Friends Women's Association (FWA) - Gender-based Violence Survivors Initiative.

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Friends Women Association (FWA)

Initiative Overview

Friends Women's Association (FWA) began in 2002 with a focus on women's health care, in particular, reproductive and maternal health, support for women with HIV and gender-based violence (GBV) survivors.

Problem

According to research, Burundi's socio-cultural context is favourable to GBV. With its male-dominated authority structures, Burundi is a patriarchal society where the relationship between male dominance and female total subordination is often reinforced and perpetuated. The main cause is cultural norms and prejudices. In Burundi, women are often treated as objects to manipulate and reject at will.

How the Innovation Works

To address this issue, FWA has been running trauma healing workshops for GBV survivors and has initiated women's economic empowerment through the self-help group (SHG) approach, the Street Business School and the support of small projects initiated by GBV survivors. Women are typically recruited into self-help groups by women already participating. Some join after hearing about the group and how they help women become stronger and more independent.

Beginning lessons require women to contribute financially to the group and to arrive on time, both sober and clean. The group decides the interest percentage to charge on loans to group members.

After twelve months of saving and collaborating, the women celebrate their anniversary wearing matching dresses and having a meal together. Several groups have been meeting for more than five years.

Observations

For participating women, the SHG increases peer support, community, individual responsibility, and discipline for saving money, which leads to improved food and housing security, the ability to pay children's school fees, and the economic stability of their families. All of these factors serve to increase her ability to parent with love, to model coping skills, her family's respect, and her self-esteem.

Sustainability

Currently, FWA supports 148 self-help groups comprised of 3,621 women, men, and teens from Kamenge, Maramvya, Kibimba and Nyabiraba. Since 2018, 280 women have graduated from the FWA Street Business School's eight-module training program.

Keywords

Friends Women's Association, Reproductive and maternal health, HIV and gender-based violence survivors, Trauma healing workshops, Self-help group