

Partnership Issues

Round Table

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Summary

Violence and insecurity are experienced differently by men and women. These social problems cut across and affect women from diverse classes and backgrounds. This makes it necessary for municipalities respond to these problems through diverse strategies and policies that are sensitive to gender differences.

Improving awareness of violence against women remains one of the first steps to be taken. It is important that public education remains a primary response to social problems that are rooted in violence. The fight against violence must ideally be institutionalized by developing programs and projects that are directly linked to a process of citizen participation in all steps of their development.

Different communities must share their experiences with each other. It is essential that municipalities form networks and build partnerships with one another so that they can share and learn from each others' different development approaches. Partnerships must first be developed at the local level which can then grow into national and international networks.

Partners must make themselves and their efforts known and request time and political will to make change. A network of 16 municipalities exists in Ecuador and works to integrate a gender approach into government policies. There is also collaboration with "sister-cities" in other

countries (Santa Fe in Bogotá and Medellín in Colombia) as well as with the network of Latin American capital cities (UCCI).

Networks of communities within countries must develop common tools and support the development of similar safety indicators and databases that can then be shared and compared. The same thing applies for international networks who can support the efforts of international organizations and programs.

Some key characteristics of successful partnerships include:

- Help increase public awareness and sensitivity to safety issues;
- Be able to rationalize and justify resources and share them among partners;
- Promote transparency by sharing experiences with other partners: sharing not only successes but also challenges encountered so that other partners will learn and not repeat mistakes or duplicate efforts;
- Help develop related theory and methodology;
- Use existing communication technologies (internet, e-mail).

The most important element always remains political willingness to work to reduce violence against women at all levels of municipal government: political personnel, city councillors, directors of staff, and administration.

Discussion

Networking helps us to share and learn from others' experiences however we must be transparent and honest in sharing our information so as to give others all of the relevant information they need to replicate practices without repeating the same mistakes.

A participant from Lima (Peru) asserts that corruption in many levels of government is a major challenge to women's empowerment and safety efforts. In her many years of working as a

government official, she was kidnapped and often received death threats in reaction to her public appearances promoting the defense of women's rights.

Grassroots groups, politicians (even female ones), institutions, and community members do not always have a common understanding or vision of violence against women. The example is given that, even in a municipal government office working to improve women's condition where 40% of decision-making posts are occupied by women, they do not necessarily agree on priority issues (ex., families first versus domestic violence). This is a challenge in Northern and Southern countries, alike that makes it difficult to achieve consensus among partners on what approach should be used to address domestic violence and women's safety issues.

It is not easy to reach a common vision of gender that can be practically implemented. Nevertheless, continuing efforts in Equator have included conducting a gender diagnostic and thematic round table discussions of family violence problems in the current legal and economic context of the country.

In Equator, a program exists to work against the sexual exploitation of children and youth. A legal order of protection for sex workers also exists however its effectiveness is reduced by the fact that many sex workers do not admit to their activities in attempt to hide them from their families. Local police have been trained to be more sensitive and to work to reduce the mistreatment of sex workers however much work remains to be done to also improve public sensitivity to sex workers' situations and rights.

A participant asks what kinds of policies we should be trying to implement. Rather than create an order to protect sex workers, she asks why work did not instead focus on trying to educate these workers and get them off the streets. Here, we must consider the economic situations of these workers and the realistic lucrativity of such work.

Municipal administrations and civil society work at different paces. While municipal involvement and funding are essential to sustaining safety efforts, bureaucratic governments

often cannot meet public demands for immediate action and solutions to safety problems. It is important for community groups to remain somewhat autonomous from local government so that they can respond to civil society demands more quickly and efficiently. Municipal funding of community-based action also allows a greater diversity of problems to be addressed, that would simply take too long if handled through local government processes alone.

While networking is important, we must strive to clarify define realistic objectives and use them to make our networking and activities more focused. Otherwise, much time is spent in networking meetings that strive to address too many issues and in the end do not produce remarkable concrete progress.

Conclusions

- Lack of common vision and consensus among diverse partners - and even between different women's groups - can seriously threaten synergy and success of women's safety efforts.
- We must be careful when considering criminalizing prostitution and must also be sensitive to issues of mistreatment of sex workers and abuse of their human rights.
- Government and institutional corruption can perpetuate inequality and violence that continuously undermine women's safety efforts and even further threaten their own safety to carry out public education activities promoting women's equality.
- While municipal funding and support is essential to sustaining safety efforts, community-based action must also remain sufficiently autonomous from local administrations so as to avoid being restricted and slowed in their capacity to respond to public demands for immediate action and solutions to diverse social issues.

Recommendations

- We must be transparent and accountable when documenting and sharing our experiences. In addition to our successes, we must honestly document our challenges so that other communities can learn from these setbacks and adjust their own strategies and practices to hopefully avoid such implementation or replication problems.
- If we are to make lasting improvements to women's safety, particularly in unequal and violent cultures, we must work *with* men to influence the socialized roots of their abuse of women.
- Community groups, institutions, governments, and the general public must be educated and trained to be more sensitive to gender considerations in their practices.
- Rather than solely relying on repressive and reactive approaches, police services must be educated on the different elements of violence against women (age, social class, etc) so as to be better informed and able to develop preventive measures.
- More women must hold key decision-making positions in local government so as to ensure that women's concerns are considered in urban planning.