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ACTION FOR WOMEN AND AWAKENING IN RURAL ENVIRONMENT, UGANDA

Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environment (AWARE, Uganda) is a locally established organisation improving the status of women and girls in Karamoja through social, civil, cultural and economic empowerment

Authors: Maxencia Nabiryo, Juliet Nabirye and Phyllis Awor

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SIHI Academic Advisory Panel: Prof. Lenore Manderson and Dr Lindi van Niekerk

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	3
CASE INTRODUCTION.....	4
1. INNOVATION PROFILE AT A GLANCE	5
2. CHALLENGE	6
3. INNOVATION IN INTERVENTION	7
3.1. HEALTH SERVICES.....	7
3.2. GBV ADVOCACY AND REHABILITATION.....	8
3.3. ECONOMIC AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.....	8
4. IMPLEMENTATION.....	9
4.1. INNOVATION IN IMPLEMENTATION.....	9
4.2. ORGANISATION AND PEOPLE	9
4.3. BUSINESS MODEL	10
5. OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES	10
5.1. IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE DELIVERY.....	10
5.2. ORGANIZATIONAL MILESTONES.....	11
5.3. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS	11
6. SUSTAINABILITY.....	12
7. SCALABILITY	12
8. KEY LESSONS.....	12
8.1 IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS.....	12
CASE INSIGHTS	13
REFERENCE LIST	14

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDs	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AWARE	Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environment
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MOH	Ministry of Health
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UGX	Ugandan shilling
USD	Unites States Dollar
WASH	Water Hygiene and Sanitation
WFP	World Food Programme

CASE INTRODUCTION

Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environment (AWARE-Uganda) is a non-governmental organisation operating in three districts of Karamoja region in far northeast Uganda: Kaabong, Kotido, and Abim district. Karamoja is the least developed region in Uganda, with high levels of domestic and gender-based violence, illiteracy, food insecurity, poverty and poor health care services, as well as a history of armed conflict. The consequences of these development challenges, coupled with unfavorable socio-cultural norms such as underestimating the value of female education and community beliefs in the value of early marriage for wealth, result in great suffering to women and girls in Karamoja.

AWARE Uganda was established in 1989 by a group of local women in Kaabong district with the aim of advancing the social, cultural and economic status of women in the region. AWARE utilises a holistic approach to address development issues through women's empowerment and engagement to improve their own livelihood and the livelihoods of others in the

entire community. AWARE provides supportive and enabling conditions for women to engage in small business enterprises, agricultural practices, leadership and decision making. Women are also sensitised about their rights. With the establishment of a maternity waiting house, the organisation has improved access to maternal and child health care services, bringing pregnant women closer to Kaabong hospital. As a result, maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality have been reduced.

AWARE-Uganda has engaged and empowered over 5000 women in its activities. Participating women are able to earn a living for their families and participate in leadership and decision making activities. Most support activities are offered by local volunteers, who were previous beneficiaries. This illustrates how empowering and engaging with vulnerable groups to improve their situation is an effective approach to creating social change.

1. INNOVATION PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Organisation Details

Organisation name	ACTION FOR WOMEN AND AWAKENING IN RURAL ENVIRONMENT (AWARE-UGANDA)
Founding year	1989
Founders	Grace Luomo, Margret Ajilong, Sylvia Awor, Christine Akong, Agnes Namugit
Founder nationality	Ugandan
Current head of organisation	Grace Luomo
Organisational structure	Non-government organisation
Main value proposition	A locally established organisation improving the status of women and girls in Karamoja through social, civil, cultural and economic empowerment
Size	9 staff members, over 100 volunteers
Main income streams	Donor funding, partnership projects with government and non-government agencies, product sales and women's contributions
Annual expenditure	USD 97,000

Operational Details

Country/countries of operation	Uganda
Local scope	Karamoja region in Uganda, based in Kaabong district Other intervention districts are Abim and Kotido
Type of beneficiaries	Women of low socio-economic status in Karamoja region
Number of beneficiaries (annually)	6502 (4002 women and 2500 men)
Cost per client	USD 300 annually
Local engagement	Works with local stakeholders such as the district hospital, district officials, police, schools and community members
Innovative elements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivering an integrated package of services to address the health, economic-development and social empowerment of women 2. Working with men to address negative gender dynamics and change beliefs around the value of women 3. Delivering services through beneficiary volunteers
Scaling Considerations	<p>This model will be effective under the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of high rates of gender-based violence, poverty and low-literacy • Communities willing to offer voluntary services

AWARE is sustained through;

Sustainability Considerations

- Training individual community members to offer voluntary support services
 - Generation of 8% revenue from agricultural product sales.
-

Health Systems Lessons (3)

1. This case illustrates that to contribute to effective social change for women experiencing GBV; full community, including men's participation is paramount.
 2. Past programme beneficiaries for example women and girls who experienced GBV can become active providers of services to new beneficiaries sensitizing them about gender-based violence
 3. The bottom up approach utilised by AWARE is important for effective change. AWARE works to ensure that all community members (men and women) have skills to improve their livelihoods and to support gender equality.
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2. CHALLENGE

Uganda is a low-income country, located in East Africa with a population of about 44 million people (World Population Review, 2018). The country is divided into four regions: Central, Western, Eastern and Northern, which are further divided into 122 districts (UBOS, 2017). The Northern region, where Karamoja lies, was adversely affected by the civil war from the early 1990's to 2011, and has a long history of violence against women and children (EDUKID, 2016). Karamoja is a semi-arid area where the populations are predominantly pastoralists. It is regarded as the most underserved area in the country, with limited access to health and education services (UNFPA Uganda, 2018).

Social norms and patriarchal attitudes that promote discrimination against women are entrenched (COFFEY, 2016). Unequal power and gender norms expose women to the risk of mistreatment and disease (Muhanguzi, 2011, De Meyer et al., 2014). Factors including poverty and unemployment, discriminatory racial and gender norms, armed conflict and mass displacement all exacerbate physical, sexual and emotional violence among women (Patton et al., 2016, Muhanguzi et al., 2017).

Food insecurity and water scarcity are common

in the region (OXFAM, 2014, Uganda Women's Network, 2018). Women hold primary responsibility of securing food for their family and have to travel long distances to find food and water, and risk abuse during travel (UNDP, 2015). Despite Uganda's steady improvement in enabling the education of girls, the high poverty levels contribute to low school attendance, and 79.6% of girls in Karamoja are unable to attain at least a primary school leaving certificate (Datzberger, 2017). Parents balance school costs against food security, and utilise their children's labor to obtain food (WFP, 2014). Poverty also strengthens the acceptance of the norm of girls leaving school and marrying early so that their parents receive dowry payments (UNDP, 2015).

Women in Karamoja continue to disproportionately suffer from high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), unemployment, poor financial services, limited access to health and education, and have a lower voice than men in decision making - it is not uncommon that men will have more power over property and land ownership than women (ACTION AGAINST HUNGER, 2017). Girls aged 10 to 12 years are often raped and forced into early marriage (UNFPA Uganda, 2018). In this context, many organisations have prioritised investing in

Karamoja to encourage gender equity and women empowerment (Uganda Vision 2040, 2017). However, injustice against women is still prominent. The rate of gender based violence in Karamoja has been reported to be as high as 60%, according to the recent Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, and 22% of women aged 15 to 49 in the country had experienced some form of sexual violence (Uganda MOH, 2016, UNFPA, 2016).

The combination of factors, including GBV, unemployment, and limited rights to property ownership and decision making, result in poor health indicators, including high maternal and child mortality in the region (Cummings et al.,

2012, UBOS, 2012). Increasing opportunities for women and girls to access quality education, health care, economic opportunities, property ownership, and engage in political and economic decision making, will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (UNDP, 2015). In order to ensure effective change, an holistic approach that focuses on solving the needs of the community and that ensures their full participation is most suitable (Lubandi, 2009).

Traditionally a woman is not supposed to own any property or have a voice in the home or go to school. A woman is to be there to be married. (Grace Luomo, Executive Director, AWARE)

3. INNOVATION IN INTERVENTION

Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environments (AWARE) is a non-governmental organisation, established in 1989 and operating in Karamoja region in Uganda. AWARE seeks to advance the social, cultural and economic status of the population in Karamoja. The organisation invests in strengthening the capacity and capabilities of women, girls, men and boys to make desired changes in their community. AWARE delivers an integrated package of development services including health services, GBV advocacy and rehabilitation, economic and agricultural development through a multi-purpose women's centre.

3.1. HEALTH SERVICES

Maternity waiting house

Women often have to walk long distances in order to access health care, at times when they need emergency assistance to delivery, resulting in high levels of maternal and child deaths. AWARE provides space for a maternity waiting house within its women's center, located 30 meters from Kaabong Main Hospital. About two weeks before the estimated date of delivery, women move into the house where they are hosted and cared for. A midwife who is a founding

member of the organisation voluntarily offers medical and counseling services. When labor commences, women are transferred to the Kaabong Main Hospital. Pregnant women both from near and far places also come to AWARE center to receive antenatal care, Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission (PMTCT) and family planning services. Women who come to the maternity waiting house also receive education and sensitisation on other things including making jewelry for financial gain, hygiene and sanitation, and HIV/AIDs prevention/treatment among others. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) supported the initiative by providing bedding and chairs.

HIV and Home-based Care

To improve knowledge and access to HIV/AIDS and health care services in the community, AWARE conducts community dialogues, individual discussions, radio talk shows, and community workshops on the prevention, care, support and management of HIV and AIDS in Kaabong, Abim and Kotido districts. AWARE encourages community members to test for HIV and links people who test positive to available health care

services in the community.

AWARE has trained over 100 community health workers to support people living with HIV in five

sub counties of Kaabong district. The community health workers offer HIV home based care services including, collecting medication on behalf of people who are sick, and encouraging and helping them to take their medicines. AWARE conducts monthly refresher training of home-based caregivers, in order to improve and strengthen their skills and services.

3.2. GBV ADVOCACY AND REHABILITATION

Advocacy against GBV

The organisation uses media to broadcast messages, and to hold radio talk shows to promote GBV awareness and prevention. Additionally, it conducts community dialogue, open focus group discussions, and has a music band which marches at various events; the aim is to educate people about human rights and women rights. These initiatives promote access to and create knowledge on GBV, and on how to seek support in the case of abuse. AWARE produces various informative and educational materials to support its advocacy campaign on domestic violence and human/women rights, including T/Shirts, posters and video shows.

Rehabilitation services for women

AWARE mobilises women who have survived violence (rape, defilement, forced marriage and physical violence) and hosts them at the women's center while they receive counselling and recover sufficiently to gain strength to return to the community. During the rehabilitation period, women are equipped with some life skills such as handcraft-making to help them earn a living.

1.3. ECONOMIC AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Business development programme

AWARE formed a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation (SACCO) in 2010. The SACCO gets loans from the bank and this, together with women's savings pooled together, is used for loans to interested small groups and individuals willing to do business. Survivors of GBV are encouraged to start up small business enterprises to facilitate their survival after recovery:

The survivors also, we give them some... money 50,000 UGX to go home and start something to do for their life. (Grace Luomo, Executive Director, AWARE)

Agricultural production

AWARE conducts training, capacity building, and empowers women and men in agricultural practices: growing fruit, vegetables and chili for trade; bee keeping; crop protection; cereal banking as a coping mechanism to food security threats; and the best techniques to set up a nursery garden. Ten women farming groups were established in five sub counties of Kaabong district, where members are taught production skills and the group leaders are capacitated with marketing skills. Market places and prices are searched online through Uganda Agro Business link companies to identify the nearest markets. These contemporary farming practices are a source of income to women and their families, and at the same time, they are central in addressing food insecurity. AWARE enhances this programme through engaging partners, including the World Food Programme (WFP).

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. INNOVATION IN IMPLEMENTATION

AWARE Uganda offers an integrated bundle of services to address various community challenges through multi-stakeholder partnerships. The organisation empowers community members, both women and men, to engage in service delivery by promoting peer support education.

Beneficiary-delivered services

AWARE empowers beneficiaries with skills and knowledge to educate, sensitise and help other community members improve livelihoods. The empowered beneficiaries work with AWARE as volunteers, thus supporting efficient service delivery. Engaging beneficiaries in the work can foster project ownership and saves costs.

So when I came here, I found women were really being bartered.... women were adding nothing, they owned nothing at all.... I said no, women what do we do? I said we can't sit like this because we were just there the women were just there... waiting for what the husband can bring (money and food) and the husbands were not bringing anything. (Grace Luomo, executive director AWARE)

Community Engagement in GBV

The community is made aware about AWARE's GBV programme, through sensitisation and community education meetings provided by AWARE staff. Upon identifying a case, community members are encouraged to immediately report the case to AWARE by phone or accompany the woman to the AWARE women's center.

Engagement of men to change cultural practices

The GBV programme is led by a male employee, who is also member of the community. Using his experience of GBV and the local community, he addresses issues associated with GBV such as

human rights abuses and land rights, in order to support vulnerable women and transform discriminatory cultural attitudes. Men, especially community elders, are engaged in discussions to end GBV, and to fully participate in prioritising activities to promote human rights. These elders, the majority men, are highly respected in the community; thus their full involvement in campaigns to end GBV greatly influences change in community beliefs.

I always advocate for the protection for lesser people, promotion of rights and the fulfillment of human right obligations in response to the convention of the UN in Geneva 1948, so my work is to help the community especially women to have what they call the land and then the property rights. (Martin Lomilo, GBV project counselor)

4.2. ORGANISATION AND PEOPLE

AWARE-Uganda was started by community members. Mrs. Grace Luomo, originally from Lira District, married in Karamoja and experienced directly the dire situation in the area: massive hunger, poverty, and armed conflict, all of which exacerbated the mistreatment of women. Grace decided to mobilise, organise and empower women to work and to realise and claim their rights. This began with fruit tree growing: she bought the seedlings and engaged women to plant them on land that they had obtained from the government. AWARE is now an organised group of community members that can identify needs and available opportunities for community development.

I want to see change, positive change in the communities I live, I want to make sure that these people live a comfortable life, as any other woman on earth. So that's why really am so committed I want by the time I am not there, people would have seen a great change in the community. (Grace Luomo, Executive Director, AWARE).

AWARE has a team of seven staff who lead and oversee organisation activities, comprising of four women

(the Executive Director, Technical Director, Team Leader, and Financial Coordinator) and three men (The Programs Coordinator, Programs Manager and Projects Officer). AWARE is also supported by over 200 volunteers involved in community service delivery.

Collaboration partners

The organisation has partnered with a number of organisations and agencies including: World Food Programme, Global Human Rights, Global Fund for Women, United Nations, Women Water Initiatives, Netherlands Embassy, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADs), Karamoja Peace Network, Ministry of Health Uganda, Uganda Land Alliance, Kitchen Table Charitable Trust, the local government, police, and Kaabong main hospital. AWARE reports to its partners every month, to update them on activities. The organisation also engages in partnership meetings to discuss activities, and share and learn new approaches.

The organisation has also established partnerships with the district government. Part of AWARE's activities are reflected in the district work plan and budget. The organisation has also embraced partnerships with other local agencies, including the police, which greatly supports its work on GBV, and Kaabong Main Hospital which receives and attends to referrals from the organisation.

4.3. BUSINESS MODEL

All services are delivered at no cost to the user. The organisation is dependent on donor funding to support its activities and operational costs. The donor agencies include: World Food Programme, Global Human Rights, United Nations, Women Water Initiatives, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Netherlands Embassy, NAADs, Karamoja Peace Network, Ministry of Health Uganda, Uganda Land Alliance, Kitchen Table Charitable Trust, and the local government. AWARE has a small revenue generating component from agricultural product sales.

5. OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

5.1. IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE DELIVERY

No formal impact evaluation studies have been conducted but the organisation uses informal monitoring mechanisms to assess whether its services benefit the local population.

- Over 50 girls have been rescued from various forms of violence including GBV and forced marriages, and have received counselling and treatment. AWARE has conducted awareness creation, capacity building on Gender-Based Violence/Domestic Violence to 20 police officers, 15 health workers, 20 elders, 10 district councillors and in schools, where four child rights clubs have been established in Kaabong district. The four child rights clubs were sensitised on all forms of

discrimination against women and human rights, case handling, and reporting procedures.

- In early 2016, AWARE Uganda conducted over 28 training workshops for 10 women's groups on the use of modern farming methods, including the use of ox plough, crop spacing, and making and using composite manure to improve soil quality and crop yields. These skills were shared with over 370 households. AWARE purchased 25 ploughs and 25 ox chains, and 550 hoes, pangas, and axes to assist in these agricultural practices. About 200 women from four communities were involved in chilli and honey production, improving their livelihood.

- The 20-bed maternity waiting house at AWARE center is the only one of its kind in the Karamoja region. Over 500 women receive services at this facility per year. Since its establishment, in 2010, 322 mothers and 483 babies have been saved from likely death and over 550 mothers have been reached with maternal and child health care information. Some 1000 people have utilised family planning services provided at AWARE.
- AWARE distributed 12,040 home health care kits with condoms, with support from Programme for Accessible Health Communication and Education (PACE), to the community of Kaabong district. AWARE registered and trained 32 Village Health teams (VHTs) to operate in five sub counties of Kaabong district, the VHTs follow up on those who need further care at household or community level.

5.2. ORGANIZATIONAL MILESTONES

AWARE has been sustained over a period of 30 years.

Recognition: The organisation has been recognised in various ways:

- It received an award for sensitisation of people on HIV/AIDs from the Uganda president's office
- It obtained a women achiever's award from South Africa
- Its work was appreciated and recognised by the first lady of Uganda, who supplied some food to the organisation and bought it a tractor.

Exchange visits: In 2005, six women from AWARE, travelled to Kenya to participate in a

women groups' meeting, aimed at sharing and gaining knowledge on: HIV prevention strategies, implementation of WASH promotion activities and how to improve livelihoods. This opportunity equipped the AWARE women with new skills that helped strengthen their programmes.

5.3. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

The beneficiaries' perception about AWARE's services are positive. The community expressed gratitude for the economic empowerment skills and support that it receives from the organisation. Women acknowledged AWARE's role in fighting for their rights, supporting them against abuse and promoting their right to property.

AWARE Uganda has been supporting us it started with establishing an orchard, our mothers were watering the orchard and were being given some food. AWARE Uganda also gives us information about hunger and helps us to protect our land. (AWARE beneficiary)

Mama (AWARE executive director) actually supports us so much..., she helps pregnant women stay here to give birth at Kaabong hospital. When we feel really weak, and there's nothing to take with drugs (referring to ARVs), she gives some little sugar, or posho (maize meal). (AWARE beneficiary)

Peer educators express satisfaction with AWARE's work and acknowledged AWARE's efforts in supporting marginalised individuals.

Why am I working with AWARE? it was not for the help of clothes or food and whatever but because they also deal with positive livers (HIV positive) and the orphans, and widows, most of the widows we get are positive livers (HIV positive). (AWARE peer educator)

6. SUSTAINABILITY

Volunteer involvement has contributed to the organisation's sustainability over 30 years. AWARE has brought on board individuals passionate about serving the community. Over 100 volunteers, most from vulnerable communities, were sensitised, trained and empowered to serve their own community members without payment. The engagement of beneficiaries creates ownership of the programmes and also reduces labour costs, for example, for building and fruit planting.

The organisation depends on donor income but has also created revenue generating streams including the orchard, resulting in fruit sales, bee farming, resulting in honey sales, and sales obtained from the chilli garden and the grinding mill. The women's farming groups trained by AWARE, are a source of manual labour for the organisation's enterprises and women are allowed to utilise (sell or consume) a proportion of the agricultural products for their own benefit.

7. SCALABILITY

The organisation started its activities in Kaabong district, and later extended to Abim and Kotido districts. AWARE plans to extend its services to Moroto and Nakapiripirit districts in Karamoja region, although Organisational growth has been limited by available resources.

Scale up is needed in areas with gender-based violence, poverty, low literacy, and lack of access to health care, where communities are willing to offer voluntary services. AWARE's scale-up priorities include improving services at the mothers' waiting hostel and establishing a girl's school

I wanted ... really to strengthen this maternity waiting house, to make it a role model where everybody knows that it is really for services for the women, because still if we don't improve this, the women still will die.... first of all, we need a vehicle, where we can go hard to reach places, because always we have calls..., they say come and help this woman, we need a vehicle which is ready to go and pick the person who's in labor and bring here. (Grace Luomo, Executive Director, AWARE)

8. KEY LESSONS

8.1 IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

a) Leveraging community social capital as starting resources

Mrs. Luomo did not wait for funding opportunities to start organising women. The greatest resource she had were the ideas which she shared with

other women. The women also lacked resources, but they were willing to offer their energy and time. This organised group of women asked for land from the district and they were granted it. Luomo bought 150 fruit tree seedlings which the

women started planting, and this marked the start of their activities: *we organised our women, we asked them they didn't even have money for membership fee, but they have their body (energy) to offer. So ... we started planting trees.* (Grace Luomo, Executive Director, AWARE)

b) Overcoming cultural perceptions through committed long-term involvement

The major challenge that AWARE had to overcome was traditional perceptions of women. Men do not view women as independent decision makers. To change men's mind set, AWARE started involving them in their meetings.

c) Maintaining efforts

Utilising volunteers and beneficiaries was key to sustaining AWARE's efforts for 30 years in a low-resource, remote rural area. Women became empowered by supporting other women in similar situations.

AWARE strongly believes in working with collaborative partners to strengthen and advance work. For instance, the police strongly support the organisation in the area of GBV, and the Kaabong Main Hospital receives and attends to referrals from the organisation.

CASE INSIGHTS

1. This case illustrates that to contribute to effective social change for women experiencing GBV; full community and multisectoral participation, including men's participation, is paramount.
2. Past programme beneficiaries, for example women and girls who experienced GBV, can become active providers of services to new beneficiaries, sensitizing them about gender-based violence.
3. The bottom up approach utilised by AWARE is important for effective change. AWARE works to ensure that all community members (men and women) have skills to improve their livelihoods and to support gender equality.

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