



Ms Catherine Othieno,  
Director of COCFAWE

# COCFAWE partners with religious leaders to fight social injustice

## We don't need sex warriors!

By TOV TEAM

IT is interesting how times are changing! Paternal aunts who used to provide "sexual and reproductive health education", at least in as far as how a newly married woman can satisfy a man's sexual urge, is concerned, may be fading out. In their place have come organizations that do not focus on one gender but the whole family.

Men and women, girls and boys are strategically targeted with empowering messages, call it sexuality empowerment. In Wakiso, COCFAWE conducts sex and reproductive health programs in the midst of both sexes who are free to ask questions however 'embarrassing' they may sound.

COCFAWE Director, Catherine Othieno says: Paternal aunts commonly known as 'ssengas' had assumed a role that they lacked proper training in, and ended up giving wrong information to couples most times causing or escalating domestic violence.

Sick mothers or women who had spent barely a week after delivery, would suffer ruptures because men wanted sex". She asks: What reaction would you expect from a man nurtured to be powerful and even having control over the woman's sexual organs to receive a No from a woman when he feels like sex?

The role of the ssenga has been to teach women satisfy men. But is this empowerment? A ssenga would never advise a woman about delaying a pregnancy but instead would condemn her for planning her family.

Othieno says, "I condemn the ssenga's approach as it only disempowers the woman instead of creating an atmosphere for negotiation and understanding for both sides.

To me this is sexuality empowerment. Such a process facilitates open communication and dialogue, contributing to peace and harmony. We should all discourage situations where women envisage men as sex warriors, and men look at women as servants. Couples should endeavour to learn and appreciate each other."

By REBECCA BIRUNGI AND TOV TEAM

CONCERN for Children and Women Empowerment (COCFAWE) has embarked on a new approach. They are partnering with religious leaders to transform lives as part of its campaign to reach out to the communities in Busukuma, Wakiso District.

Catherine Othieno, COCFAWE Executive Director says that, over 80 religious leaders participated in one of the partnership activities, a five-day meeting aimed at integrating HIV/AIDS into church and mosque program activities.

Citing COCFAWE'S mission as to facilitate empowerment of families and communities for improved quality of life of children, women and men by promoting participation, dialogue and solidarity using the psychosocial approach, Othieno says:

"It is the participatory approach and promotion of dialogue which has yielded the fruits of involving religious leaders into the COCFAWE's program which seeks to see that they become gender sensitive while preaching in mosques or churches' adding, religious leaders have a willing audience who take their word with respect rarely questioning it, and if COCFAWE encourages them to mainstream the program activities in their pastoral work, we would have used one stone to kill two birds.

### Religious Leaders not Gender Sensitive

Gender activists note that most religious leaders are not gender sensitive while preaching. For example a woman is told to be submissive but the same leaders remind the male spouses about their responsibility to provide for their families but when they fail to do this, religious leaders rarely raise a finger.

### HIV/AIDS is still a challenge to Public Health Specialists

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### Ms. Teddy Kakeeto, the Head Teacher of one of the Primary Schools in Kingo:

I can confidently say that both my husband and I profoundly benefited from the community dialogue, and later on during the feedback session. Issues that we normally see in our own lives and those near to us were depicted in the play, and many identified themselves with them. Personally I grew up in a violent family, saw my dad physically abusing my mother, who later had to cope with a broken finger for



A cross-section of COCFAWE members and religious leaders at a recent workshop in Busukuma.

According to evangelist and Director of the Bible Society Mbuya Hannu Happonen, tackling the epidemic requires a multi-sectoral approach through mainstreaming HIV/AIDS programmes into church/mosques. In his book entitled "Opportunity in crisis-basic lessons on HIV/AIDS" he quotes scripture 1 Cor 7.26 where Paul gave his advice to the Corinthians: and imploring that the bible encourages us to make 'the most of every opportunity'.

Hannu therefore contends that the epidemic has caused an opportunity crisis which requires religious leaders to guide the brethren on what to do by addressing the issues in the community. COCFAWE has also ceased the opportunity and is using the same book as a training manual with religious leaders in an effort to raise their knowledge levels on reproductive health issues and their roles.

One participant said, "Every Sunday,

I look forward to going to church to be consoled. I carefully listen to the Reverend and take everything he says as a gospel truth without questioning it". Meanwhile Robert Kagwire, the District Focal Person notes that the HIV prevalence is high among married couples. According to a 2009 report by Uganda AIDS Commission, out of the 1.8 million HIV infected Ugandans, majority are married and higher among female adults of 30-35 years and male adults of 35-40 years. It states that married couples account for about 43 percent of the new infections and that people with multiple partners and are not married, account for about 46 percent of new infections.

He appeals to COCFAWE to strengthen its partnership with the religious leaders because he says these are 'trusted' people and are critical in the HIV/AIDS fight.

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## Bride price!

**Norah Nansasi: Reporter with Eddoboosi:**  
"I think our parents should stop asking for bride price as it is used by men to control and mete violence to their spouses.

**Kiita Gloria of Kyalumbi:**  
The training gave me the courage and confidence to intervene in homes where domestic violence is happening to give advice. This is something that many people feared to do before the community dialogue.

### Gertrude Lwanga, Secretary for Information Get Smart has participated in various trainings on domestic violence and says:

Local women and journalists can partner and deliver people out of poverty, ignorance and misery. UMWA should continue to build the link between the two groups because there is need for a strong force to fight violence in our home and societies. We will do all we can to continue with the struggle. Mobilizing Get Smart Women to do a play and show it in the community does not require lots of finances and like my chairperson stated we are going to do more. When I met with these journalists, I told them they contribute to domestic violence because they put those nude pictures of women and stories in the newspapers.