



Survivor-Centered Approach: Working with Churches for Survivors' Safety & Healing



Dear partners & friends,

As we set into the month of August, we take a moment to express our heartfelt appreciation for your unwavering prayers and support as we work tirelessly with the local churches and communities to create safe spaces for survivors and to end gender-based violence! Because of COVID-19 pandemic, the past three years have presented us with unprecedented challenges in responding to survivors' needs and safety.

As you all know, the COVID-19 pandemic led to numerous social and economic disruptions and challenges, including heightened sexual and gender-based violence cases, especially domestic/intimate partner violence and rape of women and girls. The consequences are severe, threatening the gains already made for gender equality and rights of countless women and girls around the world.

It is deeply troubling to know that still, one in three women globally experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or non-partner in their lifetime, with intimate partner violence being responsible for over one-third of women's

homicides. But why gender-based violence, and violence against women in the midst of all efforts to end it globally?

At the Institute for Faith and Gender Empowerment (IFAGE), our strategy is to end root causes of sexual and gender based violence and that's why we target and work with religious communities and traditional actors to shift power imbalance, transform patriarchal beliefs and mindsets, and to empower both women and men to end gender based violence

Since 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic experience, IFAGE has been steadfastly dedicated to providing survivor-centered approaches, bringing healing, connection and counseling to survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

In this August update, we are proud to share with you some of the impactful initiatives we've undertaken:



IFAGE counselor talking to a group of survivors traced by our Gender Champions from January 2023

Harnessing the potential of Faith Leaders and Traditional Actors

IFAGE recognizes the importance of involving religious leaders and traditional actors including local chiefs, village elders, community elders, clan elders and religious leaders in the fight against GBV.

These Traditional actors hold influential positions within our community and are recognized as custodians of tradition, culture, and social norms. They have played a crucial role in addressing GBV and promoting gender equality and advocating for survivors support and protection. By collaborating with these influential figures, we have been able to promote awareness, challenge harmful gender norms, and effect positive changes within local communities, for a

better community for the vulnerable people in our society.

Equipping Faith and traditional Leaders as Para-Social Workers

Our efforts extend to training gender champions as para-social workers, enabling them to provide crucial support and hope to GBV survivors within their communities. These champions play an essential role in creating safe spaces, offering counseling, and assisting survivors in accessing the resources they need during their restoration journey.

Survivor Tracking and Tracing for healing and justice

We have been tirelessly working to track and trace GBV survivors, ensuring they receive the necessary assistance. Our commitment to sharing their burdens and standing by their side has been the driving force behind our efforts.

The challenges we face are immense, and the stories of survivors we encounter touch our hearts deeply, reinforcing the urgency and importance of our work at IFAGE. GBV is a stark reality for countless individuals, and we firmly believe that only together can we eradicate this menace.



Counseling session with a para social worker in August 2023

Your unwavering support, prayers, and dedication are invaluable to us. Without your efforts, our endeavor to bring hope and restoration to GBV survivors would not be the success it is. Each step we take forward is made possible by your generosity and empathy.

As we continue our journey, we kindly request your continued support, prayers, and advocacy for our cause. Together, we can create a world where every individual can live free from violence and fear. Our vision for a world where

women and men are equal and free from Sexual and Gender- Based Violence is possible.

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Finally, we would like to share one particularly impact case that has touched our hearts deeply and further emphasizes the significance of our work.

(N/B; "Francis" is fully aware and voluntarily consented to share her story with our partners and the world.)

My Journey to Freedom: A Survivor's Story of Resilience and Empowerment

Names have been changed for privacy.

"My name is Francis, and I am a 36-year-old woman. My life has been a roller coaster of hardships and struggles, but it is also a tale of strength and resilience.

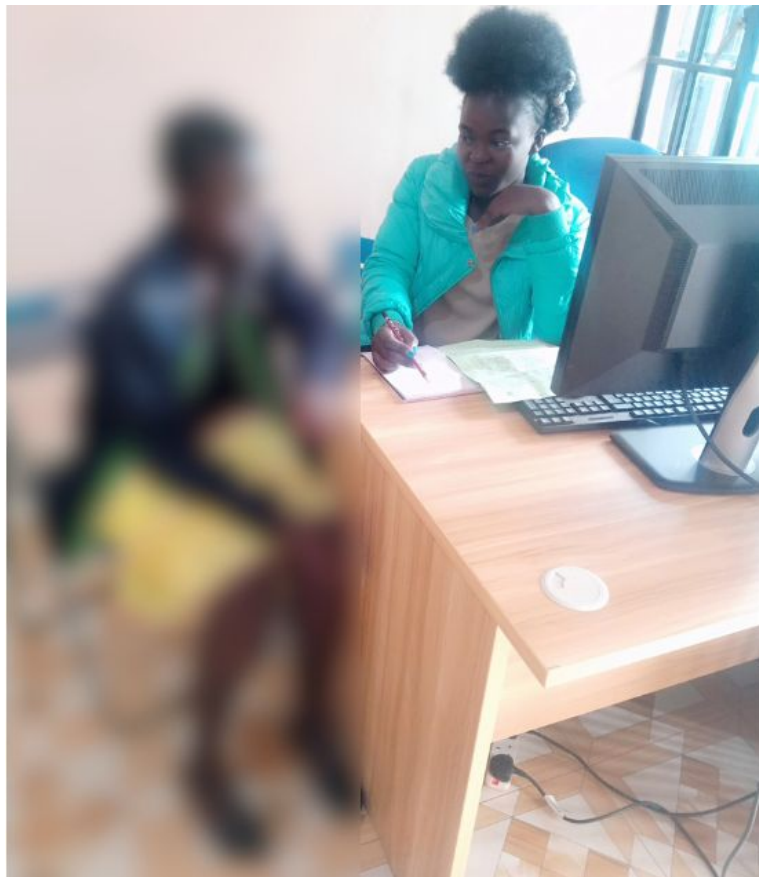
At the tender age of 14, I found myself married, hoping for a bright future. However, my dreams were shattered when my first two daughters came into the world. Their father was unable to support us, leaving us to fend for ourselves. Life was tough, but I persevered, determined to give my girls a better life.

Years later, fate led me to a man who seemed caring and loving. He took us in and provided for us, and for a while, life felt more hopeful. But as time passed, he began to change, transforming into a wild and angry person. My heart sank as I witnessed him becoming violent and abusive towards my precious daughters.

Confused and terrified, I could not comprehend the darkness that had engulfed our lives. Then, one heartbreaking day, my second-born daughter ran away from home because she had lost his step-father's hard disk, leaving behind a heart-wrenching letter. In that letter, she revealed the unbearable truth: my partner had been sexually harassing her. I was in shock and devastated. But little did I know that this was just the tip of the iceberg.

As I dug deeper into the truth, my worst fears were confirmed. My first daughter bravely opened up to me, sharing the painful secret she had been carrying silently. She disclosed that this man had been forcing himself on her, violating her trust and her body. The weight of her pain and the burden of her silence weighed heavily on my heart. She confessed that he had threatened to harm her if she ever revealed the truth, leaving her trapped in a cycle of terror.

I had given birth to two children for him, during my last born's antenatal clinic, I found out that I was HIV positive, I was shocked and heartbroken, I confronted him but he turned violent and abusive, he warned me to leave his house together with my children, he took away all my business stock and shut everything down, he gave me an ultimatum when the defilement case reached the local authorities that I should leave or he will kill all of us, meanwhile I also found out that he had another woman besides his first wife and he was never faithful, the other woman also became his accomplice and could inform him of the proceedings of the case.



IFAGE counsellor with another SGBV survivor

One dark night, after he went hiding he came together with some other men, tied me up and started beating me, I screamed for help but he took my daughter too, he tie her up and warned me not to scream a gain or else he could kill me before my daughter, my other daughter who was sleeping in the kitchen outside heard the commotion and ran for help, people came and that's when they left. It was then that I knew I had to act, not just for my daughters but for every survivor who had suffered in silence.

I left with nothing but my kids then I got to an Anglican priest's homestead, he welcomed me, listened to me and gave me shelter for two days, he then took me to the Institute for Faith and Gender Empowerment (IFAGE), apparently he

was one of the Gender Champions.

I felt revealed when I met the team together with other survivors like me, we shared our stories and it made me feel at home, they took my two girls to school, at very good school in Bondo after being counseled and undergone medical screening.

Together with other survivors and with the support of caring IFAGE team, I found the strength to break free from this nightmare. Together, we embarked on a journey of healing, seeking justice, and empowering ourselves. Today, I have accepted my condition and I adhere to my medication, IFAGE facilitated my hair dressing business, by giving me the seed money, I couldn't be happier and grateful.

My story is not just one of tragedy; it is a testament to the indomitable spirit of survivors like me. Today, I stand tall as a survivor, reclaiming my life and fighting for justice for my daughters and every survivor who deserves to be heard and protected.

Through the support of IFAGE and their survivor-centered approaches, I have found my voice, and I now stand as a beacon of hope for those who need it most. My journey to freedom continues, and I am determined to break the chains of silence and empower others to find their strength and resilience.

Thank you for standing with me and countless survivors on this journey of healing and empowerment. My plea is that IFAGE builds a rescue center for the survivors and I pray that God grants them a stronger and able legal team to help us seek for justice as that is my ultimate want and a survivor, above all God bless the IFAGE team, I am nothing without them.

With love and gratitude,
"Francis"

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To conclude, thank you for being an integral part of IFAGE's journey. Your commitment and compassion will undoubtedly make a difference in the lives of GBV survivors, fostering a brighter and more equitable future for everyone.

Institute For Faith and Gender Empowerment (IFAGE) is a registered faith-based Non-Government Organization working in East Africa on gender justice and equality since 2013

With warm regards and deepest gratitude,
Rev. Domnic Misolo & IFAGE Team



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You are receiving this email because you opted in via our website.

Our mailing address is:

IFAGE International

Shalom House & Estate

P. O. Box 663 - 40100 Kisumu - Kenya

Bondo 40601

Kenya