

Teenager trained as Paralegal (COP) rescues self first



Barbara (seated - in black) attentively listens to fellow participants brainstorming on factors fuelling GBV



Barbara happily receives a Certificate of Completion of COP training from the Facilitator.



Beatrice, AWDF Grants Manager, poses with Barbara at Bumbo Play Ground during AWDF's site visit to Better HAG Uganda.

The period November 2014 through to October 2016 marks the second phase of implementing a project on elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) with the generous support of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The project is happening in Bubulo County East of Manafwa district in Eastern Uganda where GBV is very prevalent.

One of the lessons learnt in phase I was the need to recruit and train Community Paralegals (CoPs) on GBV issues and related laws so as they reach out to victims in their respective communities. Little did young Barbara, one of the beneficiaries of the COP training, know that she was destined to the empowerment that could save her critical situation.

Barbara Mukite is an 18 year old candidate for O-Levels National Examinations at African Secondary School, Bumwoni S/County but the future of her studies was fading on account of her Father (who happens to be a S/County Speaker) denying her tuition and other scholastic materials. "...he tells me he does not have money to educate girls, that I should get married so that he gets the dowry to educate my male siblings...what is more hurting is he helps other clan children with fees and scholastic materials and ignores me...he even threatened to slice me up with a panga if I insisted on demanding for tuition from him..." a sobbing Barbara secretly shares her ordeal with the M&E Officer during tea break.

This was hastily shared with the Lead Facilitator who is a Lawyer by Profession. She elucidated a whole set of rights while quoting different legal instruments to the delight of Barbara. She also encouraged her to rise up and demand for such rights from her Dad, noting that Better HAG Uganda would stand with her. This incident formed the benchmark of the training where the Executive Director encouraged the rest of the participants to ensure that such human rights violations come to a halt as soon as they pass out from the training.

Barbara successfully completed the training and was awarded a certificate, a card (ID) identifying her as a CoP as well as an introduction letter from Better HAG Uganda to concerned authorities in the GBV response. Feeling empowered, flying high and confident that she would emerge victor in the fight for her right to education, Barbara happily left for home.

It is Better HAG Uganda's principal and passion to follow up peculiar GBV cases like that of Barbara. A fortnight after the training, Better HAG Uganda made contact with Barbara to the joy of 'good news'. "I respectively told him that I know my rights, and that I didn't wish to take him to court for that...I showed him the certificate which clearly bore my name, together with the ID and the letter Introducing me as a COP...I could see him with no option ... and days later he paid my tuition. I am now happily in school and although I've not got all I want, I am sure he will honour his pledge and settle me in the near future..." noted a seemingly happy Barbara on phone.

On the question of what she thought of the training, Barbara noted "...thank you so much Better HAG Uganda, without that arrangement and the fact that you selected me to participate, I wouldn't be here (at school) today..."

To us all credit goes to AWDF, for without this big-hearted support; Barbara would perhaps be one of the saddest girls in the world.