



HOPE FOUNDATION FOR  
AFRICAN WOMEN

*Eliminating Gender Disparities  
to Create Strong Communities*

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## **Empowering Communities: Participatory and Transformative Strategies for Health Training With Abagusii, Based on Popular Education**

When the Kenya HFAW team of six women ( Dr. Grace B.MoseOkong'o, Dr. Mary Nasibi, Hellen Njoroge, Joyce Amoyi, Lisper Bundi and Nelly Koyo) arrived from an intensive two week training in Chile on how to transform communities using EPES model, they immediately went to work. Following the EPES model we embarked on working to pilot the model. We began by forming a grassroots committee of 8 people including 4 men and 4 women to lead the planning process for the training. The planning committee played a key role in fairly selecting people who will be committed to the training to become trainers as health and human rights promoters in the Borabu sub County, Kenya.

We then immediately embarked together with the grassroots committee to motivate grassroots participants to register for the training. At the same time we visited all local county offices to garner their leadership support. We have learnt that creating a relationship with community and local leadership of those we intend to impact on will lead to project ownership and sustainability of the project. During our launch, we invited our county representative, county women representative, director gender unit, director health unity, development officer, top leadership police, deputy county commissioner local chiefs and sub chiefs, local school principals, head teachers and local clergy to mention a few. Many ordinary men and women were invited to our launch. We used fliers and thoroughly explained how this training will empower our community to eradicate many gender issues including FGM, gender based violence, alcoholism, insecurity and family conflicts. That is will lead to eradication of poverty and will play a key role to raise awareness of human rights.

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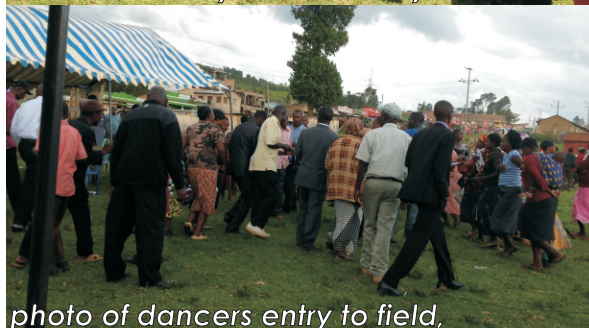
During the launch we were pleasantly surprised to know that all our local leadership turned up. It was a hot awareness raising day with extraordinary speeches and role plays. For example the audience was treated to a special session where a local school acted out an FGM play. It gave these students



*Picture of Office meetings*



*Photo of county women entry to field*



*photo of dancers entry to field,*



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Photo of girls acting



Photo of girls acting



Photo of Man addressing FGM



Photo with grace introducing



Photo of plenary presentations

an opportunity to reprimand the parents for doing FGM underground since the legal ban. At the same time it revealed how police were so corrupt that they were unable to stamp out FGM. All these unfolded in front of the deputy commissioner of police. Very serious messages were passed on amidst laughter. By the end of the day some people began telling the organizers of the event to keep doing this to stop harming our girls.

For the first time in the village, we strategically appointed a man to discuss with the audience the issue of FGM and why it was urgent to eradicate. He did so with vigor and urged all those doing this practice to stop.

By the close of the day, with our County Women's Representative declaring the training open, all people who were at the launch wanted to be included in the training. We were swamped with requests from all leadership to bring the training to their wards. We originally wanted to train 25 people since our financial capacity is very low but, we were pushed to include an additional 5 to total 30. We are very conscious of gender inequality in the village so, we included 10 men even though our focus is women who are much marginalized. We are very aware that this is a man's world where our success will be more practical if we include men. With this awareness we are raising, we are seeing men who are rising to the occasion and supporting our cause with enthusiastic participation.

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, following the launch on April 2 we started our training on a very high note with people so enthusiastic to learn on how to transform their communities, eradicate FGM. We started by innovatively adopting the EPES curriculum and included topics which would not normally be included in EPES curriculum but which are relevant to our situation. For example we took time to discuss why projects fail immediately a funder leaves the neighborhood and discovered that people knew the reasons: when tokens end, corruption, lack of leadership, lack of local ownership were mentioned. We strongly advised against expectations of financial handouts because we did not have such handouts.

We discussed the concept of popular education, the principles, values and the pillars. We made understanding easy by use of teaching aids and engaging the trainees on complete participation, plenary presentation, dance and music. Then we introduced sensitive topics the following day such as FGM and alcoholism in the topic called "Understanding the Issues". Here we engaged the participants with print pictures of the issues asking them to discuss what they are seeing, what the cause is, how the issue is affecting us and what we can do to address it collectively. It was satisfying to see very ordinary people come up with such creative solutions to their problems.



Participation



Group discussion



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**You can make a difference in the lives of these African women with your gift today. \$50 will send two women to a training session and \$500 will pay for the team of trainers from Nairobi to travel to a rural village.**

We have begun a very serious endeavor which we believe will transform our community. We feel the urgency and the heightened interest from the villagers. We are now starting the second session of the training. After the pilot training we want to scale up to 5 wards in our sub-county using the 30 trainees as leaders. We thank EPES Foundation for facilitating this pilot this far.

This chapter we have begun holds key to real change perhaps not just in our county but the entire country. We want to break subordination of women in Kenya once and for all. We are ambitious and highly motivated. We need to just keep on building our capacity and holding ourselves accountable to each and every one of us. We need your help in doing this important work.

Dear Friend,  
Imagine the pain of a woman in poverty with very little control of her life. A woman subjected to domestic abuse and genital mutilation, or becoming an HIV/AIDS patient or caregiver. A woman with very little decision-making power personally or politically. Women in Kenya live this experience every day. Many do not know any other way of life, and have no hope that their situation can change. To bring these women hope of a better life, in 2011 I left my family in the US to come back to my home country of Kenya. I founded the Hope Foundation for African Women (HFAW), a nonpartisan charitable organization which strives to eliminate gender disparities in all our communities. We are committed to empowering women through income-generating activities and education about their rights. We have a firm belief in the power of ordinary people to change their situation. Since 2011 HFAW has been able to:

- Work with Kiva Zip to sponsor over 60 interest-free loans for vulnerable women (and a few men)
- Assist women in beginning small scale economic enterprises such as making bricks (to sell as well as construct healthy buildings), dairy farming, and buying and selling grains
- Donate over 15 sewing machines and train women to become self-employed as seamstresses
- Use the forum created by the economic activities to conduct workshops on topics such as eradication of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), HIV/AIDS and human rights

The level of enthusiasm among women is very high. Earlier this year six Kenyan women traveled to Chile for a two-week training program on the popular education model of Educación Popular en Salud (EPES). EPES, as many of you may know, is an organization founded over 30 years ago by a woman who has inspired me over the years, Karen Anderson. We came back from Chile transformed and ready to share what we had learned with as many other Kenyan women as possible. HFAW has recruited over 30 health and human rights promoter trainees from the village of Nyaronde and has begun a training program entitled "Empowering Communities: Participatory and Transformative Strategies for Health in Collaboration with the Abagusii." The goal is to train the trainer and then expand to impact more villages. The training awakens ordinary women to realize that they are key to personal and community transformation. EPES sponsored HFAW with \$5,000 to launch the program and pilot it immediately.

Apart from the principles of popular education, this training also tackles many gender issues such as FGM, HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, gender-based violence, and gender construction. We help participants understand the origin of gender issues, how these issues impact them and how they themselves can work to combat them. Unlike the rote learning (memorization of facts) in our Kenyan education system, this training is centered on the learner and treats all participants as equals with facilitators who know their situation best. It is truly empowering. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Since February we have motivated local leaders to support this program. The few men who joined us in this journey are very committed to change, having realized that their lives will be much better when women are doing better. We are extremely motivated to drive this pilot to maturity and begin scaling up.

However, our resources are extremely meager. That is why we need your help. Just \$50 will help us pay for transportation, accommodation and food for two training sessions for one woman.

I have shared my personal story with many of you, including the formidable challenges I overcame, at times with your help. I was a desperate woman a few years ago, but now I can make decisions and follow my dreams. I have given my children a much better chance in life thanks to you! Because I did it, these women in my village are inspired to and can do it, too. You can help these women transform their lives. Thank you in advance for helping us have an impact on women's lives - not tomorrow but right now.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [gbmose@yahoo.com](mailto:gbmose@yahoo.com). Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Dr. Grace B. Mose Okong'o  
Founder and CEO, Hope Foundation for African Women (HFAW)