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Women**

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**Integrated Initiative to eliminate and  
overcome the impact of VAW  
In conflict situation in Darfur, Sudan**

**By Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies,  
BBSAWS-Sudan**

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## **Introduction**

**Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies BBSAWS-Sudan** is a registered non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1979 and working in area of rural women empowerment and improvement of quality of life. The primary goal of BBSAWS is to advocate and empower women to fight against all forms of violence and harmful traditional practices that influence their health and wellbeing. BBSAWS aims to improve the status of Sudanese rural women and to provide them with skills and knowledge to overcome all the constraints that influence their lives. Currently BBSAWS is a member and Sudan focal organization for the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA Network) that has several activities in the area of violence against women (VAW). It is the pioneer NGO that started campaigning against female genital cutting (FGC) using media, research, publications, training and advocacy work for the past 25 years. Five years ago, it started to focus on other forms of VAW such as domestic violence, and VAW during conflict where it carries out several researches and oral histories with displaced women from the south of Sudan as well as offering counseling and educational services in collaboration with Ahfad University for Women (AUW).

Concerned by the increase of sexual and gender based violence GBV and especially the use of rape as a weapon of war and the repeated victimization of women through the physical, social and economical violation that result from these brutal acts in Darfur, Western Sudan, BBSAWS-Sudan was able with a support from UNIFEM Trust Fund Grant to start implement its Integrated Initiative to eliminate and overcome the impact of VAW during the on going conflict in Darfur. The initiative is a one-year project aimed at:

- Scaling up responses by NGOs and community-based organizations to empower women victims of sexual violence to settle back into society and strength their capacities to tackle issues of protection and counseling
- Advocate for VAW among policy makers, legal system and the community by media campaigns using testimonies of women who have experienced physical sexual abuse, trauma and torture and
- Influence legal reforms and authorities response to VAW during conflict and post–conflict situations

To achieve the above outlined objectives, the following activities were planned:

- Documentation of 100 women testimonies through conduction of two researches involving life-histories and narrative accounts by trained researchers in Western and Southern Darfur;
- Carry out two 12 days training workshops on how to design media and advocacy campaigns on VAW using the women testimonies;
- Provision of documented testimonies of the women for media personnel and journalists to be used in advocacy and media campaigns;
- Carry out one 12 days training workshop for 20 NGOs and CBOs working in Western and Southern Darfur in counseling, coping, and protection skills during conflict;
- Carry out a one-week training of trainers' workshop for 10 NGOs and CBOs on community mobilization skills, conflict resolution and victims protection during conflict and post-conflict periods.
- Establishment of a network of these NGOs and CBOs to scale-up the responses and activities of individual organizations to assist traumatized women to settle back into society and to provide counseling and protection services.
- Develop and produce 1000 copies of advocacy materials using women's testimonies to reflect the gaps in legislations and authorities' response to VAW during conflict.
- Carry out a one week training workshop for 20 advocates from 5 NGOs working in women and legal issues in Darfur area using the advocacy materials for the sensitization of policy makers and authorities workers.
- Carry out 3 two-days sensitization and advocacy workshops (20 each) for 60 policy makers, legal workers, authorities and police staff in legal reform and response to VAW during conflict and post-conflict periods.

Data collection from the field was done parrerly in 45 days in both Nayala, capital of South Darfur and ElGenienea, capital of West Darfur. The teams succeed to interview (12) rape victims. The testimonies were done with women who were selected with the help of local women leaders (key persons). The team collected qualitative and quantities data through the interviews and focus group discussion, and life-history technique.

There were many horrified stories by victims such as F.M.B who's only 15 years old from the Dajo tribe and already married to her cousin for a year. She lives now in a displaced camp in Nyala. 20 Janjaweed men raped her and seven of her colleagues one morning when they went to

collect firewood. Three of the 10 women were managed to escape. More than one man raped each of the 7 who could not make it; they were harshly beaten and named with their tribe as bad people and need to be killed. F. M. said: "with us was a 3 years old child who scarcely watched his mom being raped, his dad came from the camp when the 3 women run back to tell their relatives, he was shot to death in front of his wife and child and all of us!! I will never forget that morning which changed my life!! My husband becomes indifferent and 3 months later he got another wife!! Now am sitting in the camp without education and no means to support my self economically!.

A. A of Algenina is another victim of sexual violence. She is 28 with 4 children during 12 years of marriage. She cried saying "they came to our house and killed my husband in front of me and his children and raped me in the presence of my brother who is 22 who asked them to kill him and they refused!! They are humiliating us! I cannot look him in the eye till he left and I never seen him for a year now!! Iam wondering if he is still alive!! I hated my self and all men and I will never forgive them for what they did to us!!"

N. B. A. living in Kalma camp, Nyala. She was the only case - among the 12 cases reported - who got pregnant as a result of being raped. N.B. said "I remembered the incidence as if it happened yesterday, no in fact am living those moments everyday when I look to that child who is suppose to be my child but I do not feel he is!!! I wanted to abort him but my husband refused although he knew very well that he is not his child!! When I was raped, I was terribly injured to the extent that my foot was broken and I was unconscious. After a month, I started to feel symptoms of pregnancy and cried and asked my husband to get rid of it. My husband refused and said he or she will be our gift from God. I was not happy for my nine months of pregnancy and till now!! This child always reminds me those who raped me and they were three and I did not know whose child is!! My life is hell!!

Since Darfurian women got married early, the only case documented for an unmarried girl was that of H.H.A. who were only 13 when she was raped with her married older sister when they went to collect firewood one afternoon. She said, " We were attacked by 4 men came on horses with their faces covered, we screamed but no body to help us. Each one of us was taken by two of them behind two trees, they have beaten me and torn my close, one is forcing my hands on the ground and the other raped me followed by the other one till I lost my conscios. I do not remember what happen to me exactly till some people who come to

rescue us waked me. I was bleeding, feeling pain and not able to walk. They took me to a health center in the camp; they washed me and gave me 10 tablets. Am feeling ashamed and cannot look my family in the eye. My father died 2 month later and I always think is because of me, I hated men and I will never marry. I would rather die than live such a life of fear and disparity”.

Twelve terrifying stories were documented reflecting the inhumane situation of many women in Darfur region. They were marginalized with thousand others since they were born. They are uneducated, circumcised, tribally marked on their faces, their lips were tattooed, heavily burdened with household work, married at early age (findings showed on average marriage age range between 12-16), have many children and do 80% of the agriculture activities. We believe that research findings need to be linked to policy maters. Therefore, findings will be used for the basis of the sensitization training for policy makers planned in this project.

The project proceeded immediately for the media training making use of the data collected and the women victims' testimonies. A 7 days media-training workshop for 30 media workers was conducted to develop programs at broadcast, television and newspapers for community people. Six-month work plans were developed by the media trained groups to advocate for VAW. **Participants of the media-training workshop will participate in celebration of the 16 days of activism on VAW in Khartoum state using some of the programs designed during the training workshop.**

The project is preparing now for the training workshops for community based and women's organizations and NGOS to build their capacities to provide trauma and counseling services to victims as well as raising the awareness of Darfurian women on protection mechanisms as well as legal services available.

We believe that such projects are needed as women in Darfur and other parts of the country are exposed to a wide range of gross human rights violations with very little support for human rights work in the country or by the international community particularly for building of the local capacities to tackle the problem of violence against women. So this project comes in the right time to support potential capacities. Women still play secondary role in their society, a large segment of them live in poverty resulting in huge exploitation, lack of opportunities and power. Darfurian women deserve to have right to sustainable existence, social

services, right to life and safety, social and political participation and before all the right to identity.

Violence against women should not be acceptable in any form, culture or any part of the world, yet it is very prevalent in many parts of Darfur, am saying “what happening to our sisters in Darfur is astonishing and needs immediate action and should be the priority of everyone, all of us have a responsibility to stop it”. The international, national organization and the government must do action. International agreements must be respected, laws must be adopted, violence must be abolished, violations must be announced and support systems be put in place. There is a need for collaboration with women’s rights activists and groups who are working to expose and redress the forms of violence against women. There is an urgent need for the mobilization of human resources (both men and women) to counter violence against women, to use power and persuasion and human rights framework in our efforts to stop violence against women. There is also a need to challenge the attitudes that provide and sustain the normalization and acceptance of violence against women in our societies. Violence against women can go beyond public sphere and enter into the homes so each of everyone and us has a role to stop the promotion of the culture of violence within their homes. Working together helps to address the violence against women problem

Finally, I would like to thank UNIFEM for supporting our project and for their continuous support to women all over the world to end violence against women. I will reaffirm BBSAWS and SIHA full commitment as local and regional organizations to address violence against women in our society.