

Panos Ethiopia

Panos is an international organization with regional offices worldwide. Panos Ethiopia is a country office that operates under the Eastern African Regional Office. The organization works to raise awareness of neglected issues and strengthen the ability of marginalized sections of the community to assert their priorities in public policy and debate.

The End Violence Against Women Project of Panos Ethiopia was established in 2001 with the intention of stimulating informed debate and discussion on development issues both at country and regional levels. The project's strategy includes informing the public about GBV and in particular, those who have the mandate to protect the rights of women in the community. The project uses different information dissemination strategies to reach a variety of target groups. The project was designed in partnership with The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the Ethiopian Media Women Association. Bringing together three different, but strong organisations to put their efforts together in the fight against violence against women generated synergy.

Objective

1. To raise awareness on violence against women and increase its profile to induce changes in attitude and behaviour within the community and the government machinery.

Programme Descriptions

Public hearings are public event where victims of violence give testimonies of the abuse they have faced. They are designed to raise awareness within the public, the legislature and other public institutions of legal and support aspects of VAW and gaps in legislation. The public hearings also enable victims of VAW to speak out and stimulate public debate on issues

Workshops for law enforcement agencies aim to sensitise law enforcers on issues of violence. The workshops are designed to create opportunities for participating individuals and institutions to review the current situation and systems from a broader perspective (e.g., police and judiciary do not often meet and discuss together); to identify problems in the system – practical, attitudinal, information etc – and identify solutions; in combination with media coverage and advocacy, to initiate steps to change culture, support victims and reduce VAW.

The activities focus on discussing basic gender issues, forms of violence and how they are looked at from the existing law and the constitution, international convention signed and the problems faced in the process of dealing with violence against women cases. The participants include prosecutors, judges and the police and the intention is to increase knowledge of women's rights, as well as encourage reflection on the practical implications of this knowledge within their places of work and then to help the institutions think about how to operationalise new knowledge.

Workshops for journalists sensitise journalists so they can develop more informed publications and news on violence against women and other issues related to women's rights. Since the media has a large influence on all people in the country, PANOS aims to influence the portrayal of women and violence in the media in order to stimulate positive change.

A Radio programme, The Voice of Eve, has aired 52 programmes primarily dedicated to violence against women. Though it deals with providing information, it also has become a forum for discussing options, discovering alternatives and holding existing serviced providers (usually government) accountable. It includes topics which are of immediate application in the other parts of the country. It is also being used as an also an avenue to compare experiences in the use of the existing machineries thereby monitoring the government and its institutions that deal with violence throughout the country.

Notable Innovation

Choosing community institutions carefully

In a country like Ethiopia, working with community's institutions such as the police, judiciary or lawyers is a choice that has to be made deliberately because meaningful work involves a long-term commitment that is often challenging. Panos has learned important lessons in their journey of working to strengthen community institutions, they are as follows.

- The customs and social values of the community or institutions may undermine your work (e.g. acceptance of child marriage, women as property of men) and many of the leaders within the institutions that you may be working with, may also be leaders who uphold these social customs. Accept this and work to influence attitudes at a personal level first.
- Working with the people who 'run the system' requires a long-term commitment to build their capacity to develop a new conceptual framework. This entails beginning the training process with the broader gender analysis and focusing on establishing a fundamental shift of perspective before any practical skill building can occur.
- Organisations accepting this challenge must recognize that this is a time-consuming strategy that requires resources and perseverance.
- If an organization does invest the resources and time, the impact can be substantial and sustainable.