

The Other Voice

It matters too!

Living a life of suffering

Robinah narrates a tale of recovery

TWELVE years ago, my father and mother used to stay together, in a one – roomed house. They were not officially married though my father, then a pastor had abandoned the calling and soon he started coming home drunk and would start quarreling with mother.

They separated when I was 3 years and being young I could not clearly understand what was happening then. But I remember dad and my siblings moving out of the house, and walked a long distance. We had left mum in Katosi.

We traveled with father to a location I later learnt to be Ssenga village, near Matugga. Along the way I needed someone to tell me what was going on, where I was going and why I was leaving my mother behind. However, none of these questions could be answered by my father who kept a deaf ear through out the journey.

Upon reaching Ssenga, father pointed to a dilapidated house with scattered saucepans, unwashed plates and an old sponge mattress. He directed us to a place where we could fetch water, showed us food and vegetables he had bought for that day. He promised that our mum would join us when school starts! But up to this day, she has never come to live with us.

Fending for ourselves has helped me to mature at an early age. I started seeking for solutions to the problems that I was facing. Whenever I would feel hungry, the option was simple; climb the neighbor's jackfruit tree, mangoes, or cook something for myself.

Meanwhile, my father would come home drunk, and any request we made would irritate him resulting into a beating. In fact, he could 'remind us of how stupid' we were.

The conditions at home worsened when we started school, we would stay hungry all day, only to come back home to find no food. Little as we were, we would often forge temporarily relationships with the neighbor's children to welcome us to their homes, with an intention of gaining some food.

Both girls and boys seemed willing to help me but with varied intentions. Much as the girls helped me in areas such as giving me their underpants, dresses, offering shelter and Vaseline, they were always reluctant to give food. So I would stay hungry sometimes.

The relationship with the neighbor's children produced positive results for us. I began studying at Saint Kizito Tikalu Primary School, a government aided school and our neighbors offered to pay my school fees.

I was studying in Primary seven when COFCAWA, a non- Governmental Organization visited Saint Kizito Tikalu Primary School. For five days COFCAWA facilitators taught us the consequences of risky sexual behavior; reproductive health, gender, power relations and effective communication and its benefits in promoting better relations between boys and girls.

I then understood that the practice of seeking for favors from boys in exchange for sex may lead to health risks such as early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STDs and dropping out of school. Till this day, I recall the facilitators urging pupils to always abstain from sex.

After the training, I felt the need to denounce my past in order to begin a new life. My memories included the lack of love from my parents and missing food among other essentials.



During a feedback session with parents I was chosen to present the children's views and I did it without fear and told them about the injustices I was being subjected to as a young girl. For example after my father had abandoned us, my two sisters were married off at 15 and 17 years respectively, I felt this was the time for parents to learn what injustices girls from poor backgrounds were going through for them to survive.

Back home, rumours had spread that Robinah was a 'spoilt' child and would contaminate others. I was accused of promiscuity, chased away from the home I was staying. I sought shelter from my sister's home but later on left. This time I went to live with a friend and once again I had to leave and decided to go back to my father's home.

I began questioning the existence of God, wondering why God could not rescue and end the misery I was going through. And one day as I was preparing to wash my clothes, I saw my former teacher who had come to inform me that COFCAWA had found a sponsor to further my studies and join secondary education!

I wept that day, I could not believe that a person who wasn't my relative could be more helpful than my father. To me, this was a God sent opportunity to forget my past, stay in school so that I improve my status and hopefully one day, I graduate as a doctor just like Riitta K. my sponsor!

With that I would be able to help my sisters and brothers who are languishing in poverty and later work with service organizations that promote girl education.

I'm sure that with education, other girls in the community will not suffer the same fate like my sisters who are trapped in abusive relationships. I want to help the sick people and sensitize people on health related matters.

Years later, mother told us that our father was a pastor in one of the churches but was attacked by evil spirits, and abandoned the calling. This made him change, began drinking, and constantly quarreling with mother.

This affected us so much.

The relationship between the parents became unbearable. Yes, I am a grown up but I feel so bad and could not help but cry because of the pain my mother has had to endure. I can imagine the emotions she has been undergoing because even up to now my father does not love us as his children. I just don't understand it!

FOR me, Domestic violence is caused by poverty that cripples the man's ability to provide for the family. The constant requests and demands to buy necessities for the family makes the man become irritated if he has nothing to offer to the family. This causes tension which leads to quarrels amongst them hence leading to battering of the woman.

And when the man refuses to provide for the family, the woman is left with no choice but to take on the responsibility of the children. And if she gets the money from the few yields in the garden, and does not present the money to the husband to apportion it, this leads to violence. The man feels insecure. He does not feel a 'boss' any more!

The other cause of Domestic Violence is lack of trust between husband and wife, the man may not trust the woman or vice versa. This suspicion may cause misunderstandings, sometimes ending in violence. Lazy and drunkard fathers who demand for money from wives are another cause for violence. It is important to have both parents working, and respect each other.

This publication has been made possible with support from Rebecca Birungi, Sarah Muwanga, Chippo Brenda, Fred Mabonga, Michael Kasiko, Joan Nankya, Gorrette Nalwoga, Grace Bamuranje, Lydia Mutenga, Clothilda Babirekere, May Nakyejwe, Charles Ssuuna, Joseph Kibirige, Olive Lwanga, Anne Kari Garberg, Margaret Sentamu, Margaret Mwangi, Lista Ndumba COFCAWA and the International Solidarity Foundation



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Letters to the Editor

NGOs challenge donor aid procedures

Dear Editor,

I have been craving for an opportunity to express my experience, related to what it actually means to secure development aid. I am confident that, this publication, The Other Voice, is security enough for me to coin out the other side of development aid. To that effect, I beg to be anonymous.

I know this is a subject where most members of the civil society have deemed a No - Go Area! Why, because they would not dare challenge the hand that feeds them. I will allude to their fears by treading softly, but express my concern nonetheless.

We are all deeply indebted to the development aid which continues to be the engine that drives development in a great part of the developing world, Uganda not exceptional. Part of this aid has been channeled to the civil society, particularly, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), popularly known for complementing government programmes.

Although this is true, receiving such funding is not an easy path. It is an arena for those so daring! In their sustainability drives, NGOs have no choice but to take up the challenge. This is mostly done in response to the Call for Proposals (CFP) by the development partner. As expected, this kind of aid has minimum requirements and / or standards that intending applicants ought to have for eligibility.

Because this kind of opening is regarded as "manna" from heaven, most NGOs waste no time speculating. One Executive Director from a women organization shares her experience about the process. "...my dear, donor aid is an emergency, and we waste no time. As a system here, we identify a task force to take on the concept or proposal development. This literally means, putting on halt all ongoing activities or targets, to prioritize on the new funding opportunity. This process requires a lot of brain work, strong will, commitment and long hours of work, coupled with administrative costs. Some NGOs engage a consultant at a fee!

Stress is typical in such a process, with the deadline looming in their minds! At some point, we go an extra mile to engage the intended beneficiaries to input into the proposal. Why they go this far, is to brace themselves to the competition ahead of them.

"Donors want unique concepts, and we do go out of our way to satisfy them!" So with a number of consultations, here and there, the 'task force' will feel satisfied with the proposal, and effect a submission.

To us, she adds, timely submission of the proposal is an achievement on one hand, and an anxiety on the other. This means sleepless nights, typical to that of an expectant mother, looking forward to the birth of her baby! They await a response on the status of the application. Little do they know that fate is bound to befall them!

When the moment of truth finally comes, it is usually a blind statement typical of these excerpts; "... we regret to inform you that your concept note/proposal was not among those shortlisted. It also goes on to indicate that; due to the volume of applications received, we are sorry to inform you we will not be able to respond to individual queries..."

Now this is the area that has been most disappointing to NGOs, as we feel no effort is made to give individual explanations for the non consideration, let alone appreciation for the effort.

From an Executive Director's point of view, Sarah Kyabanji, not her real name

from a leading local NGO, her experience is classical. "...sometimes during the advent of the year 2000, an international donor agency called for proposals, in which over 3,000 applicants were received. Her organization was one of those that passed through the screening process, up from 100 nominees, down to 10.

Little did they know that, out of 3,000 applicants, the agency was only interested in seven (7) beneficiaries! They were irked by the experience, and were made to wonder, why all the ambiguity in the number of nominees? She also observed that the organizations that were considered for funding, were big umbrella agencies aligned to international NGOs affiliated to the donor countries or agencies.

She cannot hide her dissatisfaction; and wonders that, if that is the case, what then happens to the local and small organizations that are struggling with funding and yet engaged in great work? How can such small organizations be expected to compete with those gigantic agencies? Do the donor agencies take into account how it feels to be left out! And what happens to the volume of literature and documentation submitted to the CFP? This is a small representation of the so many unanswered questions felt by people in developing world.

Some schools of thought have been made to believe that donors are using this as a technique to scoop a wide range of ideas from the civil society, blinded by their desire to mobilize funds. It is not even a mere allegation but different concepts / project proposals that were not considered upon application have actually been and continue to be very visible on the ground.

A project Officer in one NGO in Kampala had this to say, "One time, at the completion of the first phase of our project, we had to develop a new proposal for the next phase, which was done successfully. However, to our dismay, we were given an abrupt notice by the donor, that they were not able to continue with the project.

The explanation given was not satisfactory either. She adds that, to their surprise after a while, they learnt that the very same project was being implemented in a different location, with another local partner. This sort of scenario beats ones understanding! This is a violation of rights!

Proposal for the future

As civil society, we feel that development aid takes into account the diverse processes for proposal development. A lot of resources, both capital and human are committed towards this process. Let the donor agencies indicate on their call for proposals that we are looking for only X number of NGOs to benefit.

As well, they should consider including the page limit for the proposals. If they are looking for a particular NGO, say in the field of Agriculture, Humanities, the Media or otherwise; let them go straight to them instead of calling for proposals. This will save us a lot of time and other resources and anxiety as well.

Let some kind of refund be allocated for the proposal development process. As well, let the donors be cognizant of the fact that applicants need some form of explanation for not considering them to help them re-visit their strategies and practices.

Above all, let the screening process be opened up to the applicants to cause their satisfaction in the event of funding or the lack of it. Lastly, donors should be fair and return all the documents to those who had applied.