genocide. Over time, the situation in Rwanda has changed to developmental long-term goals, this has led to streamlining and professionalizing the Center in addition to a stronger emphasis on beneficiary active participation as well as a wider target population other than women victims of rape during the 1994 genocide.</p> <p>Through the POH program, it has become very clear that integrating conflict resolution strategies in all program activities is necessary in post conflict situations.</p>	
<p>Description of issues and context:</p> <p>At the end of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was left with big numbers of widows and orphans; these had suffered the worst inhumanity ranging from rape, torture and mutilation since this was a reliable weapon during genocide. The violence in 1994 had deeply damaging effects on the women and children and the aftermath was characterized by the negative impact of this history including deep-rooted hatred, victims of rape and other violent crimes, psychosocial trauma, HIV/AIDS, etc. In response to the women's plight, the PoH center was established in 1995.</p> <p>The Polyclinic of Hope (PoH) is a center for women victims of rape and other</p>	

violent crimes during the 1994 genocide as well as other vulnerable groups like women living with HIV/AIDS. The center reaches more than 655 women and their families. In total the program reaches more that 2,508 persons.

Strategy used:

The PoH Center provides space that has proved an effective response to the women's plight, which continues to manifest in psychosocial trauma and the effects of HIV and Aids. Adopting a holistic approach right from the start, the Polyclinic of Hope has enabled the women understand and accept their situation by offering medical attention and making them aware of their rights, as it socio-economically and psychologically equips them to live positive and productive lives. The program transformed the women from being victims of violence to being agents of change.

Specifically, the PoH encourages a spirit of voluntarism and creates space for

- Healing and reconciliation
- Solidarity building, leading to successful coalitions of women looking out for each other in their communities
- Empowerment for the women and their families, where cultural barriers have been done away with enlightenment on the law and human rights.
- Socio-economic empowerment and education on reproductive and other health issues that has transformed the lives of the women and their families.

Results:

- The center has contributed to the recovery process that the country is going through especially in relation to peace and reconciliation of the people of Rwanda due to the fact that the center welcomes all women victims of violent crimes despite their social diversity.
- Improvement of the social welfare of the PoH women beneficiaries and their families, this is through better shelter (rehabilitation and construction), education and awareness programs, income generation projects, health services, etc.
- Behavior change among the women themselves and those that they interact with in particular people's response to sexual gender based violence, HIV/AIDS, human/legal rights violations, etc. leading to more people approaching PoH initiative for services because people are open about these problems.
- Also the women who have been victims are now the advocates for change i.e. they are the ones that share what they have gone through with others in the same predicament i.e. at a local, national, regional and international levels advocating for better treatment of women through respect of their human rights.

To-date the Polyclinic of Hope has been replicated in three areas in Rwanda, namely in Bugesera, Huye, and Gasabo Districts. Through one of its replication at the RWN Village of Hope (VoH) program in Gasabo District, Kigali city, the program won international acclaim by receiving the 2007 UN-Habitat Dubai International Award in "recognition of best practices to improve the living environment" for child-headed households and genocide widows and their families.

Providing a holistic HIV/AIDS support package to more than 426 survivors of the 1994 genocide who were victims of rape now living with HIV/AIDS as a result and their families. In total the program reaches 1,808 : -

- Conduct HIV voluntary counseling and testing (VCT)
- Trauma & HIV/AIDS counseling & support
- Provision of basic medical care & support
- Comprehensive ART services and follow-up
- Education & vocational training support
- Income generating activities support
- Sensitization, education and awareness on different issues
- Medical referral services

Exchange learning with post conflict countries like Burundi, Uganda. Soon to exchange with Ethiopia, Eritrea, Southern Sudan, DRC & Burundi in a bid to replicate the PoH model in these countries.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The PoH has proved to be a unique, replicable and sustainable innovation due to its **integrated approach**. The center supports the victim to become vehicles of change - the victims of yesterday are becoming advocates of today; leading to peace and reconciliation. This is evidenced through: -

- The women becoming volunteers to help other women go through the same project in their homes, neighborhoods and communities
- The women at the POH from beginning of the project in 1995 have freely talked about what happened and denounced it and called for it never to happen again.
- The women's willingness to facilitate the judicial system by giving information, evidence and witnessing about what happened.
- Willingness to forgive when asked for forgiveness by the perpetrators.
- PoH is an ongoing program proving that rehabilitation of a human being should be on a long-term basis. PoH links the pre conflict, the conflict and the post conflict drawing information from the women to identify their potentials, their weaknesses

and available opportunities that can be tapped to promote their healing, development, peace and reconciliation.

The PoH is a sustainable program in that once a woman has gone through the PoH experience she can take care of herself as an individual, at the same time the PoH spirit of solidarity building, sharing and assisting / supporting each other can be sustainably spread throughout the community without any financial costs.

Suggested Follow-up:

The PoH holistic approach to addressing gender based violence has proved the best way to addressing women's needs, RWN and its partners will continue to work towards the replication of this approach within other parts of Rwanda as well as other post conflict regions.

Collaborators:

- DFID in collaboration with Imbutu Foundation and Survivors Fund (SURF) through the Care and Treatment Project (CTP)
- USAID/PEPFAR working in partnership with Community Habitat Finance (CHF) under the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization project (CHAMP)
- UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
- JAC Charitable Trust

Links and resources:

www.rwandawomennetwork.org