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UNIFEM PARTNER PROFILE

Coalition on Violence against Women, Kenya (COVAW)

The Coalition on Violence against Women, Kenya (COVAW) is a national women's human rights organization and a long-standing UNIFEM partner. Established in 1995, COVAW works to promote and advance women's human rights through community outreach, research and advocacy. It provides legal aid and counselling to survivors of physical, sexual and domestic violence.

In 2008, COVAW was able to partner with the Kenyatta National Hospital to re-launch the Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centre (GBVRC) as a one-stop shop for gender-based violence survivors. Patients are being offered medical, psychological as well as legal support, with COVAW lawyers providing legal services to survivors of violence and especially sexual violence, who have been receiving treatment and care. In 2009, an average of 60–70 women have so far been treated per month.

Since its start in 1995, COVAW has been conducting community forums in remote villages and small towns, reaching out to 3,600 women and girls every year. The most common experiences discussed are cases of domestic violence, child maintenance, female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriages, women being denied access to family property after the death of their husbands, or discrimination on the grounds of gender, as well as sexual violence, with some communities having high rates of incest. In poor communities, frequently, actors are used to play out scenarios, and a COVAW advisor gives examples on how to deal with situations of violence.

According to COVAW, awareness of the issue and women's self-confidence has grown. Cases of communities rescuing young girls before they can undergo FGM, or of whole villages having come together to arrest known perpetrators of sexual violence are being reported.

Supported by UNIFEM, COVAW conducts training of paralegals, law enforcement chiefs, and health care workers on how to recognize VAW, training of survivors on how to respond and give testimony in courts, and training of magistrates and prosecutors. Its pro bono lawyers file matters involving women's rights violations in court and help survivors to follow up with government officials. As part of its Advocacy and Lobbying programme, it regularly runs extensive media campaigns in order to stimulate public dialogue on the issue and to establish a positive relationship with journalists of the national media. It also conducts periodical surveys on violence against women. Every year, COVAW marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence.

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