

## Malawi Human Rights Resource Center Malawi

Malawi Human Rights Resource Center (MHRRC) formerly known as the Danish Center for Human Rights is a local human rights capacity building NGO whose main focus from inception in 1996 was to strengthen local human rights NGOs through resource (technical and financial) support, capacity building, networking and community mobilisation.

MHRRC is committed to promoting a sustainable human rights culture by working with civil society organizations and other institutions through resource provision, networking and research in Malawi and the SADC region.

The GBV prevention work in the Center started in 1999 after several studies conducted between 1997 –1999 collectively confirmed that violence against women was a serious problem affecting the majority of women and girls in different ways throughout their life cycle. While the focus groups and victim testimonies revealed that some men are also victims of violence at the hands of women/families, the vast majority of violence is male to female.

### Objectives

1. To increase male involvement in GBV prevention.
2. To raise awareness about GBV among men.

### Programme Description

The Network against Gender-based Violence, launched in 1999 was created after the Malawi National Platform for Action was developed and accepted. The Platform includes violence against women as one of the four key areas of action for Malawi. The first Men-to-Men Symposium brought together men from all over Malawi to discuss and strategise about GBV prevention and male involvement within the efforts. The group consisted of men from communities, civil society organizations, the policy, religious institutions, the judiciary and prisons. The diversity of members was very important as it meant that in all these sectors and groups, sensitization would be occurring on GBV prevention. All of the participants in the Men-to-Men symposium committed to working in their own community and/or workplaces to prevent GBV. This created an extensive network of male activists throughout the country. The members of the Network conduct a variety of activities such as:

- Men to Men Symposiums.
- The establishment of a Men-to-Men Networks on GBV at the village level.
- Publication of civic education materials on GBV such as Breaking the Silence, a comic strip magazine produced by the Network Against Gender-based violence in Malawi.
- ARISE: Breaking the Silence a newsletter for the Network Against GBV.
- Community sensitization and Education. This includes drama, traveling theatre, mobile van campaigns during the 16 Days of Activism.
- Traveling police campaigns to sensitise rural communities on GBV and how cultural traditions negatively impact women's health and lives.
- Formation of village action groups on GBV that now cover most of Malawi.

The range of activities and the diversity of men taking on the responsibility of preventing violence have created considerable momentum within the country. The men involved feel proud of their

effort and other men are recognizing that change is positive and can occur. The national level meetings foster solidarity and support for the men. At these forums, they have an opportunity to share ideas, problem solve, and further their determination to prevent GBV.

## **Notable Innovation**

### ***Constructing GBV as a community problem***

MHRRRC has made considerable effort to ground the GBV prevention programme at the community level and to shift the dialogue from GBV as a women's problem to a community's problem. The process included the following.

- It is important to conceptualize GBV as resulting from the way we socialize men and women. GBV is a result of the community's definition of how a man should behave and how a woman should submit to him. Therefore, the community must be involved in redefining gender roles.
- Men are often leaders in the community and they can be instrumental in shifting the community's opinion.
- By locating the problem in the community, we help men feel that they are a part of the solution even though they end up causing the problem.
- It is important to train community volunteers to challenge the value system instead of outsiders coming in to critique the way community promotes GBV.
- Interventions at the community level must involve explanation of the concepts of human rights and be based on 'PANEL' analysis (i.e., participatory, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and linked to human rights).
- Encouraging men to speak out against GBV has been a highly successful approach in persuading other men to also take a stand against GBV.