



## Empowering female survivors of sexualized and gender-based violence in Northern Uganda

The overall objective of the project is the improvement of living conditions of female survivors of sexualized and gender-based violence in Northern Uganda. The main target group consists of 400 women particularly affected by the consequences of conflict. Additionally, about 300 female survivors of (sexualized and) gender-based violence addressing FOWAC for help receive psychosocial, legal and medical support. Measures to achieve the objectives include psychosocial counselling, socioeconomic activities and awareness raising and advocating for the rights of women and girls in collaboration with other stakeholders.

**Project duration:**

2014-5-1 to 2016-12-31

**Evaluation period on site:**

2016-4-15 to 2016-5-15

**Type of evaluation:**

Mid-term Evaluation

**Consultant team:**

Hildegard Scheu and Janet Awimbo

**Funded by:**

German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) & medica mondiale

**Project budget:**

257,592 €

# Executive Summary

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE FOWAC APPROACH

The Foundation for Women Affected by Conflict (FOWAC) is a woman-led civil society organisation based in Kitgum District in Northern Uganda. The organisation was officially registered as a community based organisation by the Kitgum District Local Government in 2008. The overall purpose of the project under mid-term review is “to improve living conditions of female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Northern Uganda”. The project is FOWAC’s largest initiative so far; running from 2014-5-1 to 2016-12-31 with a total budget of 257,592 €, co-funded by medica mondiale with a grant by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The stated goals of the project are as follows.

### **Project Goal 1:**

Female Survivors of (sexualized and) gender-based violence have increased their self-help capacities and are empowered to participate in social and economic activities at community level.

### **Project Goal 2:**

Communities, local government and traditional leaders in the project area participate in preventing (sexualized and) gender-based violence.

The main target group comprises the women and girls particularly affected by the consequences of the LRA-led insurgency which occurred in Northern Uganda mainly between 1995 and 2007. The project is being implemented in the sub-counties of Omiya Anyima and Amida in Kitgum District as well as Palabek Kal and Padibe East sub-counties in Lamwo District. The activities being undertaken by FOWAC to achieve the project goals include:

- » Psychosocial counselling, legal and medical support for survivors of (sexualized and) gender-based violence
- » Mobilisation of women and girls to form self-help groups
- » Promotion of socioeconomic activities for women
- » Awareness raising and advocacy for the rights of women and girls

## OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS OF THE EVALUATION

The main objectives of the mid-term evaluation are:

- » To assess the progress and the success so far
- » To assess the project’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability
- » To provide recommendations that can be implemented over the remaining project period and beyond.
- » To provide decision makers at the BMZ, medica mondiale and FOWAC with sufficient information to make informed judgements about the current and expected performance of the project.

The evaluation was commissioned to Avigato Consulting in April 2016, the two evaluators were Dr. Hildgard Scheu (Germany) and Janet Awimbo (Kenya). They began with a review of project documentation, development of data collection tools and planning consultations with both medica mondiale and FOWAC before a two-week field mission in Uganda. Key activities in Uganda were meetings with two FOWAC consultants based in Kampala, workshops with FOWAC staff (at the beginning and close of the field mission), visits to a sample of eight women groups, and meetings with other key stakeholders (government and non-government) in Kitgum and Lamwo districts. Interviews, group discussions and participant observations were the main methods used in the field.

The evaluation was conducted in line with OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and standards as well as DeGEval standards. The evaluation team collected information and quantitative data from various sources, including the meetings with group members and advisories, project files (hard copies), databases and narrative reports, and the groups’ cash ledgers. Different types of triangulation were used to check the validity of the information and data they collected. In addition, the evaluation team requested additional information and clarification from FOWAC staff after the field mission.



© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

## FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation responded to the questions formulated in the Terms of Reference regarding relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability and also undertook an overall assessment of project management by FOWAC.

### Relevance

The complementary strategies for psychosocial support and livelihood improvement for women are addressing a real need within the targeted communities. Before the 20 village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) were established, vulnerable women were isolated and had very limited access to psychosocial, legal or medical support. Women, especially widows and young mothers, had few resources, skills, motivation or familial support to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

The identification of 60 advisories, based on nominations by the beneficiaries, was a relevant intervention; providing a much-needed link between the groups, their communities and FOWAC staff. Prior to the training by FOWAC the advisories were already recognised as leaders within their communities but had not received any formal training on topics such as human rights, conflict resolution and counselling.

The project's target communities in the sub-counties of Palabek Kal, Padibe, Omiya Anyima and Labongo Amida are among those most affected by the conflict in northern Uganda. The community entry strategy, involving consultations with local leaders, has generated support for the project within the targeted areas and facilitated identification of the principal project beneficiaries. The partnerships that FOWAC has developed with actors in the law enforcement, health and legal sectors are important for improved access to the services needed by the affected women. FOWAC has complemented its partnerships with police and organisations such as the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) with connections to local media stations, thereby broadening the scope and reach of its advocacy on women's rights.

The project approach and the interventions and services provided by FOWAC are appropriate within the social context in Acholiland in Northern Uganda and address the psychosocial and livelihood needs of women affected by sexual and gender based violence. FOWAC plays an important and acknowledged role in contributing to peaceful conflict resolution in the targeted communities. Its activities are highly relevant.

## Effectiveness

The establishment of VSLAs has contributed to the psychosocial well-being of about 500 vulnerable women, including returnees, widows and child mothers. Over 90% of the members are now able to keep their children in school and less than 1% of the members feel that they are still shunned by their community. Approximately 80 girls have been enlisted in the four school clubs and preliminary reports indicate a reduction in annual dropout rates within the selected schools.

The ability of the women to save varies greatly within each group as well as between groups. By December 2015, 17 groups had cumulative savings in excess of UGX 2,000,000. By May 2016, most groups were in the second cycle of the VSLA process.

The training provided to FOWAC staff and advisories has improved their capacities for accompaniment of the VSLAs and for individual counselling of women, group counselling and family mediation. Women who are not part of the VSLA groups but need support approach either an Advisory or a FOWAC staff member. The efforts of the advisories to encourage victims of

GBV to seek medical attention or legal redress, and to alert the authorities about criminal activities, is particularly valuable in the more remote communities from where such information rarely reaches the elders and officials based at the sub-county centres.

The community dialogues organized by FOWAC, the documentaries aired on national television and the lobbying for the bye-laws have certainly raised awareness of women's rights and practices that undermine human rights in general. In July 2015, FOWAC also produced an 'Annual Report' which was distributed to district and sub-county officials and other key partners in the project. The increased visibility of FOWAC is also helping the organization attract new partners.

FOWACs achievements are good, taking into account the challenging social environment and the limited funds available. Specifically, the psychosocial support to women as individuals and in groups has helped women to feel emotionally better. The training in life and business skills, VSLA group formation and the income generating activities undertaken, although limited in scale, helped women to feel more respected in their communities. Overall effectiveness is good.



© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

## Efficiency

By the end of 2015, the project had already surpassed the targets of enabling 700 women access counselling, medical or legal support and integrating 400 women into the 20 VSLAs. Likewise, the 60 advisories that have been recruited and trained to support the VSLAs and other beneficiaries exceed the number of volunteers targeted by the project. With at least three advisories assigned to each group, they are well deployed to support the VSLAs and other beneficiaries. Although there was no baseline data that would indicate the proportional representation of the different vulnerable groups within the targeted communities, the members of the VSLAs are vulnerable women in terms of the defined criteria (returnees, child mothers, widows, victims of gender-based violence).

Community dialogues and other meetings involving local officials are held regularly and complemented by broadcasts on local radio stations. Several communities have adopted rules limiting the sale and consumption of alcohol. However, progress towards the enactment of bye-laws at sub-county levels has been constrained by bureaucratic and political factors, including the reluctance of elected leaders to champion unpopular policies ahead of the 2016 polls. It is unlikely that the proposed bye-laws on defilement, domestic violence and drug abuse will be formally adopted by local authorities by conclusion of the project.

The project aims to strengthen FOWAC's capacities in project management. However, the organization has not allocated sufficient time and resources to improve monitoring and documentation, or to complete its strategic planning for 2016–2018.

These different aspects of efficiency are difficult to summarize; satisfactory may be appropriate as an overall judgment.

## Impact

Being a member of a VSLA and having access to life skills and business skills training as well as psychosocial counselling through FOWAC staff has had a positive impact on many women. The different project activities, including community dialogues, have resulted in a decrease in stigma associated with female returnees and child mothers in the targeted communities. Several interview partners also reported a decrease in GBV in households of VSLA group members.

Women's access to cash has improved but control over their earnings from petty trade and other ventures are still limited, as husbands or parents sometimes claim control. VSLAs which show more signs of unity and cohesion in the group are also those whose members are, in addition to individual farming activities or petty trade, supporting each other's farm work or have embarked on joint agricultural projects.

FOWAC has contributed to the social and political discussion on violence in general and sexualized and gender-based violence in particular. Networking with police and other stakeholders has contributed to making the legal system more responsive to the issue of (sexualized and) gender-based violence. Preliminary data also indicates a decline in drop-out rates in the schools where the clubs for vulnerable girls have been established. There are, however, still many cases of rape of children/young girls which are settled within families and without doing justice to the victim. Eradicating (sexualized and) gender-based violence is a long-term process and needs great staying power.

While the improved access to psychosocial support has a positive impact on many women, activities to change social perceptions of gender roles in the society and of (sexualized and) gender-based violence as a crime against girls and women to be persecuted need to be continued and extended in order to have a lasting impact. However, the impact so far is good.

## Sustainability

The group members appear to have internalised the VSLA culture: they meet regularly, conduct meetings in a transparent manner, allocate loans to members fairly and manage conflicts internally (with support from the advisories). Although all the groups visited during the evaluation were adamant that they still need regular support from FOWAC staff, the evaluation team got the impression that that a weekly accompaniment of most groups by FOWAC staff is no longer necessary and could happen at longer intervals (e.g. twice a week or once a month).

The long-term sustainability of the groups will depend on members' cohesion and commitment to self-reliance, as well as the continued guidance and moral support of the advisories. Considering that many of the advisories already find it challenging to meet the groups regularly, an additional mechanism might have to be put in place to ensure their continued availability. External support and mentoring from programmes



© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

such the Community Driven Development Fund will also be significant for the sustainability of the groups.

The sustainability of the existing school clubs will depend on goodwill from the hosting schools, particularly the head teachers. Continued support from the school heads and teachers is necessary for integration of the clubs as routine, extracurricular learning activities for the members and other pupils. A gradual and planned phase-out of direct support from FOWAC for both the VSLAs and the school clubs is highly recommended. However, until mental health service become available in government facilities, FOWAC staff should continue to offer psychosocial counselling to VSLA members and other women in the target communities even after the accompaniment of the VSLAs has been phased out.

### **Project Management**

FOWAC now has a well-trained team of committed staff, who work under difficult conditions. However, FOWAC is understaffed and self-care is not easy under high work pressure and also psychologically and physically demanding work. It is very important that the management supports the staff in setting of boundaries and self-care, and also organizes regular retreat for staff to get out “recharge their batteries”. Both the executive director and the project coordinator would

also benefit from leadership training and personal coaching sessions.

In November 2015, FOWAC conducted a strategic planning workshop but the plan had not been finalised by May 2016. This lack of a strategic plan also impacts on monitoring and general management of the project. Weaknesses in planning were already apparent in the project proposal submitted to the BMZ. Planned results are confused/mixed-up with indicators. The theory of change and the underlying impact chain, which outlines the anticipated outputs, outcomes and impacts at individual, group and community levels, is not clear. The evaluation team highlighted this problem during the final workshop with FOWAC and recommended that future planning of new projects include achievable results and measurable (qualitative and quantitative) indicators on outcome and impact levels.

The need for the development of a monitoring system was recommended in the report of the 2013 evaluation report and repeated during the 2015 strategic planning workshop. The internal knowledge and information transfer was found to have gaps and there was an obvious deficiency in filing as well as data entry in the recently introduced electronic database (the FOWAC Savings Groups Portfolio Tracking System). The issue of missing, misfiled or removed documentation has implications for monitoring and evaluation and

also compromises the confidentiality of the information obtained from project beneficiaries. During the final meeting with the evaluation team, it was proposed that FOWAC should learn how other organisations handle confidential information about their beneficiaries and also acquire adequate storage for both electronic and paper records within the FOWAC office.

## MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

FOWAC has achieved several positive outcomes. The organisation has been successful in recruiting and training volunteer advisories as well as networking with local stakeholders within local government, traditional institutions, civil society and local media. Within the targeted communities, there is an apparent increase in the number of cases of SGBV reported and referred to the police and greater social acceptance of returnees and single mothers. FOWAC's strategy of community dialogue and sensitisation, in conjunction with legal referrals to end the impunity of rape and other forms of violence against women is deemed successful.

The integration of the psychosocial dimension into the VSLAs clearly had a positive impact on the psychosocial well-being of many women. Life skills trainings have helped women change their behaviour and self-perception. Economically, VSLA has helped some women to increase their income, and improve the welfare of their children and other family members.

Investing jointly as a group in agriculture seems to be a preference for several VSLA groups. Although FOWAC actively supported this strategy in earlier projects, it has not been included in this project. The focus on business skills has limited impact within the current context and agricultural enterprises would probably generate a higher impact on food security and improved livelihoods. Having access to a loan is no guarantee that women have control how to spend it or what to do with a profit. The social dependence on men is high and severely hampers women's empowerment.

The empowerment of Acholi women and the reduction of (sexualized and) gender-based violence requires the change of values in a highly male-dominated society. This perception is shared by most of the key stakeholders, including VSLA members and FOWAC staff. The question of how to work with men was also raised during the last evaluation of FOWAC in 2013.

As such, the overall economic and social impact of the project is mixed. The effects from individual to community levels should be monitored and analysed more closely. In this regard, the organisational development of FOWAC should include continued training of staff in psychosocial counselling, conflict mediation and stress reduction, as well as the development of a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluation.



© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations directed to FOWAC for the current project phase

1. Continue with networking, advocacy and referrals with all relevant stakeholders.
2. Strengthen links and networking with organisations providing agricultural support to local groups.
3. Integrate local fundraising efforts with lobbying and advocacy on human rights issues.
4. Plan for regular meetings and refresher training on conflict resolution skills and counselling skills for advisories.
5. Develop a savings & loan scheme for advisories so that they are able to access an interest free loan to buy bicycles for easier transport.
6. Research the impact of the VSLA-induced small businesses on the overall work load of women.
7. Explore approaches which have a greater impact on the sustainability of livelihoods of female farmers relying mainly on subsistence agriculture.
8. Encourage VSLA groups to embark on group loans and group activities (e.g. joint farming, honey production) to improve food security and increase income.
9. Encourage and allow VSLA groups to invest the revolving fund and their own savings in a pair of bulls and plough.
10. Devise a clear plan to initiate, accompany and phase-out support to VSLA groups.
11. Lobby local officials of the Ministry of Education and Sports to promote the establishment of similar clubs for girls in other schools.
12. Develop partnerships with other civils society organisations and schools for the establishment of clubs for vulnerable boys.
13. Continue with refresher trainings in counselling for staff
14. Continue with team building and invest in team well-being through regular retreats and providing spaces for self-care of staff.

15. Train staff regularly in facilitating monitoring processes and monitoring outcome and impact.
16. Keep personal data of group members and other clients confidential. Set up a database with a coding system.
17. Improve on formats for case management and the system of documentation and filing.
18. Complete the 2016–2018 Strategic Plan document and include specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound (SMART) indicators to measure programme outcomes and impact.
19. Prioritise development of an outcome and impact oriented monitoring system which is simple and relevant.
20. Contract an external expert to support and train staff in the development and use of good Monitoring & Evaluation formats and practices.
21. Employ a (part-time) Monitoring & Evaluation officer responsible for development of the documentation system, data management and supervision of Monitoring & Evaluation.
22. Improve the means of transport for staff by replacing some of the smaller motor cycles with more powerful ones and by acquiring a 4x4-wheel drive vehicle.

### Recommendations directed to FOWAC for future partnerships

1. Develop (or modify) a Theory of Change (ToC) together with relevant stakeholders, which will provide a roadmap that will guide the development of the intervention plan and the Monitoring & Evaluation plan.
2. Revise the strategy of concentrating on women only because it is culturally problematic and impacts on the sustainability of changes.
3. Allow more men to join the groups, with conditions to safeguard against male domination of the VSLAs.
4. Consider options of addressing male domination and violence with men and how this can be done without compromising supporting the psychosocial and economic empowerment of women.

5. Recruit gender-sensitive male staff is needed to work with men in the targeted communities and support female staff and advisories for improved security (during emergencies) and for higher impact.
6. Look for another donor organisation to support a complementary “brother project” for men.

#### Recommendations directed to medica mondiale

1. Support the development of a documentation system which keeps private data confidential.
2. Support the development of a Monitoring & Evaluation system.
3. Support the setting-up of a strategic work plan, including a sustainability plan.
4. Provide for capacity building and coaching for project staff.

5. Support FOWAC in developing (or modifying) their Theory of Change (ToC) and in developing a culturally sensitive and appropriate approach of dealing with sexualized and gender-based violence.
6. Extend funding FOWAC for 3 years (2017–2019) with increased funding, if possible.
7. Make an early commitment on funding another 3-years project so that FOWAC is able to retain the current well-trained and committed staff.
8. Sincerely discuss the option of addressing male domination and violence with men as a crucial and necessary intervention to address sexualized and gender-based violence in a holistic way and how this could be done without compromising supporting the psychosocial and economic empowerment of women.



*The Evaluation team together with the FOWAC staff members*

© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

**Text:**  
Hildegard Scheu and Janet Awimbo

**Cover picture:**  
© Hildegard Scheu, 2016

**Typesetting:**  
zeter und mordio, Cologne

**Contact:**  
Evaluation & Quality Department  
evaluation@medicamondiale.org

© medica mondiale, Köln 2016