

Impact of the Tamar Communication Strategy on Sexual Gender-Based Violence in Eastern Africa

Lillian K. Kaviti
University of Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is today recognized as a serious global health and human rights violation. Crisis situations such as conflict or war usually exacerbate the extent of the problem, particularly with regard to sexual violence against women and children. Once communal protection and support systems crumble, the most vulnerable groups are exposed to sexual exploitation by virtue of their gender and socio-cultural status in society. These survivors inevitably experience social stigmatization from their families, who find it difficult to empathize and relate normally with them. In 2005, a Communication Strategy known as the “Tamar Campaign” was launched in Nairobi with the overall objective to address Gender-Based Violence (GBV) within a religious contextual approach. This Strategy was then rolled out to four different countries in Eastern Africa and the Great Lakes Region with the objective of providing a safe space to break the silence that often surrounds GBV. This paper examines the impact that this Communication Strategy has had in changing attitudes and deconstructing how certain African cultural practices encourage GBV. The thesis propounded in this paper is that to be effective, any strategy must engage women, men and the youth if it is to have a positive social change that is effective and sustainable. The compilation of success stories, challenges and lessons learnt also provides a learning resource to improve outreach efforts that lead to a better standard of living for vulnerable groups in Africa in conflict situations.

Keywords: Tamar Communication Strategy, Sexual Gender-Based Violence, Transformative Masculinity, Female Genital Cutting, Internally Displaced Persons.

1. Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) can be grouped into five broad categories, which are consistent with the *1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. Moreover, the UN General Assembly classifies and provides examples of various types of GBV to include (but are not limited to) sexual violence; physical violence; emotional and psychological violence; harmful (gender-biased) traditional practices; and socio-economic violence.¹ Culture often acts as a medium through which retrogressive (gender-based) cultural practices are perpetuated and encouraged both in the home environment as well as in public spaces.²

Sexual violence includes sexual harassment of any kind; incest, rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery and marital rape. Physical violence is the most explicit type and includes spousal battering (often with women as the underdogs); physical assaults in public places, infanticide (usually involving the killing of female children in preference of sons) and various types of child abuse (physical or otherwise) that affect both male and female children. Closely linked to physical abuse is psych-emotional violence which includes threats of violence and abandonment; insults or abusive name-calling; forced humiliating acts performed in public spaces and blackmailing as a way of coercing vulnerable individuals to provide certain (usually sexual) favours. This study examines how the implementation of a communication strategy –referred to as the “Tamar Communication Strategy” addresses culturally sensitive issues by creating a contextually-safe space where both men and women can engage together in an effort to combat GBV in Eastern Africa and beyond.

As a way of countering negative gender images, the Tamar Communication Strategy provides is designed to act as a liberating tool to raise awareness on GBV in a way that will empower women and encourage positive aspects of masculinity. The Strategy targets changing the mindset of groups by challenging culturally retrogressive behaviour, gender stereotypes and attitudes learnt through African initiation and socialization processes. This is considered critical because negative notions of masculinity reinforce lack of respect of females and ultimately contributes to gender inequality and various acts of GBV.

2. Contextual Background

In the last twenty years, GBV has become a serious global health, human rights, and development issue. The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPFA) defines it as:

² These retrogressive cultural practices include patriarchy and the “inferior” position allocated to women and girls; Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C), abductions of young women into forced early marriages, wife inheritance and polygamy usually go against the human rights of females.

...any act that result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty that could manifest itself in public or private life.

According to the United Nations' Institute for Research and Training, GBV is rooted in prescribed behaviour, norms and attitudes on the basis of gender and sexuality.³ These norms and definitions allow – perhaps even encourage violent behaviour within environments that assign privilege and hierarchical power to certain groups, which in most African cultures will be boys and men. GBV can therefore be viewed as the enforcement of power hierarchies and structural inequalities created, sustained and transmitted through religious belief systems, cultural norms and socialization processes. On its part, Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) refers to:

any contact, gesture or act of exploitation of a sexual nature that is unwanted, or carried out without the consent of a person, which is imposed by physical force, threats, trickery, intimidation or duress.⁴

SGBV in its various forms is endemic in communities around the world, and cuts across class, race, age, religion and national boundaries. Its magnitude is difficult to determine but it is widely acknowledged that the reported cases represent only a tip of the iceberg. Even in normal (non-conflict) situations, sexual violence will go unreported due to fear, shame, powerlessness (for the survivors), and lack of support and general unreliability public services in most Eastern African countries. The Tamar Communication Strategy targets combating mainly SGBV because it goes beyond physical violence and encompasses conditions and situations that systematically deny and devalue an individual's right to life, health, decisions, choices and power.

The ICC, established in 2001, represents a significant step towards ending the impunity that is commonplace in cases of sexual violence. By criminalising sexual violence, the ICC statute embodies the principles of various UN conventions and declarations on violence against women. The problem of sexual exploitation and abuse is often exacerbated in situations characterised by poverty, conflict and/or displacement where the UN is actively involved. GBV is perpetrated primarily through patriarchal cultural practices, negative masculinity and a disparity between the rights of men and women. Rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced sterilisation, forced abortion and forced pregnancies are crimes under most national and international laws - yet the perpetrators of these crimes often go scot-free in Africa. This is because the socio-economic and culturally subordinate status of women and girls in Africa makes them more vulnerable to violence from boys and men.

Defilement involves the penetration of a child's genital organs. Concepts such as '*consensual sex*'; '*unlawful*'; '*forceful penetration*' or '*fraudulent acquisition of consent*' are considered irrelevant

³ INSTRAW (2001): '*Men's Role in Gender-based Violence*', <http://www.un-instraw.org>

⁴ (2002): *The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*

since a child has no capacity to consent to carnal knowledge. Defilement usually escalates during conflict situations in Africa. Unfortunately, families of the defiled minors often strike deals with the perpetrators of these sexual crimes to compensate the family, state authorities or judicial officials for the case to be silenced. This is done in total disregard of the survivor's dignity or integrity. The vulnerability of minors drastically escalates when the traditional protection afforded to them by their families and communities is disrupted by displacement during situations of conflict. In such circumstances, children (and girls in particular) are exposed to threats or acts of violence by parties to armed conflicts – military forces, armed groups or the police – and also by members of peacekeeping forces or humanitarian workers. Targeting girls, who symbolise the ability to procreate and survive, is a method of demonstrating that they cannot be protected in the absence of their fathers and of bringing 'dishonour' upon an entire family or community. Moreover, even when rape and defilement cases are reported to the authorities, witnesses and police officers are often compromised by perpetrators of the crime to disrupt the quest for justice.

Abduction is a form of SGBV that involves taking away or detaining of a young girl or woman in order to have sex with her or force her into marriage. This process is usually executed either by using physical force or through deceitful persuasion. This form of violence is prevalent in many African cultures where girls perceived to have reached marriageable age are abducted by their suitors as long as their parents had consented to the marriage.⁵ Even when arrested, the accused persons are often acquitted due to lack of evidence or by compromising state officials through bribes. Such cultural practices often undermine justice and morality as marriage can only be contracted between two consenting adults. There have also been reported cases of men abducting women and children in IDP and refugee camps in order to molest them. Such cases often go unreported for fear, intimidation or lack of witnesses to the crime.

According to Garner (2004), domestic violence can be defined as: "...Violence between members of a household, usually spouses or a situation where a member of a household commits assault or other violent acts against another." It also involves: "...the use of force or threats by a husband [wife] or boyfriend [girlfriend] to coerce or intimidate a woman [man] into submission. The violence can come in the form of pushing, hitting, choking, slapping, kicking, burning or stabbing."⁶ Domestic violence is a manifestation of power imbalance between a wife and a husband and has its roots in gender inequality where in the majority of cases, a married woman depends largely on her husband for herself and her children's sustenance. This often puts her in a highly vulnerable position if her husband has abusive tendencies. In such cases, such men will use their considerably higher economic status to manipulate or impose unreasonable demands on their wives and enforce these demands through various forms of GBV. In times of conflict, instability in families creates a fertile

⁵ These groups include (but are not limited to) pastoral groups including the Maasai, Samburu and Pokot ethnic groups in Kenya.

⁶ Definition adapted from *Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual*. United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (1993).

ground for domestic violence to take place. Women are generally more vulnerable, and conflicts exacerbate their vulnerability.

In African cultural contexts, men want to be in control of the surroundings in their family and thus perceive any signs of opposition from their wives as a challenge to their masculinity or authority. Hence, one way to regain their power and make their wives submit to them is through brute force and intimidation. This perhaps explains why some men continue to administer violence on their wives during conflict situations in camps meant for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) despite the fact that everyone is facing difficulties brought about by war and conflict.

3. Methodology

The primary aim of this investigation was to examine the prevalence of GBV (and SGBV in particular) in Eastern Africa and the Great Lakes region. As part of the planning process for the Workshop, a comprehensive Literature Review was conducted to examine the context background (historical, cultural, socio-economic and political) background of each East African country in order to better understand the social, cultural and political factors that provide an environment conducive for GBV to take place. The objective was to identify the unique socio-cultural and religious elements that reinforce or rationalize negative masculinity. Moreover, the Literature Review was useful in identifying the various types of interpersonal violence inflicted on vulnerable groups in the family and public space.

The empirical data for this investigation was largely based on the experiences reported by the National Council Gender Representatives based in Kenya, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. The Gender representatives were drawn from Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in each of the countries. Each representative was responsible for rolling out and implementing the Tamar Communication Strategy in each of their respective countries.

The representatives provided factual information based on their experiences implementing the Tamar Communication Strategy in each of the countries and that they had faced in the process. This critical information was collected using research tools such as questionnaires and interviews conducted during group therapy meetings in their countries (“Tamar Circles”). These findings were then presented during the Nairobi workshop held in December 2013.

The next stage was to identify various manifestations of SGBV particularly during periods of conflict in each of the Eastern African countries. This was done in order to compare and contrast the various manifestations of GBV escalate particularly during periods of war and conflict.⁷ It was evident

⁷ The Communication Strategy methodology was developed and shared throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in other continents by the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research at the School of Religion and Theology in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

that SGBV was used in each of the countries as a weapon of warfare. As a way to better comprehend the occurrence of GBV from an African perspective, it was pertinent to examine the role of socio-cultural practices such as patriarchy in rationalizing violence against women and other vulnerable groups.

During the Workshop, each of the representatives had the opportunity to share and compare their experiences. This process involved analyzing the feedback obtained from questionnaires distributed to each of the representatives and evaluating the impact the Communication Strategy had at the grassroots level. Each contact resource person provided their own unique accounts and challenges faced in their advocacy efforts.

The investigation further involved documenting success or change stories collected from the communities or individuals who had participated in the group therapy sessions also known as “Tamar Circles”. This process involved integrating the useful insights from individuals who had played a significant role in the launch, integration and mainstreaming of the Strategy in each of the Eastern African countries. In general, the findings of the study were that the most likely theatres for SGBV are within the domestic sphere, family space or context of marriage. To a lesser extent, public spaces such as workplace environments are also conducive for sexual harassment.

4. Discussion

4.1: The Culture of Silence

Religion has often been used selectively to propagate and justify certain cultural practises such as polygamy) and the submission and silencing of women and girls in society⁸. This “culture of silence” contributes to an environment that wrongly accepts, excuses, and even rationalizes violence against females.⁹ Such acts are therefore declared to be “ordinary”, “normal” or ‘permissible’. Other cultural acts that are considered normal include wife-beating and marital rape. In many African cultures, children’s rights are non-existent – hence, defilement of children is not considered to be a serious issue. In many African languages, the term “rape” does not exist. Rape is sexual intercourse with someone without his/her consent. It includes both the forceful and unlawful penetration of another person’s genitals without consent as well as the fraudulent acquisition of consent. Rape not only dims any prospect of marriage but can also have very frightening consequences that endure long after the assault: unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), in addition to psychological trauma. In armed conflict, the perpetrators may include fellow victims of violence

⁸In the Old Testament, (Christian Bible) polygamy was a common practise. The Koran also allows the marriage of up to 4 wives.

such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), members of other clans or religious groups, or even family members. In many cases of rape and gang rape, the survivor knows the perpetrator(s).

Rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced sterilisation, forced abortion and forced pregnancy are crimes under national and international laws, yet the perpetrators of these crimes often go scot-free. Most cases of rape and defilement in Africa go unreported because the victims' claims are often treated with cynicism and instead, their own morality is called into question. It is common for the victims to be subjected to questions such as: "*What were you wearing? Did you provoke him?*" *Are you sure the two of you are not friends?*" The underlying assumption behind such questions is that the victims were to blame for the sexual violence. This fear is founded in the misleading gender stereotype that women are to blame if they are subjected to unwanted sexual advances or sexual assault. The assumption is that a woman is courting rape if she wears a short skirt or trousers. Hence, the rape is seen as "intentional," i.e., the woman invited the rape.

The blaming and stigmatization that SGBV survivors endure implies that they must have "encouraged" the sexual assault in some way. Consequently many women and girls avoid reporting the violations, since in most cases there were no witnesses present - it is the perpetrator's word against the survivor's testimony. Moreover, stigma and blame accompanies sexual violations and reporting the crime – rather than bringing justice for the survivor- often brings more dishonour and shame rather than the actual act itself. This sense of humiliation and shame is a significant barrier to help-seeking of any kind, which explains why so many rapes go unreported.

Stereotypes that have been perpetuated to justify SGBV in Eastern Africa include blaming the survivors for provoking the perpetrators by their dressing, demeanour or talk. The cliché that the woman's refusal is actually a ploy to make the man try harder is culturally relevant in many African societies. In Kenya, rape is often not taken seriously as criminal behaviour. The experience of many women in Kenya is that after being violated, rush to a police station to report the crime only to have the (usually male) officers trivialize the experience or ask for details of what the survivor did to encourage the rapist. A case in point is the traumatic experience of a young woman in Western Kenya with the pseudo name "Liz" reported in the Kenya print media on October 2013. Liz was reportedly gang raped and subsequently thrown into a pit latrine where she sustained spinal injuries. She also suffered serious injuries resulting in Fibula Vistula, thereby making her incontinent and in urgent need of reconstructive surgery. The police arrested the young men responsible for this heinous act and the only punishment meted out to them was to cut grass around the police compound! This illustrates the trivialization, trauma and injustice that survivors of SGBV face in Kenya. Moreover, in many African contexts, there is no such thing as "marital rape." There also have been cases of men being violated but most of these victims prefer not go public with their experiences and so suffer in silence.

SGBV has a greater impact on females, who suffer greater physical harm than males. Incest in particular remains a closely guarded secret within African families, leaving the affected victims

traumatized and suffering in silence. Other vulnerable groups include children who remain vulnerable to sexual violence because it is often perpetrated by persons whom the survivors know and trust. Hence, in order to avoid the social stigma and family shame, the knowledge of the abuse remains a closely guarded secret that is kept within the family. At times, families are paid “damage money” to buy their silence.¹⁰ This culture of silence and secrecy reinforces the impunity of the perpetrators of SGBV crimes. GBV affects more females than males, since African cultural norms tend to allow and encourage violent behaviour towards women by assigning privilege and hierarchical power to men. The enforcement of these power hierarchies and structural inequalities are created and sustained by belief systems, cultural norms and socialization processes.

The socio-economic and cultural subordinate status of women and girls makes them more vulnerable to violence and contributes to an environment that wrongly accepts, excuses, and even expects violence against the girls who undergo it. Furthermore, children are also at risk of sexual violence which is usually perpetrated by persons known to the victims. However, social stigma and family shame result in the knowledge of the abuse being kept within the family. This culture of secrecy serves to aid the impunity of the perpetrators. SGBV has a greater impact on women and girls, as they suffer greater physical harm than men when victimized. GBV during or around the time of pregnancy can lead to unique consequences on maternal and child health. Moreover, the psychological impact of GBV can have devastating results on the well-being of the mother, not only in the period surrounding pregnancy but even years later.

Survivors are unlikely to report spousal abuse because they fear the reaction of their spouses. There is a sense that what happens within marriage, even if this includes violence, is something private that should not be shared with others outside of the relationship. Women are made to feel ashamed for talking about their experiences with others. Women also have a very real fear that reporting violence to local authorities will lead to an escalation in the violence by their husbands. A socio-cultural barrier is the fear of the social consequences that result from reporting spousal abuse to the authorities. In particular, women fear that reporting abuse will lead to divorce, which will leave the woman without any financial support. When women experience GBV they are afraid to report their husbands to the police because doing that will break the marriage. Often the woman has no income to sustain her if she was to leave the matrimonial home. Inherent in this fear is the additional concern that being a divorced woman will render her an undesirable partner for other prospective husbands.

Similarly, women are concerned that their reporting of an incident will escalate the problem and even leave their husbands jailed. Others think that going to the police is useless because nothing will be done anyway. A common perception that the system is not built to respond to the needs of women who experience GBV. Reporting the violence or seeking help is further complicated by variables such as the

¹⁰ *Family Health Options Kenya 2010: An Assessment of Current Sexual and Gender Based Violence Interventions in Eldoret and its Environs; Ministry of Health: National Health Strategy (1997-2010)*

survivor's age (e.g., *is s/he "too old" or "too young" to be believed reporting on rape?*), location (e.g., *Are any services available for help? Does the provider have a relationship with the perpetrator?*), and marital status (e.g., *Will the survivor invite even more stigma for reporting violence that happened in an unsanctioned relationship? Isn't this violence part and parcel of an intimate relationship?*).

While this acceptance of violence as a part of relationships prevents survivors from feeling safe enough to report incidences of violence, even those who may want or try to report their abuse will be faced with obstacles. Women in abusive marriages therefore have to learn to "get used to" being beaten and "keep quiet" because even if they make a report to the local authorities, nothing is done, hence, she opts to remain silent. Men and boys who may be undergoing violence and assault from their wives or partners rarely report the cases because men are always expected to be superior in strength to women. Hence, the idea of a man facing GBV is ridiculed – thereby leading such men into depression and frustration.

The family frequently becomes a socio-cultural barrier in itself. Norms related to shame and the privacy of family matters serve as an obstacle to disclosing incidents of GBV outside of the family and immediate social network. Therapy cases are usually not reported because of the tendency of affected individuals to keep this as a secret because it is associated with shame and discrimination. The survivor's family often decides to keep this a secret for fear of ruining the family reputation and to protect the image of the perpetrator.

Survivors of SGBV endure mental and physiological distress; have higher levels of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic complaints than persons who have not suffered such violence. Defilement, child molestation and wife battery retards the emotional development of the woman and the child. Most doctors at the Nairobi Women's Hospital in Kenya recounted how they follow up survivors of SGBV in an attempt to alleviate the trauma they undergo. The psychological damage has long-term effects leaving many survivors severely traumatized. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have to undergo sessions of therapy to enable them to cope. In addition, even though monetary compensation cannot substitute the pain survivors endure, it helps alleviate some of the problems they have to live with, sometimes for life such as counselling fees, medical bills and other related support for the survivor may need.

The international community and African governments have been rather slow in recognizing SGBV as a crime against humanity. In Sudan, for example, although the Government (under massive pressure from the international community) acknowledged that rape was being perpetrated in Darfur, it refused to acknowledge the magnitude of this scourge, or that sexual violence was being used as a weapon of war against the civilian population. Too often, this attitude has denied survivors access to treatment, as those brave enough to seek medical care or to report the rape to the authorities have been harassed and even arrested. Unmarried pregnant women are treated like criminals, victimised not just by the initial act(s) of violence but again as they are arrested and subjected to brutal treatment by

police. Ironically, the survivors of SGBV who choose to come forward and make public their traumatizing ordeal more often than not end up isolated, ashamed and stigmatized by the community because of the high premium placed on female chastity. The shame and stigma attached to sexual violence, and the lenient penalties meted out to guilty offenders either by the state legal machinery or community judicial systems forces most survivors to keep silent about their ordeal.

4.2: Religious Norms and Beliefs

GBV occurs at all levels of society including within religious circles. The major religions practiced in Eastern Africa are Christianity, Islam and traditional African belief systems. As I will be demonstrate in a later section, some of the practices that violate the rights of girls and women are justified and reinforced by appealing selectively to certain sections of the Bible, Koran or other religious and socio-cultural norms. SGBV in particular, cannot be understood in isolation from the gendered religious beliefs and social structures that influence women's vulnerability to violence. The informants highlighted numerous cases of incest, sexual and physical abuse and other forms of GBV perpetuated by Church leaders that were kept hidden due to the culture of silence. There have also been cases of various kinds of injustice meted out by religious leaders against their own families. Moreover, religious leaders seemed reluctant to confront members of their congregation who are abusive to their spouses and families particularly if these perpetrators of GBV also happen to be wealthy and influential.

It is common for religious leaders to propagate the culture of silence rather than directly confronting survivors of SGBV and yet this affects a significant proportion of their congregations. This silence and apathy is largely caused by the ignorance of religious leaders about where to send the survivors for legal and psycho-social support. These are essential services that the survivors of SGBV need to ensure holistic healing has taken place. Moreover, religious leaders who are guilty of perpetuating these vices tend to become overly defensive when issues to do with rape or incest are brought up or discussed.

With regard to the roles of men and women in marriage, the Christian Bible views the man as the "head" whereas the woman is the "neck". This theology is not biblical for it implies that the "neck" (the woman) must take responsibility for anything that goes wrong with the "head". For instance, when a couple have problems conceiving a child because the man is not capable of siring children, his sexuality is protected and arrangements are made for the woman to conceive with the man's relative or friend. However, if it is the woman who is barren, she is ostracized by the community and exposed to ridicule since her worth comes primarily from her child-bearing capabilities.

4.3: Cultural Norms and Socializing Agents

Mothers are the primary socializing agents who often contribute to negative masculinity. Women often are the first ones to castigate those women who go against the norm, e.g. divorced women, single mothers, etc. A marriage is considered to be dysfunctional especially when women begin to question the man's power. During initiation ceremonies, teenage boys are empowered to be men before they are physically, psychologically and economically ready for the challenges of manhood. Many acts of GBV are viewed as "acceptable" or "normal" which therefore has a negative impact on the willingness on the part of survivors to report acts of violence that they experience. This denies them formal or informal sources of support. This barrier may be particularly powerful in preventing women from reporting physical abuse by their husbands. The informants reported that in most African cultures, acts such as wife beating are "acceptable" or "normal." Hence, the abused female survivors could not justify their accusations against their abusive spouses because the elders in the community would dismiss such complaint as trivial and part and parcel of marriage.

SGBV cannot be fully understood in isolation from the gender norms and social structures that make women and girls vulnerable to such forms of violence. In many cultures, traditional beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimise and, therefore, perpetuate violence against women. The subordination of girls and women is manifested in the gender stereotypes entrenched in these societies. Certain gendered norms, beliefs and cultural practices reinforce acts of GBV such as wife battering, marital rape, FGM/C and early (forced) marriages; "beading" of young girls to serve the sexual needs of young warriors¹¹; forced abortions and virginity tests; wife battering and coerced wife inheritance, favouritism of the boy child *vis a vis* the girl child amongst other cultural practices. In addition, most African communities, the testimony of a child cannot be taken as seriously as the word of an adult, especially if it challenges the integrity of a respectable person in society – hence, child defilement or molestation cases are often not treated with the seriousness they deserve.

Certain cultural customs that are supposedly helpful to women are actually very oppressive and provide a fertile ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS. One such practise is wife inheritance. In certain ethnic groups, when a man dies, his widow must undergo certain "cleansing" ceremonies and be inherited by a sibling to the deceased. Such cultural practices contribute significantly to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In contrast, the ethnic groups such as the Maasai do not practice wife inheritance and hence, a widow is "free" to engage in intimacy with other men. However, this concept of "freedom" is misleading because eventually, young widows end up worse than before, struggling to bring up many children fathered by different men who care less about sharing in the responsibility of providing for the children they fathered. Other practices such as the paying of bride price or dowry come loaded with cultural expectations for the wife who is now viewed as the man's "property."

¹¹ The practice of "beading" is practiced in certain pastoral communities such as the Samburu in Kenya, where young girls are coerced into satisfying the sexual needs of young morans (community warriors) but are forced to abort should they conceive during these sexual encounters.

4.4: Patriarchy and Initiation rites

Patriarchy refers to the masculine nature of socialization prevalent in most African cultures. There is a link between patriarchy and GBV because it forces women to succumb to unacceptable acts that violate their rights and justifies their low status in society. Many cultural practises that reinforce SGBV are justified as being “normal”, ‘ordinary’ or ‘permissible’. In patriarchal cultures, masculinity is closely equated with power and control. It is instilled early in the lives of children through the socialization process and assignment of gender roles. This is further entrenched through cultural initiation rites such as circumcision and in preparing young people for marriage.

One of the most important moments in the transition of an African child’s life is the initiation ceremony around puberty when teenage a boy or girl undergoes certain rituals and rites to cross into manhood or womanhood. During such initiation periods, boys are exposed to highly gendered messages about what it means to be a man. From a cultural perspective, manhood is equated with the ability to provide and also exert power over others - if need be, through the use of physical force. However, such expressions of masculinity are a major driving force behind the disempowerment and consequent vulnerability of women and girls. Traditions such as abducting young girls for sexual purposes, wife battering and other manifestations of negative masculinity are culturally condoned and justified as “acceptable” ways of disciplining and “taming” a wife.

Gender inequality lies at the core of SGBV and depend on perceptions of male and female roles in society and the social expectations surrounding these roles. However, the notions of masculinity and femininity are gradually evolving. In many African cultures, a woman is regarded as the property of a man (either her father or husband) -hence an affront on women is an attack at the man. From an early age, a preconceived mould of masculinity is imposed on boys and men, just as stereotypes of femininity are imposed on girls and women. As men change, entire cultures begin to change, laying the foundations for a richer lifestyle. Girls are also socialized to believe that as women, they have to tolerate anything meted out to them. Hence, it is common for mothers to advise their daughters in abusive marriages to persevere and stay with an abusive spouse because -after all, the same mothers also experienced abuse from their husbands. The daughters are further advised to keep the abuse secret, thereby protecting the perpetrator and condoning the violence. In many ethnic groups in Eastern Africa, it was evident that cultural norms, traditional beliefs, and social institutions legitimise and, therefore, perpetuate violence against women. The subordination of women to men in most societies results from the generational gender stereotypes entrenched in these societies.

4.5: Negative Masculinity and GBV

Studies demonstrate that there is a close link between negative masculinity and GBV. According to Robert (2000), masculinity has three defining characteristics. Firstly, it is structured in

gender relations, meaning that it has to do with male and female roles and attitudes and how these interact with each other. Secondly, it is not static, meaning that masculinities are dynamic. For instance, the way a father manages his household does not always determine how his son will manage his own household later in life. Moreover, the manifestation of masculinity is not homogenous because it is affected by cultural and generational factors. It is a pattern of social conduct meaning that masculinity is largely influenced by the role of religion, the mass media and institutions of learning.¹² Negative masculinity upholds and reinforces traditional stereotyped mindsets, which shape the identity and behaviour of young boys, thereby perpetuating gender inequalities and patriarchal norms. Such gendered stereotypes are largely inculcated through socialization processes which have a significant influence on how men and women will later interact and engage with their economic, political and social environment.

4.6: SGBV as a Weapon of Warfare

Whereas acts of SGBV take place all the time and are prevalent in all societies, situations of armed conflict, internal strife, economic and political crises often exacerbate the extent and escalate the manifestations of this violence. Insecurity and lawlessness creates an environment conducive for SGBV to thrive because sexual violence now becomes a weapon of war to humiliate the enemy and to achieve military objectives in crude, unorthodox ways. Sexual violence becomes an effective way to injure, control and humiliates the enemy in general, while at the same time, it violating the victims 'physical and mental integrity. Perpetrators of SGBV are often motivated by a desire for power and domination. Vulnerable, unarmed civilians therefore become prime targets of the aggressors who take them hostage, gang rape, injure them sexually and exploit them as sexual slaves or kill them altogether. More often than not, the aggressors are never arrested for their crimes thus leaving the survivors to suffer without any hope of restitution or justice. Such forms of violence tend to be gender-specific, with women and girls being the most vulnerable groups.

War and conflict situations displace communities and many are forced to flee their homes - either as refugees in neighbouring countries or living in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDP). Such horrors were witnessed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the volatile conflict area of Eastern Congo, Northern Uganda, and Darfur region in Sudan and during Kenya's 2007 Post-Election Violence (PEV) as a result of inter-ethnic conflicts. During each of these crisis situations, women and children were subjected to unprecedented and unimaginable levels of sexual abuse and GBV as they sought

¹² Robert W. (2000): *Arms and the Man: Using the New Research on Masculinity to Understand Violence and Promote Peace in the Contemporary World.*

refuge in the bushes or IDP camps. In most cases, the perpetrators of such violence get off scot-free, leaving the survivors with no means of seeking restitution or justice. It is important for governments to strongly condemn all forms of violence that affect men and women, the youth and children and to put in place measures to eliminate the vice. It is their responsibility, and it is in the interest of the state to focus national policies and legislation to promote and safeguard the rights of women.

Culturally, an African man is expected to be the primary provider of his family. However, if for some reason he is unable to fulfil this traditional role, this places him in a state of helplessness, anger and frustration. Such frustrations and anger are directed towards their families and wives in particular. This sense of powerless over their own lives and the lives of their families is extremely degrading on a man's masculinity, especially when they are forced to seek shelter in IDP camps. They are often deprived of their livelihoods due to the prevailing insecurity and are forced to depend on relief food from charity organizations. This affects the man's status, power and dignity as the provider for his family making some turn violent because of the perception that they must enforce obedience and authority on their wives. Others resort to selling some of their provisions to reassert their authority and prove that they were still in control of their families and do not take kindly to being questioned about it.

Traditional family systems where men were the providers and protectors of their wives and children has been eroded in many instances due to migrations to major towns to seek employment, poverty, chronic illness or armed conflict. With the breakdown of traditional family roles, a vacuum is left. Poverty and economic instability have also resulted in a crisis of masculinity where men's traditional roles are threatened and rather than finding alternate roles, men have in some cases sought to assert their masculinity through irresponsible sexual behaviour or domestic violence. The expectations that a man ought to be strong and in control in all situations is actually not liberating and in many instances could be oppressive to the vulnerable men in society who are physically, economically or emotionally challenged in one way or the other. As part of the initiation rites, young boys are socialized to be strong at all times. This inevitably puts enormous psychological pressure on men who are forced to pretend to be what they are not because of the high expectations of society.

During conflict situations, the collapse of law and order provides an environment conducive for rampant sexual as well as other forms of abuse to take place on a massive scale. The situation becomes complicated when the individuals who were supposed to perform a protective role suddenly turn out to be the perpetrators of the crimes. Perpetrators usually take advantage of the state of insecurity to commit these heinous acts since the risk of identification and prosecution is minimal or non-existent. They include government security forces (policemen and state military personnel); rebel groups opposing the government forces; external peace-keeping forces, relief food workers and camp administrators (in refugee and IDP camps) as well as opportunistic members of the public.

Based on the empirical accounts provided by the representatives during the Nairobi Workshop, it was evident that SGBV escalates during periods of war and conflict – in essence, it becomes an

additional weapon of warfare against the enemy. Sexual violence therefore becomes a form of torture to inflict injury or as a means of extracting information. It is also used to degrade and intimidate those captured. One representative from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) narrated a horrific account of how captured men were forced to watch their wives and daughters gang-raped by soldiers.

Sexual violence is also used as a form of punishment for actual or alleged actions committed by individuals, their families or ethnic communities or to destroy the cohesion of certain communities. Sexual violence is further committed on young girls based on the mythical belief that having sex with a virgin girl is a cure for HIV/AIDS infection.

During times of war and conflict, sexual violence is strategically gender-specific and mainly targets the vulnerability of women and girls who then are taken hostage as sex slaves, gang-raped, or killed altogether. Girls may be recruited to fulfil various functions –such as domestic workers, porters, fighters, spies, suicide bombers, sexual slaves, or “wives” of the rebel commanders. When captured, men and boys are also subjected to various humiliating acts of SGBV such as sodomy, being forced to watch their wives or daughters gang-raped by the oppressors, castrated or forced to perform other degrading sexual acts. Sexual violence in conflict almost always springs from wider problems – a lack of security and protection, the low status of women and girls and a culture in which either sexual violence is not recognized as a crime or impunity prevails.

4.7: Failure of Justice, Restitution and Accountability Mechanisms

The primary obligation to protect women and girls from sexual violence rests with the state. However, many fail to meet this obligation even during peace-time. Most of the justice systems within the developing world are characterised by shoddy investigations, low arrest records and insensitive judicial procedures that criminalise and intimidate survivors. This encourages a culture of silence where cases of sexual violence go largely unreported thereby enhancing impunity and further human rights violations.

While the traditional criminal justice system engenders a paradigm shift in dealing with SGBV by affording direct compensation to the survivor, such awards are nowhere near sufficient. The notion in such systems was that the award is more a ‘benefit’ to the survivor’s family rather than a means of alleviating the survivor’s conditions. The prevalence of SGBV therefore escalates because of the reluctance of various actors in the justice system to act firmly and decisively to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes face the full force of the law.

Although each of the Eastern African countries have legal frameworks to counter GBV and sexual violence, forms of violence such as emotional and physical abuse in marriage, matrimonial rape, coerced widow inheritance or disinheritance, forced early marriages and adultery are yet to receive legal recognition as offences, are very difficult to prove or are not recognized as “serious” offences in

courts of law. Courts have discretionary powers to be lenient in the interest of saving a marriage and it is common for complainants of domestic violence to be sent away from police stations or courts for lack of evidence. Other survivors are advised to consult their area chief or family elders to mediate the case. Unfortunately, many village chiefs tend to be biased and so are easily compromised to side mainly with wealthy and influential perpetrators whereas the woman is told to “*go back and persevere like all good women do*”.

Sexual crimes, justice and restitution mechanisms are not considered to be primary issues in the crafting of peace protocols relating to the cessation of conflict that would require urgent redress in the post-conflict dispensation. Traditional reconciliation and judicial processes such as the informal “*Kiama*” (council of elders) in Eastern and Central Kenya; “*Gacaca*” courts in Rwanda, and the “*Mat-o-put*” which is the Northern Uganda Community Peace mechanism often choose to pardon and re-integrate perpetrators of GBV into the society once they confess, apologise and pay a fine of some sort to the aggrieved family. This allows perpetrators to go scot-free into the post-conflict society to further perpetuate more acts of GBV. Such blatant disregard for accountability in safeguarding and protecting women and girls reinforces the culture of impunity.

5. The Transformative Approach of the Tamar Communication Strategy

Transformative masculinity is a relatively new approach which is currently been used as a tool during workshops in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. It involves religious contexts where sermons are preached that create awareness on GBV in order to empower women economically, psychologically and spiritually. During discussions, rural women show a general awareness that their rights are infringed upon by their men folk. However, they lack alternatives and fear the backlash from their husbands and society at large if they become too assertive in changing the status quo. The appeal of this Strategy lies in its transformation approach where direct questions concerning sensitive topics such as the rights of women can be discussed in a public domain. In so doing, it underscores the important role of women in society. A case in point in the Bible is the important role played by women, which in most cases is often overlooked or downplayed. A case in point is the presence of women such as Mary Magdalene in the ministry of Jesus. It is often assumed that there were only twelve men who assisted Jesus in his earthly ministry.

GBV is rooted in unequal power relations between men and women and is grounded in power imbalances, meaning that there is a close link between negative masculinity and the increase of GBV. It is therefore necessary to “deconstruct” the concept of masculinity before positive aspects of masculinity can be “reconstructed”. There is also need to deconstruct and then reconstruct masculinity as a means of finding alternatives ways of defining masculinity. “Deconstructing” masculinity means identifying the things that are not life affirming, while “reconstructing” masculinity implies reinforcing the life affirming values and beliefs. This entails establishing a balance between values of belonging, (partnership, inclusiveness, cooperation and generosity), with values of enterprise (individualism,

competitiveness, and materialism). It is important to strike a balance between values of belonging and values of enterprise and to re-evaluate the socialization process and initiation rites that children and the youth undergo in Africa.

The Communication Strategy consists of interactive study of texts drawn from religious texts where both the reader's environmental context and the religious context (in this case, Christianity) are merged together. The primary objective is to raise awareness in order to create transformation through the 'five Cs' that refer to: 'Community', 'Context', 'Criticality', 'Consciencization' and 'Change'. 'Community' implies that this communication strategy is meant to be interactive within a group setting. 'Context' means that the strategy must consider the social location of the audience. 'Criticality' refers to the need to critically examine the religious context of the particular religious text in use – in this case, the Bible¹³. 'Consciencization' refers to the effort to raise the reader's inner, reflective awareness of specific concerns; while 'Change' means that the end goal of the Communication Strategy is transformation of the reader's behaviour through deliberate, personal action.

Over the years, various forms of religious doctrine have been used to condone and perpetuate acts of GBV and justify negative masculinity. In addition, issues to do with sexuality are often considered to be "taboo" subjects- thereby entrenching a culture of silence concerning acts of SGBV. For instance, using the Bible as a case in point, there are numerous examples of cultural bias, gender inequality and negative portrayals of women using their sexuality to tempt men to commit sinful acts. For instance, according to Christian doctrine, the first human couple created in the Bible (Adam and Eve) were thrown out of the perfect garden of Eden after the "temptress" Eve gave in to the temptation of the devil to eat the forbidden fruit and then convinced her husband to eat the fruit as well.¹⁴ Another example is cited in the Old Testament of a prostitute named Delilah who used her sexuality to lure the prophet Samson into letting out the secret that the source of his superhuman strength was his hair. Numerous other instances are cited of women caught in acts of adultery and condemned for their apparent promiscuity.

Other taboo topics highlighted in the Bible include the story of a woman who had a chronic bleeding problem for 12 years but was miraculously healed by touching Jesus' garment. This incident highlights the stigma that chronic diseases have had over the years. By appealing to this story, is story is relevant to contemporary African societies making it easy for religious leaders are to discuss the stigmatizing effects that chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS have negatively affected society and the empowerment that is brought after their healing. Another sensitive topic that can be discussed within a safe space concerns issues to do with racism, negative ethnicity and gender inequality which is alluded to in the story of the Samaritan woman who meets a Jewish man Jesus at a well and they have a conversational interaction which was a taboo at that time.

¹³ Although the Tamar Communication Strategy makes reference to the Bible, it does not exclude the application of other religious texts such as the Koran.

¹⁴ Genesis 3(Old Testament, Christian Bible)

This story could be used religious leaders to facilitate a discussion on negative ethnicity, gender inequality, tribalism and to some extent racism (which is common in Africa) can be addressed in an amicable way. The story illustrates that these barriers can be broken – the woman gives Jesus water, and in return, she is offered “living water” that will benefit both herself and her community. The Strategy is non-confrontational and can be used to effectively deal with transformative masculinity by appealing to the positive aspects of masculinity and downplaying the negatives aspects as a way of encouraging gender equity and equality.

Ironically, no mention is made of any of the men the women were found with!¹⁵ These examples and others portray the female gender as (mis)using their sexuality not only to tempt men but also to bring about evil into the world – the underlying assumption is that it is through the female gender that an otherwise perfect world was ruined and also the reason for all the pain and suffering in this world.

6. Conclusion

SGBV is prevalent in the Eastern African region with the persons most affected being women and children. Efforts to eliminate it have been ineffective, considering that the sexual and gender-based violence is most prevalent in situations of conflict, in which the government is a major player. Certain forms of the violence are perpetrated by the patriarchal nature of the society, which makes women subservient to men. Because the legislative, administrative and policy decisions are in most cases made by male-dominated structures, the pace at which measures targeting elimination of sexual and gender-based violence have been half-hearted. Deeply entrenched African and religious cultural practices and attitudes perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence. Certain cultural practices reinforce gender inequality and the perception that women are second-class citizens lacking the capacity to sustain themselves. Many communities blame and ostracise the survivors rather than the perpetrators of SGBV.

FBOs have a duty to advocate for the right to justice for the survivors of GBV. This entails lobbying and advocating for legislative, administrative and policy decisions to combat SGBV as part of restorative justice. Other measures include conducting education and awareness campaigns to sensitize the public on harmful traditional practises that reinforce gender inequality. There is also need to set up special funds for the compensation of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as to sensitise the courts, the police, prosecuting agencies and Gender Desks. Each of the states in the Great Lakes Region have committed themselves to prevent and end Gender-Based Violence by ratifying international conventions and declarations, and in so doing, acknowledge the seriousness of the problem. Working in consultation and coordination with state agents, human rights groups and the

¹⁵ One such example of an adulterous woman is in John Chapter 8, New Testament, Christian Bible

international community can join forces to address GBV. More needs to be done to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence whether against men, women or children. The survivors of GBV need to be supported and protected - a responsibility for which each state official needs to be held to account.

Prevention efforts need to focus on changing the deep-rooted attitudes and behaviours that foster GBV, which includes women's low status, unequal gender roles and an imbalance of power between intimate relationships. It is important not only to influence individuals (women and men experiencing/perpetrating violence) but also the broader community, which is influential in creating a culture of non-tolerance for violence. The prevention of GBV requires a significant transformation in the value of culture at individual and the community level.

Religious leaders and FBOs need to be role models who value compassion and community building over constraining gender roles. In addition, places of worship need to be places of solace and healing for the survivors of violence. FBOs and religious leaders therefore need to be more pro-active in redefining masculinity and encouraging younger men to affirm women as equals in need of protection and not as instruments to edify their masculinity through subjugation and violence. Religious institutions such as churches and mosques must lead the way in redefining masculinity. This can be done by reinforcing legal and policy structures so that laws prohibiting violence against women and girls are enforced.

Addressing gender inequality and adverse cultural attitudes and practices including the larger cultural, social and economic factors that contribute to violence is critical. This involves taking steps to change them, including measures to close the gap between the rich and poor and to ensure equitable access to goods, services and opportunities. Because violence is a multifaceted issue, with psychological, social and environmental roots, it requires a variety of approaches targeted at a number of different stakeholders, including government and nongovernmental agencies, law enforcement agencies, the health and education sectors, state organs and FBOs.

Any intervention designed to contribute to the reduction of GBV must be multifaceted and target the elements listed which are all intertwined. Accordingly, efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence must deal with the cultural dynamics that relegate women to the periphery of creating and enforcing policy and hold perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence to account. It is important for states to safeguard the rights of its citizens and put in place measures to eliminate it. It is their responsibility, and it is in the interest of the state to focus national policies and legislation to promote and safeguard the rights of women.

Even if services are available, sometimes rape victims do not make use of them due to lack of absolute confidentiality and privacy within a medical facility. In addition, acknowledgement of rape can have repercussions within the family, such as rejection or divorce, and wider social consequences of stigmatization and economic marginalisation. The political and legal system can represent a hurdle,

especially when extensive bureaucracy and contact with a proliferation of different authorities are required in order to report and file suit for rape. In some conflict areas, there are no authorities available to document violence or to provide legal recourse. National authorities can play a key role in facilitating SGBV projects simply by recognising that SGBV is an issue and enabling medical services or agencies to respond. The impact of stigmatisation makes it all the more difficult for SGBV to be handled in a general medical structure. One way is to establish 'safe spaces' such as the Communication Circles, where women can speak about SGBV with the assurance of full privacy and confidentiality. To truly respond to SGBV, international and national actors must demonstrate political will to invest significant financial and human resources in all these inseparable and indispensable dimensions of care for survivors of sexual violence.

Religious leaders are well placed to foster close relationships with journalists and media watchdog groups. The print and electronic media has the capacity to reach a wider audience and therefore needs to be used as a channel of advocacy that targets all levels of society. A multi-media approach includes engaging key public institutions, the disciplined forces and institutions of higher learning.

The recommendations advanced herein are that the Duty Bearers¹⁶ must address SGBV by: facilitating and providing adequate holistic assistance and support to all survivors; promoting equity in access to resources irrespective of gender and work towards addressing cultural norms and practices that encourage SGBV; providing access to medical and psychosocial assistance to SGBV survivors and enhance gender-sensitive structures for the reintegration of survivors as non-stigmatized members of society; and to sensitise the judicial system, state agents and prosecuting agencies. Public education and awareness campaigns are therefore necessary to empower vulnerable members of the society. Acts of SGBV need to be exposed by creating awareness of the vice and searching for strategies on how best survivors can be supported and the perpetrators brought to justice.

NGOs, FBOs and humanitarian organizations have an obligation to lobby for more aggressive legislative, administrative and policy decisions to eliminate SGBV as part of restorative justice. This can be achieved by conducting public awareness campaigns to sensitize the public on harmful traditional practises that reinforce gender inequality. A special fund needs to be established to compensate SGBV survivors and to further empower justice systems and prosecuting agencies on how best to deal with the vice. This can be achieved by working in consultation with the state machinery, human rights groups and the international community to eliminate SGBV while also establishing credible truth, justice and reconciliation commissions.

¹⁶ In this context, the Duty bearers include State Agencies, FBOs, NGOs, national and international organizations

Finally, each of the states in the Great Lakes Region need to demonstrate serious commitment to reduce acts of GBV by ratifying international conventions and declarations, and in so doing, acknowledging the seriousness of the problem. NGOs, FBOs and State machinery have an obligation to continuously expose acts of GBV, create awareness on the problem and search for strategies not only to curb the vice, but also to explore how best survivors can be supported and the perpetrators brought to justice. The survivors of SGBV need to be supported and protected - a responsibility for which each State ought to be held to account.

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