



**Using innovative approaches to better
understand Sexual Harassment and
Exploitation within the Food Distribution
Program**



**CARE INTERNATIONNAL IN BURUNDI
Bujumbura, June 2005**

« I received more than once, nightly visits from the chief of sector harassing me and I had to give in so that I could feed my children. » You know « Ikigutegeye ku nda kiba kigushikiriye » meaning it is difficult to escape what is linked to survival.”

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INTRODUCTION

The initiative to better understand the types of sexual exploitation and harassment in the CARE/WFP Food Distribution project was an experimental approach working in partnership with a local partner that uses interactive theatre to expose issues and seek solutions. The partner “Tubiyage” which means ‘lets talk about it worked with CARE from October 2004 until June 2005 to seek strategies to reduce the risk of women as beneficiaries of the food distribution project.

The present report is based on testimonies, the existence of sexual harassments and exploitation practices, mechanisms in place and community strategies to fight against these practices.

CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

Since the 1993 war, Burundi has been plunged into mourning, and the population life conditions have degraded profoundly. The cost of living has become expensive and the majority of the rural/urban population can barely meet their basic needs.

Culture values have changed dramatically and in their place are corruption and manipulation of power. The means used to corrupt are money, a present, a given service against another, etc.

At the level of the socio cultural standards related to sexuality, much has changed: sexual relations which previously happened amongst married couples. Now sex is used as a tool by those with power who demand sexual favors in return for favor and support

This initiative was launched because CARE Burundi wanted to better understand if and how sex is used around the food distribution project, is sex used as a means to receive food aid?

It is in this context that CARE introduced the experimental initiative working with the food distribution project. This project was chosen because evidence indicated that a great deal of other corruption is used by people to access the benefits of this project, such as cash paid to be on the beneficiary list. Given that the most vulnerable members of the population are women, who do not often have cash and that the CARE Food project works in 16 of the 17 provinces of Burundi, it was felt that this project would be a good pilot for this initiative.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND HOW IT WORKS

The Food Distribution project works in Partnership with WFP in all but one province of the country. The team of 60 staff are mobile and move throughout the country with WFP in order to conduct food distributions. Recipients of food aid are not consistent but based on WFP assessments and as a result a fixed and approved list of beneficiaries does not exist. Following an assessment a specific amount of rations are allocated to a given geographical location. Following the allocation, CARE teams work with locally established ‘Distribution Committees’ and local authorities to determine the beneficiary list for the up-coming distribution. Selected recipients receive a ‘token’ on the day of distribution which they submit

in order to receive their food ration. These ‘tokens’ are pieces of paper printed by CARE staff. Following distributions, recipients monitoring takes place to ensure that the food distributed has arrived to the correct persons.

Given that distributions takes place daily, in different locations throughout the country, time is limited to follow through on monitoring of ‘Distribution Committees’ or recipients. Although most monitoring reports show that the food has reached the right location, there are known cases where the food ‘tokens’ are sold or exchanged as well as cases where the ‘Distribution Committees’ might not be selecting the most vulnerable members of the population.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Overall Objective

The initiative aims at contributing to the respect and defense of the WFP Food aid beneficiaries’ dignity by fighting sexual harassment and exploitation within the food distribution project in Burundi.

Specific Objectives

- a) investigate to see if sexual relations are used to have access to food aid
- b) Identify the reasons and mechanisms to be used to avoid such a practice
- c) Identify other existing practices of corruption within the food aid distribution structure
- d) Raise the community awareness (administration, beneficiaries committees) on their interest, rights and duties within the food aid distributions structure so that it can mobilize in consequence.

Methodological tools

Invisible and interactive theaters

CARE and TUBIYAGE have been working together in communities since 2001 with as a main tool, interactive theater. This has had success and proven to be adapted in the Burundian cultural environment as far as it allows and involves the community to have discussions on subjects considered as taboos (among others questions on ethnicity) and find sustainable solutions. However, this tool was not considered appropriate to deal with the question of sexual exploitation within the distributions project where thousands of beneficiaries wait for the reception of food aid to quickly return home and where consequently the limited time as well as their number of people does not favor participation in fruitful exchanges.

This is why CARE and TUBIAYGE wanted to try: the “invisible Theater” which is a tool developed to use in crowds.

How does it work?

Essentially two or three actors mingle in a crowd of people and pose as normal members of the population. A ‘situation’ is created involving the actors and the general population.

Eventually the population, not realizing that there are actors present, intervene and resolve the situation. Discussion takes place amongst the population. To seize to the maximum the participants opinions, it was necessary to associate both theatres.

Survey – open discussions

An inquiry was done with focus-groups, observation and semi-structured interview, were also used to handle the question in all its dimensions. The focus-groups allowed to conduct an open and deep dialogue with the population on the mechanisms implemented, the authors and strategies to prevent and fight against this practice. By observing the reactions and mimes it allowed to analyze and interpret the unsaid given that questions related to sexuality are taboo in the Burundian culture.

In all eighteen (18) focus-groups having six (6) by municipality were the object of dialogues in three municipalities investigated (see the dialogue handbook in appendix II). As for the semi-structured interview, it was used to collect information with key persons such as the local administration, Bashingantahe committee's members, priests, former administration staff, presidents of associations as well as retailers.

N.B (For reasons of protection, the participants refused to mention their names in the report).

REALIZATIONS AND RESULTS

Practices of sexual harassment and exploitation within the food aid distribution structure.

The existence of the sexual harassment and exploitation within the food aid structure was confirmed on one hand by the beneficiaries and on the other hand confirmed by local government administrators who participate in the elaboration of beneficiary lists.

These theatre performances took place in four of the capital communes Kanyosha, Mutambu, Kabezi and Mutimbuzi. (See the representations list in appendix I). Through both the invisible and interactive theatres, the actors were able to intercept comments and murmurs from the crowd telling them that these practices do exist but are difficult to denounce. The actors heard amongst others comments: “hum, hum, hum; that exists, that exists; you know how much they dishonor us!!”

With the focus -groups, the sexual exploitation practice was revealed by testimonies from the participants who gave information on the authors and the mechanisms implemented.

Here are the comments held by the members of the groups to focus which confirm the practice of sexual relations to be one of WFP food aid beneficiaries.

- ❖ The practice of sexual relations is hidden. It's a secret between two people.
- ❖ If you don't have any money, you will use your body.
- ❖ The practice of sexual relations when the lists for WFP food aid beneficiaries are done illicitly. It is a secret between the girls, the women and the chiefs who establish lists.
- ❖ The practice of sexual relations to benefit from the WFP food aid is a reality.

- ❖ It is difficult to prove it but one can wonder why a woman would benefit from the food aid at each distribution and then talk in private with the chief.
- ❖ « This practice is done secretly, but we wonder why some women will always be the first on the lists while there are old women who walk with their back bent and always go home without receiving anything »
- ❖ If the chief ask you to have sexual relations with him and you refuse, your name will be definitely erased.
- ❖ The sexual relations with women are used to prepare the lists. Everything starts while sharing a glass of beer and then they share something else.
- ❖ Most women are widows. They don't have money to give to the chiefs. This is why they have to use their body to benefit from the WFP food aid.
- ❖ Most married women are not concerned by this, and moreover, it would difficult to find them since the chiefs goes to see them in the evening.
- ❖ Today people are not honest anymore. Any mean is good to arrive at their objective.

Besides these answers, certain body movements and reactions also demonstrated that sex is indeed a tool used to receive food aid For example when the question

« What do you think about sexual relations to be a beneficiary? » was asked the women participating in the discussion started reacting. Some poked each other, there were winks, giggles and others placed their hands in front of their mouths.

Mechanisms implemented

The sexual harassment and exploitation is generally made when the beneficiary lists are established It is either at the time of the establishment of lists, or the day before the distribution, or after the distribution.

Victimized women have said:

- ❖ “The chief came to my house and asked if I could share a beer with him. Afterwards, he told me that he appreciated me and that he wanted me to be a beneficiary but I had to be available for him. I accepted because I didn't have any other means and I had already missed twice the food aid”
- ❖ “If I accept the first time there is no coming back; I had sexual relations with the chief every time he requested it, but mostly before and after the food aid distribution»
- ❖ “The chief came to my house with the list of beneficiaries. He showed me all the names that had been erased and tells that my name will be erased if I don't accept to have sexual relations with him. He starts to caress me and I accept in spite of me”
- ❖ ‘Niho aba ukuboneye, agira ati ko akenyenatshobora kwanka kuko arankeneye’. Meaning it's now or never, let's see if she can refuse since she needs my services”
- ❖ “If the chief comes and you refuse « izo nzira sindazigiramwo» meaning, I will never accept it, he will erase you definitely from the list ».
- ❖ “I have received night time visits from the chief harassing me and I had to accept so I could feed my children » You know ‘Ikigutegeye ku nda kiba kigushikiriye’ meaning it is hard to escape what is linked to survival.
- ❖ “I refused many requests from the people who establish the WFP lists. I was threatened, attacked many times in my home in the evening. I was forced to place my bed in my son' bedroom so that he can protect me; But it is difficult because we are

hungry. The majority of widows and orphans know about this and it is difficult to escape from it.”

- ❖ “The administrator asked me to have sexual relations with him, I refused. From that day on, I could not benefit from the WFP food aid or from any other services from the municipality. Fortunately, this administrator was replaced”.
- ❖ “One chief asked me to have sexual relations with him and I refused. He tried to rape me but failed. Since that day I am always with my son to protect me”.
- ❖ “Things began in the camps, promiscuity; the men are not ashamed anymore. They have sexual relations with us in front of our children. Because of the war, men have become animals, they don’t respect anything. »

The sexual harassment and exploitation targets

The sexual harassment and exploitation targets are generally all women. But, they do not undergo the harassment in the same way. Here is how the participants classified the different types of harassment.

Sexual harassment and exploitation victims

Quoted Persons study	Married Women	Widows	Young girls
Young girls		X	x
Young persons	x	X	x
Widows (women)	x	X	x
Married women		X	
Men		X	
Authority		X	x

The table shows well that the widows are the most victimized by the practice of the sexual harassment and exploitation.

According to participants, it is probably due to various factors:

- ❖ « Widows do not have financial means to give bribes and even if they had, they are asked to give what a man is looking for».
- ❖ « The people, who establish the list, are abusive because they know that these women do not have husbands. But when a widow has a grown-up son, she is protected; it is said « Urugo rutagira umugabo ntakitarukengera »: a household without a male head of the family, does not receive any respect ».

The perpetrators of sexual harassment and exploitation

The beneficiaries' point of view

Sexual harassment and exploitation is generally done by those who establish the beneficiaries' lists. This responsibility gives them a power that they abuse. In spite of the fact that this subject is taboo and cannot be discussed, the women, assert that the chiefs are the primary perpetrators. The chiefs that the preparation of the beneficiaries' lists is the occasion to frequent the youngest and beautiful women and girls.

“All the chiefs involved in the process of preparing the beneficiaries lists for the WFP food aid are involved in this practice in the following order

- the chiefs of sector, then
- the chiefs of hills,
- Sometimes the leader of zone (we heard of a case where a chief of zone had relations with 3 widows), and
- sometimes the municipal Administrators”

The administration staff (local government) point of view

During individual interviews, the chiefs who are involved in preparing the beneficiaries lists for the WFP food aid gave very different answers from the inhabitants of the three municipalities.

These chiefs say that they send lists of all the population without distinction and begin with the poorest. But those who come to distribute the food aid come with completely different lists. They said that it could be that the secretary forgot names during preparation of the list.

Some chiefs accepted that they receive beer to register people among beneficiaries. They did not deny the use of sexual relations as corruption according to some « if the woman does not say no, the man will profit from the situation ».

As for the question to know how they select beneficiaries if the WFP asks for a number inferior to the inhabitants of the hill, the chiefs answered that they privilege the disadvantaged.

As for the sum of money requested, those who establish lists justify it by saying:

- The money we require is used for the purchase of paper. However WFP provides cards for this work
- It is a payment because the time they spend to establish lists could be spent doing something else and earning money.

Other means of corruption

Bribes, Friendships

The participants in the theatre performances and in the study confirmed unanimously the existence of the other means of corruption: bribes, beer, promises to share the food, that are used without discretion contrary to sexual exploitation.

The persons who establish lists put themselves first, followed by members of their family, their friends, and those who are capable of paying for beers. The person who is capable of giving more beer receives many fictitious names. They can even appear on the list of a hill on which they do not live.

After establishing the lists, the chief of the hill or sector waits before handing the list over to the administrator so that he has time to add to the list his friends or any other person who gives money. It is then that they are passed on to the municipal administrator. The administrator has no means to verify the lists because he does not know the names of the persons living in his municipality.

In general, a person who is on the list receives a token to be able to receive the ration. Depending on the places, a token can be obtained by paying a bribe:

- ❖ one thousand burundian francs(1000 FBU), (1\$)
- ❖ one bottle of primus, (approx 1\$)
- ❖ five thousand burundian francs (5.000 FBu).

The more you pay the more tokens you receive.

During focus-group discussions, everybody was unanimous when saying that the richest are the first ones to benefit from the WFP supplies. « **Ivyaboro, aborozi ni bo bavyikumirira Ko** » meaning that supplies which are for the poor are benefited by the richest (Breeders of herd).

STRATEGIES TO FIGHT AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EXPLOITATION AND OTHER PRACTICES

The solutions to ensure corruption and exploitation does not take place suggested by the population in 3 municipalities is as follows:

1. Establish a mixed committee with:
 - Women who have to promote their rights,
 - Bashingantahe (traditional elders responsible for conflict resolution) for equity,
 - Committees of associations so other active members of civil society can participate such as church groups, development committees etc ,
 - An employee from WFP and CARE for transparency,
 - Men to have a balance in gender
 - Young pupils from the secondary who know how to read and write. The young people respect their mothers and cannot ask their mother to have sexual relations with them.

Lists should be signed by the committee's various members.

2. Create a municipal committee from which the members would result from dynamic associations' which could contribute to establish the beneficiaries' lists according to the pre established criteria.
3. Have an elected committee from the population by the inhabitants.
4. Associate the members of the movements of catholic actions.
5. The lists are made in the open with the participation of women and young people of every hill.
6. Transcribe names on the index cards of WFP lists instead of using exercise books and insuring that their sent the same day to the municipal administrator and keep the original list
7. Have a committee which does not have any administration staff
8. Leave the beneficiaries selection to the WFP staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The question of sexual exploitation is finally debatable although it remains discreet in the Burundian culture.
- The invisible theater generally used to discuss questions linked to corruption in large spaces such as the market, crowds, has limits concerning questions related to sexual corruption as far as it is a question which even the victim does not want to talk about.
- Use other tools such as focus group discussions to compliment invisible theater especially for discreet questions.
- There is a need for an understanding – community training on the concepts of exploitation and harassment
- Enlarging community participation (more than two people) would help strengthen honesty, transparency and equity when selecting beneficiaries for the food distributions.
- Where women's associations are strong, sexual harassment and exploitation is tackled “the reason why this practice does not exist here is that women have associations into which they gather (development associations), they remain united in all the domains and even during the food distribution. Their daughters go to school and have no time to be tempted.”
- There is a need to investigate and explore what goes on in other CARE programs/projects

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sexual harassment and exploitation within the distribution project is strongly confirmed by beneficiaries while the authorities generally deny the practice without being categorical however: «if the woman does not say no, the man will profit from it inevitably » says one administrator.

Things being what they are, there is a saying: “there is no smoke without fire” to say that the various comments and testimonies mentioned above will alert whoever is concerned to begin prevention actions to fight against such abuses.

To do it, the following recommendations are formulated:

1. To the Distribution Project:

- A. Integrate as much as possible in beneficiary selection the enlargement of committees as previously recommending so that a more diverse representation exists on the committees.
- B. Integrate HIV / AIDS messages into the distributions activities every time the occasion to be in touch with the population appears
- C. Invite the administration staff to involve themselves in fight against sexual exploitation.
- D. Strengthen women's associations capacities so that they get involved effectively
- E. When conducting beneficiary list validations, organize two groups - one with men and the other with women, as was experimented in Bugabira in the North of the country.

2. To all CARE projects and programs

- A. Within the activities of other projects conduct similar assessments to examine if similar types of sexual exploitation are taking place.
- B. Organize discussions with the community on the concepts of exploitation and harassment and have them contribute in the fight against these practices (certain young girls and women interrogated, think that they are solicited because they are cherished)

3. To CARE International in Burundi

- A. Strengthen the staff capacities around the subject of sexual exploitation and harassment when having open discussions so that they are capable of leading fruitful discussions;
- B. Prepare a suited methodology to lead such discussions;