

EMPOWERING RURAL GIRLS

Project Summary and Recommendations



Sarawak Women
for
Women Society

EMPOWERING RURAL GIRLS

PROJECT SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

- Between June 2009 and October 2010, Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS) conducted a three-phase project in the Baram region of Sarawak, following reports of rape of Penan women which were first published in the media towards the end of 2008.
- SWWS's view was that with rapid social change young women and girls from across the different ethnic groups in the interior were potentially at risk of a range of sexual exploitative situations — from relationships with men who deceive them of their marital status, to rape. The group therefore believed there was a need for young women in remote rural locations to acquire knowledge and skills to handle the changing environment in which they lived, went to school and worked. Only through empowering the women and girls and developing a supportive environment, including establishing effective reporting systems, could the risk of exploitation be lessened.
- The project was funded by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and also had the support of the Sarawak State's Women's Bureau.

Objectives and Operating Principles

The stated objectives of the overall project were:

- To increase knowledge on how to limit and handle sexually exploitative and abusive relationships.
- To train trainers / local contacts to:
 - (i) sustain the sharing of such knowledge and
 - (ii) provide direct help to young girls who require assistance.
- To facilitate the community to develop:
 - (i) systemic and empathetic responses to women and girls and
 - (ii) constructive channels to involve assistance from outside the area as required.
- To enable youth to protect their reproductive health by promoting discussions on healthy relationships, sexually transmitted diseases and family planning.
- To help strengthen networks between the rural community and helpful networks / services in town.

The operating principles applied throughout the project were:

- To work in partnership with the communities and government agencies operating in the area.
- To be culturally sensitive.
- To adhere to and promote the professional principles of counselling, social work and community development within the project.

Overview of Project

- The three phases of the project comprised a *familiarisation trip* (Phase 1) to gather local people's responses to the programme and learn more about their situation; a *core training phase* (Phase 2) when people from the surrounding areas gathered in the designated centres (Long Lama and Long San), after which the SWWS team returned with them to selected villages, (designated satellite areas), to advance the ideas shared during the earlier training; and a *final follow-up stage* (Phase 3) when the team revisited the participants to discuss progress and to provide additional training as requested by them.
- A key feature of the project design was to bring together the various local communities and the agencies which serve them, especially the teachers and clinic staff whose participation had the full support of their respective Ministries at the State level. A participatory format was used to facilitate teamwork between the participants. The SWWS team also introduced training modules addressing relationship issues to the secondary schools in each centre. Participants from primary schools had the opportunity to observe 'keep-safe' material being presented by the team to pupils. During the visits deeper into the interior, the SWWS trainers also ran 'keep safe' sessions in several schools, namely Long Sait, Long Kevok, Long Pelutan and Long Bedian. The materials used in the schools were adapted from training packages developed by recognised agencies in Malaysia. The Reproductive Health of Adolescents Module (RHAM) developed by the Federation of Family Planning Associations, Malaysia, formed the basis of the training in the secondary schools, whilst for primary schools, the core material was from PS The Children complemented by training resources from the Women's Centre for Change (WCC).
- Throughout the project, the aim was to strengthen helping networks in a spirit of partnership. This ethos was embedded in the design and implementation of the project as were the principles of community development. The long-term goal was for the participants to become the catalyst for change by spreading the message and developing their own ways of tackling the situation with additional support from wider systems.

OUTCOME OF PROJECT

- A total of 185 adults attended the core training in Phase 2 and 160 in Phase 3 of which just under a half were returnees, the rest being new participants who had heard of the course from others and were keen to attend.
- In addition, 918 school pupils (312 secondary and 606 primary) attended the sessions that were either conducted or observed by the SWWS team. The team also gave short presentations to a gathering of people in Ba Abang and Long Item as a demonstration of what was being proposed for their village-based faith groups to conduct in the future.
- Seven schools participated in both phases of the training and another five schools joined the last phase. Of the original, all seven schools had made attempts to sustain the programme in their establishments. Similarly the community representatives had shared their experiences when they returned to their communities and several had made progress with their action plans although some lacked confidence to proceed.
- Some of the Penan women attending decided to form their own association to bring more awareness and support to their community. For some it was news that rape was recognised as a crime, whilst others were not aware of HIV/AIDS. As far as possible participants were linked into the rural training programmes already being run by the Health Department and the project Sarawak AIDS Concern was conducting in the Baram at that time. However, practical difficulties remain in reaching all groups in the interior. This important out-reach work is further hampered by insufficient funding for key helping agencies.
- During the training the team heard of other issues affecting the various communities. These included the hardship of wives left by their husbands; the plight of other single mothers; domestic violence; pollution of rivers by chemicals; difficulties in applying for birth certificates and Mykads and – repeatedly – transportation problems which meant reaching support services, including reaching clinics, was costly and often not feasible.
- The objective of developing and strengthening networks was achieved, including with those living and working in the Baram and their community members who have migrated to town. SWWS now has a rich web of contacts who keep in touch as far as is feasible given the communication difficulties. More importantly, the interconnections along the Baram, often already existing, were enriched. However, again cost factors limit the degree to which different communities can work together. Many wanted to spread the word to their neighbours but were thwarted due to communication and financial

difficulties. There was also a fostering of networks between government servants and the communities they served with some deciding to jointly work together to try and achieve the wider aims of the project. Participants commented on how it was a rarity for government servants, faith groups, NGOs and residents from different ethnic and educational backgrounds to be brought together to discuss issues of shared social concern; such gatherings usually only being called to discuss specific events. This lack of basic community development forums, in SWWS's view, is lamentable and surprising given the long tradition of open discussion and sharing within the collective communities in Sarawak's interior. It appeared to remain at village level but was less frequent in larger settlements, where there was more variety of cultures, influx of people or where different factions had developed.

- For the completed three phases of the ERG project to have a lasting impact, the spirit of partnership is required at many levels. Throughout the 18 months of implementation SWWS has given feedback to its funders and the wider public. In addition, SWWS was invited to give a presentation at an Integrated Co-ordination Meeting for Penan Women Development held in Kuching on 26th October 2009, initiated by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and chaired by the State Planning Unit of Sarawak. SWWS was also invited to brief the Working Committee on Penan Affairs under the State Planning Unit who met on 14th June 2010. We would respectfully like to suggest that both these groups, and the State's Women and Family Council, meet at the earliest opportunity to consider the following recommendations which have arisen from the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Context

All abuse thrives when there is isolation and a power imbalance as these dynamics make concealment easier and access to information and help problematic. To minimise risk, this imbalance needs to be systematically addressed. The situation in the Baram, in this respect, is similar to other situations the women's movement has addressed. However the problem is compounded by limited infrastructure and a sluggish economy for local people. Development has brought improvements but has also increased people's need for cash. Consequently many still face relative poverty which increases their vulnerability. The following recommendations deal with practical points which SWWS believes are significant steps to address the issue but the wider context will need more consideration by other stakeholders before there can be a substantial change in the underlying dynamics and attitudes impacting the situation.

Action Points

1. Reporting Abuse

- (i) To extend the one-stop crisis centre (OSCC) concept to designated rural health clinics.*
- (ii) To provide health care staff, school teachers and para-counsellors confidential access to their respective mentors.*
- (iii) Under the Safe School Programme, to include as a criterion standard procedures on how schools are to report and follow-up on situations where sexual exploitation or bullying have been disclosed or suspected. For the school inspectorate to review the implementation of the above procedures and related training programmes during their visits and to assess the involvement of Parent Teacher's Associations (PTAs) in advancing such programmes.*

Commentary:

(i) OSCC: One of the points of contention in the discussion surrounding the allegations of rape was the role of the police in terms of access and response. What has been forgotten is that national policy for survivors of rape is the same as for survivors of domestic violence, that is, they are encouraged to report to a one-stop crisis centre (OSCC) run by the Ministry of Health and then the police meet them there. These centres currently are established in hospitals but, given the distance of such facilities for people in the interior, it is timely to introduce the same concept at designated rural clinics. This would not stop people with the means travelling to Miri or Marudi hospitals but would give rural people more options. The clinic-based OSCC service could also serve as a focal point for multi-disciplinary help in the outlying communities.

Rationale for Reporting to OSCC: Health personnel are more appropriate 'first people' for the survivor to see as their primary responsibility is her well-being and they alone are able to conduct the necessary examination and ensure that testing for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases proceed at a suitable time. Some sexually exploitative situations will only come to light when the girl presents with a pregnancy. Rural health personnel can, if suitably trained, equipped and supported by local para-counsellors, ensure the girl is given choices and the help to realise these choices. In keeping with the OSCC concept, the police can travel to the clinic to interview the girl. The report should ideally be taken by a female officer but if this is not possible in the interior then the interview can be conducted in the presence of a female para-counsellor.

Subsequent Investigation: When further investigating the reported rape, SWWS recommends that the police are supplied with vehicles suitable to make the necessary journeys instead of using timber companies' vehicles which is the current practice and gives the wrong message. SWWS was surprised that the police station in Long Lama did not have its own four-wheel drive vehicle despite being the only police station servicing the middle and upper reaches of the Baram, an area estimated to be 19,300 sq km containing approximately 70 longhouses and having a population circa 32,000.

(ii) *Mentoring:* To ensure the effective development of any new service, it is necessary to provide training and guidance to the staff. For the OSCC, this is also true for the volunteer para-counsellors and others handling the difficult situation of helping a survivor of rape. Mentoring by experienced professionals, aware of local cultures, is required. SWWS therefore recommends that those assisting in the rural areas have direct access to mentors for consultation when faced with the reality of an individual situation. Such mentors need to abide by professional codes of ethics, including maintaining confidentiality. For health personnel it is suggested that an officer at the district level be appointed to be the liaison person who can also consult with the Department of Welfare if required through the Medical Social Work Department (currently only based in hospitals but expansion to clinics is in the pipeline). For teachers, SWWS recommends the head of the Education Department Counselling Unit in Kuching is consulted and for para-counsellors, SWWS is willing to offer support until emerging women's groups along the Baram have the necessary experience. Similarly, support should be made available to the investigating police officer. Creating such a support system for front-line workers and involving local para-counsellors will not only improve immediate service delivery but will also help sustain the system given the fairly rapid turnover of government servants in the interior.

(iii) *School Systems:* When it comes to abusive situations, some head teachers fear the school will be unfairly labelled if they are open about the problem. This mindset needs to change so that schools are given credit for reporting anything which affects the well-being of the students under their care, including sexual exploitation and bullying. These are not new issues and the authorities have thought of procedures. However, covering up is still the culture at various levels. It is therefore recommended that every school has to clearly state its procedures, so all staff, students and their communities know that such behaviour will not be tolerated and how it will be addressed. This should be an integral part of the Safe School Project, as has been advocated by PS The Children, and progress assessed. Such awareness will create an expectation that reported abuse is not swept under the carpet. During the last two years, there have been commendable incidents of head teachers from the interior taking students to report sexual abuse. However the attitude of fear and cover-up still exists.

2. Sustaining School Programmes

- (i) Provide a budget so the Ministry of Education can sustain and develop the modules introduced to schools along the Baram – and any subsequent initiatives – dealing with reproductive health matters, relationship issues and keeping safe. The budget should be sufficient to (a) cover regular training sessions – cum – discussions which bring the teachers conducting the programmes together and (b) allow appropriate headquarters staff to periodically visit schools in the interior.*
- (ii) To introduce the training of such modules to trainee teachers in teacher training institutes/universities, and to school wardens through in-service programmes.*
- (iii) To include bullying as well as inappropriate touches as topics in the Safe Schools Programme as outlined in Recommendation 1 so that the school inspectorate can monitor content, frequency and processes, including liaison with PTAs.*

Commentary: The recent announcement to provide reproductive health/sex education modules in schools across the nation is welcome as it demonstrates that the need is recognised. However, it is important that we learn from past initiatives so that this time implementation can be effective and reach all schools. It is also important that the implementation of new modules gives extra impetus to the existing programmes, rather than schools feeling they have to wait until the new curriculum is circulated.

The ERG project found students and staff receptive to the material introduced, especially when it was adapted to meet the local context. Many teachers were eager to implement and had been waiting for such resources to address issues faced by their students. Others were understandably a bit apprehensive, showing that training and support of staff is crucial for successful implementation. This is also necessary to ensure sustainability of the programmes when teachers, or their heads, are transferred – a common scenario in the interior.

One issue raised by parents and teachers was bullying. This abuse, as well as how to handle sexual exploitation, needs to be addressed. All training should emphasise:- the importance of building children's self-esteem; respecting differences; helping children with bullying tendencies to change their behaviour and providing an environment which helps children come forward to share their problems.

Staff, including school wardens, also should understand the need for culturally sensitive, caring and effective ways of correcting children. Authoritative – rather than authoritarian – means are required, as these are more helpful to the child and are more in keeping with the cultural norms of the Penan who are known for their gentle approach with children.

To rely entirely on the commitment of staff to maintain the programmes outlined is not sufficient given the pressure on resources, time, frequent staff transfer and low comfort level of some staff to address such issues. It is therefore necessary to make systematic change to ensure their continuation – hence the recommendation for training budgets, school visits and linking the initiatives to the established Safe School Programme and the School Inspectorate Division. For long-term sustainability the topics need to be introduced into teacher training institutes as soon as possible and have the support of the schools' local communities as reflected in the parent-teachers association.

3. Transportation

a) Penan Students

For funds to be systematically available each year to enable headmasters to engage local drivers/boatmen to ferry the Penan students six times per year, i.e. at the beginning and end of each semester. To consider extending such a scheme to cover all students, regardless of ethnic group, whose home villages are far from the school.

Commentary: This is a key area for immediate action as, despite attempts to address the problem, the reality is many students are still dependent on logging vehicles. The current system of state - funded transportation is unclear, personality dependant, ad-hoc and too tied up in paperwork. Heads who have easy access to Miri or Marudi are more able to track the funding – which comes from the State Planning Unit via the Resident's Office – but this is time consuming and not feasible for most heads. To expedite the procedure SWWS suggests that the State provide an annual allocation to the relevant district education office which then, based on previous years' estimates, forwards promptly the estimated expenditure to the school administrator who duly accounts for the expenditure and informs education of any changes in pupil intake. Currently the onus is on the school to provide details in advance each year which creates a delay; a delay which is compounded by the lack of banks in Long Lama and Long San. Providing vehicles and drivers to each school is not feasible as the students come from many different directions. It would also incur high maintenance, revenue and capital costs. More logical, and desirable, is to help the local economy by out-sourcing the job to trusted local drivers, thus breaking the current dependence on timber companies and their transient drivers. If it is administratively simpler, the funds could be directed to the PTA who can then organise the tender at the local level. The assumption is that drivers hand-picked and known to the community pose less risk. However pupils still need to be told to inform others if any inappropriate behaviour occurs.

b) Village Health Promoters

- (i) Provide a travel budget for village health promoters so they can visit their 'parent' clinic at least once a month as well as take villagers who need medical treatment to the clinic when necessary.*
- (ii) To increase the training budget for village health promoters so it covers the inevitable transport costs and consider giving an annual allowance to active village health promoters in recognition of their commitment.*

Commentary: The system of village health promoters is a good one but it is inadequately resourced both in terms of funding regular trips to the clinic and also training and travel budgets for health personnel to update the promoters. This was particularly acute in 2010 when budgets were severely slashed. Although there are indications more funds will be available, the level needs to go beyond the 2009 allocation so it can realistically cover the cost of transportation in the interior. There were tales of people not being able to reach the clinics for treatment. Now there are fewer villages served by the flying doctor service; more funds are needed to cement the link to the most accessible – not necessarily the geographically nearest – clinic. These funds could also be used to take a survivor of rape to the appropriate clinic. One Penan community in their action plan proposed raising an emergency fund so they could independently afford to take a survivor by road to the nearest clinic or hospital. Six months later all they had mustered was a RM50 donation from the local logging company. Rape will continue to be under-reported if there is no practical means to reach help. Information about HIV/AIDs, testing and treatment will also be curtailed with possibly devastating consequences.

4. Infrastructure to Improve Communication

To maintain and extend all means of communication along the Baram – including improving road links & keeping river systems usable and affordable – and to increase coverage of mobile phones so all settlements have the facilities to make contact with the outside world through telecommunications.

Commentary: The recent financial allocation to upgrade the road to Lapok is very welcome and will remove a major source of discontent for those who need to travel along this road. In comparison, the timber roads have been better maintained but they still have their difficulties and dangers. For instance, the bridge linking Ba Abang, Long Lutin and Long Item with Long San has been washed away; consequently, fording the Akah River is very dangerous. These transportation issues, and the perennial problem of cost, isolate the communities, increasing their vulnerability and dependency on outsiders. This situation is not new and the authorities and locals are aware of the complexities.

SWWS suggests that, whilst these problems are being attended to, urgent attention is given to providing telephone contact so communities can call trusted people to help them if they face any difficult situation. There will still be practical problems, including affording, uploading and charging cell phones, but it is noticeable that wherever there is a signal – usually on hilltops – locals stop to make calls. The coverage expanded during the course of the project (e.g. Long Bedian). However, most of the towers have been installed by the logging companies to conduct their business rather than to enable those in outlying settlements to have contact with the outside world. Although extension of coverage will be costly, SWWS thinks this improvement in the infrastructure could be put in place quicker than improving the road network and would mean people can speedily, and at less cost, connect to those who can assist them.

5. Developing Local Groups

Provide seed funding and support to women's organisations and others seeking to advance the aims of the ERG project by implementing user-friendly systems.

Commentary: From the outset it was recognised by SWWS and the Ministry that for there to be a lasting impact from the ERG programme there needed to be active participation from local non-government groups; however, their numbers were few and mainly faith-based. Consequently SWWS reached out to them, namely the SIB (Sidang Injil Borneo) and the Roman Catholic Church, these being the major groups in that part of the interior. Through the project, SWWS has become aware of more groups operating in the Baram area – such as WADESA - and has stimulated the development of new groupings, e.g. the Penan Women Association. Such rural-based groups are in an ideal position to spread awareness of sexual exploitation, encourage survivors to seek help and develop supportive networks.

Both the State Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development recognise the importance of such groups and are open to helping them contribute to the well-being of their membership. However, such groups need funding to enable their scattered membership to interact, coordinate their activities and implement programmes. The communication costs are high but their own incomes and those of their communities are low, so developing financial independence is problematic. Government grants are a possibility but the procedures, especially the Federal ones, are standardised to fit activities in a different location and do not readily fit into the reality of organising events in the interior. They also require advanced administrative skills and access to telephones, faxes and postal services to follow-up on applications. For SWWS, these procedures were found to be complicated and time consuming; therefore we think they would be too daunting for younger groups operating from a rural setting to benefit from the grant allocations. The desired flexibility and accountability could be more feasibly achieved if

Federal funds were channelled to such groups via the State Women's Bureau who are more familiar with the local context and can also encourage complementary activities. For instance, the recently launched Penan Literacy Project could enhance the objectives of the ERG project. Given the practical and financial problems of sustaining activities in the interior, systems which encourage collaboration between groups makes sense and is further addressed in Recommendation 7.

6. HIV/AIDS

Provide more financial and human resource capacity to the Health Department and Sarawak AIDS Concern Society, an NGO, so they can continue to work in partnership with the local communities and develop their awareness programmes to all major employers in the Baram i.e., logging companies, plantations and those involved in the construction and operation of the proposed dams.

Commentary: Sexual exploitation inevitably means there is a risk of HIV/AIDS spreading. The disease is already present across the different ethnic groups and divisions of Sarawak. The main means of transmission in the State is known to be through heterosexual sex, yet there is still little awareness amongst those who have had more than one sexual partner – or their trusting partner(s) – that they are at risk. There is also the danger that when people do become aware, some men will turn to younger, more unaware girls which will increase the vulnerability of the most vulnerable.

The State is fortunate to have a committed Sexual Transmitted Infections (STI) Unit and a progressive NGO specialising in this area but neither has the resources at their disposal to work with enough people to reach all at risk across the State. Building their capacity needs to be a priority. Reducing HIV infections is a key national target as it is the Millennium Development Goal Malaysia has yet to satisfactorily reach. More attention needs to be given to Sarawak as the epidemiology in the State is different, as is the terrain and context. SWWS heard of, but cannot verify, reports of sex-workers travelling across the border to serve men in plantations; of youths beginning to inject syabu which has entered the local setting through outsiders; and of men working away from their own home establishing different families, or having more casual sexual relations, at different locations. All of this means the State can expect to see an increase in STIs and this is before the construction of dams which, according to UNAIDS, has posed a risk of escalating the epidemic in other countries.

There is, therefore, a need in the interior for more information, the means to protect oneself, facilities for testing and treatment. In addition to the evident practical difficulties of meeting this need, the small size of the communities in rural areas can create social barriers

to accessing assistance. Spreading awareness therefore has to also reduce stigma, prejudice and judgemental attitudes.

7. Enhance Flow of Information and Strengthen Partnerships to Address Social Issues

- (i) Strengthen and expand existing networks so there is more mutual sharing on social issues and joint planning on how to address them.*
- (ii) Train appropriate personnel in community work skills, including the social development officers in the district offices, so more collaborative projects can be initiated and effectively run at the local level.*
- (iii) Develop a range of user-friendly activities attractive to rural youth and integrate within them opportunities for youth to share their problems and constructively learn about the wider world. Provide training to youth leaders so they are skilled at relating to the needs of this age-group.*
- (iv) Utilise radio programmes in the local dialects to increase awareness on relationship issues, social problems, human rights and ways of seeking help. Similarly with internet links in the few places where these exist.*
- (v) Encourage increased collaboration so service delivery is improved and trips to the interior are maximised. For instance, school administrators and PTAs could each year provide documentation on all 12-year-olds so the students' MyKads are speedily issued; NGOs running youth camps, kindergarten programmes or parenting seminars can increase awareness on keeping safe; PTAs & Village Health Promoters disseminate information on welfare benefits.*

Commentary: There is a long tradition in Sarawak of discussions at community level among the people and between the people and government agencies. Yet despite this, there are evident gaps that mean some issues are not effectively addressed. The system of bringing together different stakeholders at the community level is one which needs to be given more attention if the insights and contributions of all can be harnessed to tackle the issues arising from the current economic and social changes. The focus of the ERG project was one such issue which had previously not been discussed across the board. Other social and legal issues raised were the needs of single mothers; parenting youth in a changing world; bullying; domestic violence; divorce; troubled youth; school drop-out and encroachment on land. Participants welcomed the forum that the ERG project provided to bring diverse people together and suggested such forums were further extended to include the police. Developing a constructive atmosphere that enables effective sharing is a skill which can be taught.

Even in small communities where people know each other, group dynamics can cause splits, so those trying to develop synergy need skill to handle such realities. The training of government officers and NGO workers/volunteers is therefore recommended so the old traditions can be enhanced to meet today's reality.

A recurring challenge in the interior is the difficulty in contacting people plus the time and cost involved in out-reach work. Collaboration can help limited resources go further. A perennial problem is the issuing of identification cards. Long San was buzzing with activity during the first training as there had been an announcement over the radio that the National Registration Department was issuing ICs but many villagers went away disappointed as the children under 12 could not be entertained. This experience led to SWWS's recommendations for collaboration between the schools and the Registration Department – a move which also might encourage parents to keep their children in school beyond primary level. It also highlighted the importance of the radio and how this could be used to stimulate conversations on how to parent today's youth – a common lament from the participants who were parents.

8. Develop Corporate Social Responsibility amongst the Business Sector Operating in the Baram.

Provide guidelines to all major employers in the interior of the corporate social responsibility expected of them and require them to submit evidence that they are putting this into practice. Such guidelines should include training of staff on avoiding sexually exploitative behaviour; compliance with sexual harassment codes of practice in the workplace and surrounding communities; providing a safe environment, especially for female employees; educating their staff on HIV/AIDS plus respecting the rights of those living with the disease; and respecting the cultural customs of the local communities.

Commentary: All parties have their role to play in overcoming sexual exploitation and ensuring that social change for economic development does not cause problems for the local communities. Responsible companies need to take the lead and implement policies and training which encourage their employees, casual workers, out-sourcing agents and sub-contractors to be respectful of women and different cultures. They also need to be concerned about the safety of their workers regardless of whether they are Malaysian or foreign labourers. There are indications some companies are open to such an approach; however, it would be naive to leave this to their goodwill. It is suggested that guidelines are drawn-up within the next six-months and meeting them forms part of the contractual agreement for new ventures in the interior e.g.

the construction and operation of dams. Existing timber and plantation companies could be given a year to comply but all new contracts should adhere to the guidelines once they are available. Local communities should have access to an independent body if they have evidence that the guidelines have been broken.

FUTURE SWWS INVOLVEMENT

- If funds are forthcoming, during 2011 SWWS will provide similar training in Marudi to serve parts of the Baram provided by this town, in addition to conducting training in Niah as originally requested by the Ministry.
- As a new secondary school is opening in 2011 in Lapok and the Long Bedian school will be extending its intake to lower secondary students, training could also be conducted for them either late in 2011 or in 2012 – by which time their operating systems will have settled down.
- SWWS will continue to be available to support the participants of the ERG project from afar as they develop their plans and strengthen their groups. However time, distance, funds and communication problems limit our involvement.
- From our base in Kuching, SWWS welcomes working with a range of stakeholders to advance the recommendations outlined in this report and the action plans of the participants of the training. This does not only include relevant Government committees, the State Women's Bureau and other Government departments but also Penan students in town who are interested in furthering the aims of the ERG project. Some are already helping to translate material which it is anticipated will be shared through an NGO working with the Church Sunday Schools and youth groups.

CONCLUSION

The ERG project has made a contribution but it can only be sustained if the recommendations listed above are incorporated into Government planning. For this to occur in a systematic, coordinated fashion these recommendations are particularly addressed to the:

- Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development who initiated - in conjunction with the Sarawak State Planning Unit – a committee to explore coordinated responses in the wake of the Ministry's Task Force investigating the original allegations of rape.
- Sarawak's Women and Family Council
- Sarawak State's Working Committee on Penan Affairs.

Through these bodies, the desired systemic, comprehensive changes recommended can be advanced and monitored in a complementary manner. It is the belief of SWWS that collaborative effort between the various stakeholders is necessary to address the issue of sexual exploitation, so working through committees of high standing will enable smoother implementation as several recommendations need concerted action from different agencies. Nevertheless there are some key lead agencies for each recommendation. These are listed at the end of the report to assist those agencies. In most recommendations the need for financing is explicit – in others, it is implied – consequently the importance of tackling the issue needs to be understood when budgets are allocated. This is another reason why a high-ranking committee is required to act on the recommendations. As anyone who knows Sarawak will confirm, travelling in the interior is costly, so inevitably budgets for such regions will be significantly higher than for other locations. If the money is not allocated, implementation will not proceed as planned.

It is not only what is done but how it is done which will determine whether effective systems are established. The ERG project has helped to create networks of trust through its approach of listening; encouraging participation; evident respect for all ethnic groups and a strong belief that everyone, regardless of position or educational background, has knowledge and ability to share. In keeping with the theory of building social capital and community development, the project has strived to encourage bonding and bridging between different communities and agencies so there can be a team approach to addressing an important issue. As with other parts of the country, it will take time to provide a safe environment from abuse for our youth but we believe this can be achieved through teamwork by committed individuals in different sectors.

SWWS

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from/knowledgeable about the Baram area who live in town and gave us their insights when planning the programme. Without the contributions of all the above people, SWWS staff and members, the project would not have run smoothly.

Lead Agencies for Specific Recommendations:

1. *Reporting Abuse:*
Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education; Royal Malaysian Police.
2. *Sustaining School Programmes:*
Ministry of Education (conferring with Ministry of Higher Education where appropriate).
3. *Transport:*
 - (i) Penan Students:
State Planning Unit; all relevant Resident Offices; Education Department; State Working Committee on Penan Affairs.
 - (ii) Village Health Promoters :
Ministry of Health.
4. *Infrastructure to Improve Communications:*
State Planning Unit; Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Communications; Public Works Department; Telekom Malaysia Berhad.
5. *Developing Local Groups:*
Sarawak Women's Bureau; Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.
6. *HIV/AIDS:*
State Planning Unit; Resident Offices; Ministry of Health; Labour Department; Immigration Department.
7. *Enhance Flow of Information and Strengthen Partnerships to Address Social Issues:*
Resident Offices; Ministry of Social Development and Urbanisation Sarawak; National Registration Department and Ministry of Education; RTM
8. *Develop Corporate Social Responsibility amongst the Business Sector Operating in the Baram:*
Labour Department; Ministry of Human Resources; State Attorney-General's Chambers.

Women's body wants two modules in syllabus

KUCHING: Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS) hopes that the Education Department could consider incorporating or include the two modules, personal safety for children and healthy relationship, into the primary school and secondary school syllabus respectively.

The two modules had been introduced by SWWS to several primary and secondary schools in the state through their Empowering Rural Girls Project.

SWWS said in a press statement that by incorporating the modules into school syllabus would help to increase the awareness of pupils and students of the importance of personal safety.

"It is SWWS's hope that the two modules introduced to the schools will be incorporated into the 'Unit Bimbingan' syllabus in the primary schools and similarly into the 'Unit Bimbingan dan Kaunselling' syllabus that is now established in every secondary school.

"Such a move will ensure it is part of every school year's activity so that future students are given this awareness," said the society.

In a recent training held at Dewan Serbaguna St. Paul in Long San, SWWS had

adopted the 'Training of Trainers' to familiarise teachers and non-teaching staff with the modules. Long San is located along the upper part of Barau River. Some 14 primary and pre-school teachers and some non-teaching staff had observed SWWS trainers in conducting personal safety sessions with the primary students in Long San and later discussed the methods shown.

Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS)

both immediately after the course and in the future," said the statement.

The five teachers from the secondary school also observed the way SWWS trainer conducting the sessions on healthy relationships.

The module was aimed at raising awareness of good healthy relationships and the range of exploitative relationships and abuses that a young person living in the interior may encounter. Later the teachers conducted the sessions themselves guided by the SWWS trainers.

The training had attracted 110 participants mostly comprised of women and leaders from various Penan and other Orang Ulu communities in and around Long San; teachers from primary and secondary schools in Long San and other rural schools in

Barau; health workers and officers from Marudi Health Department and village health promoters, as well as an officer from the Welfare Department.

Amongst the objectives of the course were to increase knowledge on how to limit and handle sexually exploitative and abusive relationships, ranging from men who cheat to rape and to help build supporting networks between rural communities and helpful town networks and services in town.

It was also aimed to train trainers and local contacts to sustain the sharing of such knowledge and to provide direct help to young girls who require assistance.

Apart from that, it was hoped to facilitate the community to develop systemic and empathetic responses to women and girls who have been abused and constructive channels to involve assistance from outside the area as required.

The training had covered topics such as healthy teenage relationships, teenage development, problems facing youths in the rural areas, range of abuses that can occur, the law in respect of those abuses and HIV/AIDS.

Trainers also introduced the basic principles and skills of counselling so that the support offered to survivors of abuse took into account the girls' feelings and life opportunities.

The programme was funded by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and supported by Sarawak Women's Bureau and the Departments of Education and Health.

SWWS will be conducting follow-up visits to review the progress of the communities or agencies that had received their training and to assess the development of local support networks.

Those interested in finding out more about the training can contact SWWS at 082-416053 or email sarswvs@po.jaring.my.



PERSONAL SAFETY SESSION: SWWS trainers running the module on children's personal safety.

減少家庭社會問題 醒覺講座70婦女參加

(本報弄拉馬29日訊) 由砂拉越婦女協會主辦，並獲得砂州婦女與家庭社會發展部資助的婦女激勵課程一連兩天在弄拉馬民眾會堂舉行。來自鎮內周邊多座長屋為數70名的各民族婦女參加。

有關課程的宗旨是提升鄉區婦女的醒覺，共同探討如何消除各項社會問題，並提升婦女各方面的知識。两天的婦女醒覺講座也同時討論如何遏止家暴、強姦、毒品危害以及婦女遭到虐待等

問題。

這是該部門一連三年在弄拉馬舉辦類似活動。

課程負責人吉爾拉惹指出，這一次是要了解去年10月間的相关課題的進展。她告訴出席者在面對事件發生時如何尋求援助，並積極灌輸各項防範知識。

她透露，之前曾經前往“弄布魯丹”與“弄卡博”本南人長屋與當地的學校及當地婦女和老師交流，並講解人民的基本權力和個人私隱課題，希望透過教師和一些得高望眾的長屋長輩協助講解和提醒人民自我防範，維護自身的基本權力。

她呼籲大家合作和了解所面對的家庭問題，以減少罪案的发生。

另一方面，參與激勵課程的本南婦女珍妮達於受詢時指出，透過這次活動，可以進一步了解到自身的權力，有機會與大家分享經驗，在增加這方



主辦當局負責人Ann Teo (左) 頒發證書予林詩恩時之影。



主辦當局的全體負責人合攝。

面的知識后，在面對問題時將懂得如何去應對。

她說，透過大家的努力與合作可以減少各類罪案的发生。她說，過去其妹妹就曾經面對家暴問題，雖曾經向警方投報，但卻

沒有獲得完滿解決。經過這一次的激勵醒覺講座会后，她已進一步了解，於日後如再次面對類似問題，將有這方面的知識應對。

她表示類似的活動讓她获益不淺。



主辦當局負責人吉爾拉惹 (左) 頒發證書予本南





Core training at Long Lama: Group discussion in progress



Pledging to stop abuse and sexual exploitation



Primary school session on Personal Safety at SK Long Pelutan, Baram



Satellite visit to community of Long Sait, Baram



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