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Rape in Ethiopia
By: Ms. Sara Tadiwos

Acronyms
AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CPU - Child Protection Unit
EWLA - Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
HIV - Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
GO - Government Organization
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

Introduction
The word ‘rape’ has different definitions. For example, Webster’s Dictionary (1975) defines it as the ‘illicit carnal knowledge of a woman without her consent, effected by force, duress, intimidation, or deception as to the nature of the act.’

Susan Brown Miller further defines it as a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear. Allison Morris, in her book Women, Crime, and Criminal Justice, speaks of rape as motivated by anger (involving an expression of hostility towards women and a desire to humiliate them) and power (involving the assertion of dominance over women).

These definitions, however, are limited because the victims of rape are not just women. It is an open secret that a significant number of children and men are raped daily, and that the rapists and the victims are not only heterosexual.

Rape and fear of rape has significantly affected the lives of the victims, whether women, men or children.

The data used in the preparation of this paper is not primary. The writer has found it difficult to obtain data on rape in Ethiopia. The paper is rather a result of deskwork, incorporating ordinary people’s views of rape in Ethiopia. The paper is so organized as to mainly focus on rape perpetrated on women and children, and it attempts to cover the causes, consequences, the extent of rape and a profile of rapists in the country.

Finally, by way of conclusion, some recommendations are suggested on how to combat the problem.

Causes of rape
Even though the potential causes of rape are varied and controversial, because of personal and cultural beliefs as well as economic status, the most commonly attributed causes of rape are inequality in gender power relations and the anger and sadism of the rapists. Sexiness is not the primary motive underlying rape, as most people might tend to think. Evidences reveal that the sexual aspect of rape is of secondary importance, as
married men and men with partners have been reported to have forced themselves on other women or children.

In Ethiopia's case there is a range of other complex contributing factors, such as culture and tradition, poverty and war.

**Culture:** Culturally transmitted assumptions about men's dominance over women, men's power over women, etc. contribute highly to the ever increasing number of rape cases reported. There is a tremendous denial about the issue of violence against women and children in Ethiopia. Ethiopians are defensive about any criticism directed against their society. They are proud of their culture or social system, and they don't appear to want to change it. Even when women speak about violation of their rights, they are told that they are becoming 'westernized', even by those who are educated. The prospect in this regard appears to be sad.

A man in his mid-twenties, when asked about why men rape, said that those who raped were sure that they could do whatever they wanted to women and/or children because they had the power. He further explained that the main reasons why they raped were sexual frustration, lack of self-awareness, lack of self-esteem, and due to both family and community environment.

Furthermore, Ethiopian culture tolerates sexual violence against girls and women. Abduction and early marriage, always followed by rape, are the norms in some parts of our society. Kidnapping and the concomitant raping of a woman, as one way of acquiring a wife, is a common occurrence. The social acceptance of this practice puts all women and children in a state of fear, so much so that the UN has reported that women are severely reducing the daily water and nutritional intake of their families in order to avoid being in the field or walking to wells to collect water.

On top of the fertile ground already existing in our culture, which condones (if not encourage) rape, western pornographic videos, films and literatures, which often objectify and devalue women, are proliferating in our society, initially among the affluent but now even among the poor through video-showing outlets.

In the inner parts of cities, particularly in such towns as Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Nazareth, showing porno videos in small rooms for young customers is not only becoming common but it has turned into a lucrative business. This practice has created a conducive situation for the rapid rise of rape in the country.

**Poverty:** Poverty drives women and children into commercial sex and streetism, which make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation, abuse and rape.

As early marriage is rampant in the rural areas, those escaping this type of marriage, or those simply escaping rural poverty, migrate to towns and cities where they will either become maidservants or join the commercial sex industry. They are, more often than not, raped in these places where they make their living as prostitutes or even at the homes where they serve as maids.

**War:** History is smeared with a lot of ugly lessons about the interrelation between war and rape. This has happened in almost all the wars that history has known. Rape is used in most wars as revenge against certain races, ethnic groups and religious communities. Putting aside for the moment the unforgivable victimization of individual women, the victors use rape for the purpose of demoralizing and intimidating the side to which the victims belong. UNICEF's Progress of Nations 1997 report has revealed that over 20,000 Muslim women were known to have been raped in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the recent war in the Balkans, and that more than 15,000 women were raped in one year in Rwanda. Mass rape has also been reported to have taken place as a
weapon of war in Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda. Ethiopian media have reported that Eritrean soldiers raped Ethiopian women during the two year Ethio-Eritrean conflict.

**Consequences of Rape**

**Psychological**

Though the complications of rape vary enormously, depending upon age, culture and other related factors, it leaves the victims, their family members, as well as their communities with enormous psychological trauma. Other forms of torture and ill-treatment that are always accompanied by rape, leave victims scarred for life. About 90% of the victims suffer some degree of physical injury and threats of violence compounded by the presence of weapons and intimidating verbal abuses. As a result, the following are some possible psychological consequences which raped women and children face:

- Fear and phobia, repressed anger leading to overwhelming depression and anxiety, feeling of guilt, self-blame, shame, loss of control over oneself, immense shock and disbelief, confusion, difficulty in making decisions, hatred towards men, diminished self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, fear of being alone, disobe dience, aversion to sexual intercourse, thoughts of suicide, desire for revenge, etc.

At least two or three of these emotional disorders occur in any given victim. It is also easy to imagine how horrendous the outcome will be when it happens to physically, psychologically and mentally immature children. Worldwide 40-90 percent of sexual assaults are perpetrated against girls who are 15 years old or younger.

**Social**

Because rape is associated with social stigma, the victims lose their dignity and respect in society. They also find it difficult to participate in social activities, as a result of which they alienate themselves from society.

In rural areas, when a woman is abducted and raped, she will no longer get a husband unless her rapist marries her, which of course will add to her misery. She will run away to cities where nobody knows her, only to face prostitution, streetism and other social problems.

**Economic**

Women's participation is very crucial for a sustainable development of any country. For women's participation to be realized education is mandatory. Among the reasons why girls do not pursue their education in Ethiopia and other developing countries one finds that (1) either girls get abducted and raped on their way to school, or (2) because of fear of being raped and the anxiety associated with it, they will either not attend school at all or perform poorly if they do. These and other such reasons result in their exclusion from participating in national development programmes. Given the fact that development without women's participation is unthinkable, the country will be affected negatively, and its future, in terms of manpower development, which basically depends on the number of children born, will also be questionable. As lack of education will also leave women unemployed, poor and powerless, violence perpetrated against them will continue unabated.
Health

Rape brings significant health problems to the victims. Most importantly, it can lead to unwanted pregnancies and transmissions of STDs, including HIV/AIDS. In Ethiopian law, there is no provision for the right to abort even in cases of rape. As women cannot legally abort, they are forced to resort to illegal and unsafe options, usually carried out by incompetent people, which are more often than not followed by complications. Some of the complications are infection, including HIV/AIDS, torrential bleeding, perforation of the uterus, infertility, etc. These and other physical damages occur especially when rape victims are those who are biologically weak.

Moreover, due to the high biological receptivity to viral transmission of young victims, there is a greater risk of contracting STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Worldwide, women between the ages of 15 and 24 account for half of new HIV infections, and there is no doubt that most of them are due to rape. Generally, the consequences of rape are all interrelated. The process is like a vicious circle.

Rapists and Victims of rape

All women are potential victims of rape and all men are potential rapists. The act of rape has no boundaries. It can happen to anyone and anywhere, because it is a social attack against women, irrespective of religion, race, age, color, economic status, etc. Rapists, too, are members of varying racial, religious, socio-economic and age groups. It is an act that may involve your mother, sister, daughter, friends, and even yourself as victim, and the rapist could be your father, brother, relative, stranger, loved one, neighbor, friend or a casual acquaintance. It is continuously becoming impossible for anyone to completely guarantee their own personal safety in their environment.

In the majority of cases, rape is a deliberately planned act in which rapists carefully select their victims as well as the time and place to perpetrate the crime. Rapists take advantage of circumstances and look for opportunities to get their victims alone, particularly targeting young girls.

In every act of rape the sexual act is a means of expressing the aggressive needs and feelings that operate in the perpetrator. The coercion takes a variety of forms, involving the use of physical force, threat, or tactics of bargaining by the rapist.

U. D. Nujoma says that the majority of rapists are not pathological monsters but psychologically 'normal' men. The image of the rapist as a lone, psychopathic stalker is the exception and not the rule. On the other hand, others argue that men who have serious psychological and personality disorders, which they discharge through sexual violence, have no regard to what may happen to them or to others. Therefore, they are not deterred by such logical considerations as the punishment they may face or the disgrace they bring upon their families, or the pain they cause to their victims.

But what we can generally agree about is that a rapist is a sexually deviant person whose actions are universally condemned. The majority of rapists carry out the act to express their hostility towards women (anger), to assert their dominance over women (power), or as an outlet for their aggressive behavior.

The Extent of Rape in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia there is hardly any statistical evidence or data on rape apart from what is occasionally mentioned on the media. So, we cannot state the extent of its prevalence and distribution in the country. This is because rape is one of the most unreported crimes due to the prevailing attitude that it is shameful and degrading to the victims, and thus, the less said about it the better.

However, it is believed that rape has increased over the last few years. Though the reasons for this belief are not still clear, one reason could be that rape cases reported to
the police have increased of late. The problem could not be effectively solved, however, as there is no systematic research done yet.

But we can have a glimpse of how rape is putting our society in danger from a survey conducted by Kasaye Mulugeta in high schools of Addis Ababa and Western Shoa. In 1997, a self-administered anonymous questionnaire was distributed to determine the prevalence and reported outcomes of sexual violence.

A total of 1401 female students were involved in the study. The prevalence of completed rape and attempted rape against female students was 5% and 10%, respectively. The age range of those against whom actual rape was committed was between 12 and 23 years, and 85% of the rape victims were less than 18 years of age. Of the total respondents 78% believed that rape was a major problem constraining their educational performance. Among the 72 girls who reported they had been raped, 24% had vaginal discharge and 17% had become pregnant. Social isolation, fear and phobia, hopelessness and suicide attempts were reported in 33%, 19%, 22%, 6% of rape cases, respectively. It was concluded that the prevalence of sexual violence among high school students is a serious problem. Considering that this data provides only a very small sample of the experiences of female students in Ethiopia, one can imagine the extent of the danger that the society is facing.

**The Ethiopian Constitution and Penal Code on Rape**

Article 35(4) of the Constitution provides protection for women and children from crimes of rape and abduction. Whatever the motivation for rape, the vast majority of the victims do not feel adequately protected by law.

Despite the fact that laws against rape exist on paper, ostensibly for women's protection, there are effective social and legal constraints which prevent women from utilizing their legal rights. The 1957 Penal Code addresses the question of rape in article 589, according to which the act is “punishable with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding 10 years.” Where it is committed “on a child under 15 years of age; or on an inmate of a hospital, alms-house or asylum, or any establishment of education, correction, internment or detention, whose is under the supervision or control or dependent upon the accused person; or by a number of persons acting in concert,” it is “punishable by a rigorous imprisonment not exceeding 15 years.”

This Penal Code is what we have been using for almost 44 years now. The law books reflect the attitude of the culture. But it is ridiculous to still maintain such laws now (Original Wolde Giorgis of EWLA).

EWLA should be commended for what they have been doing on behalf of all Ethiopian women. They have revised the law regarding rape as well as other laws related to women, and they are also giving legal aid to women. At one forum presentation it was reported that there were some improvements in the new draft law, such as specifying the minimum (5 years) and the maximum (20 years) penalties of rigorous imprisonment, depending on circumstances; similarly, the category of ‘young’ regarding rape victims has been changed to include persons who are 18 years old.

But in some cases, the problem does not lie with the law itself but with the judiciary system. Few cases come to court, still fewer rapists are convicted, and the victim, rather than the rapist, is put on trial, rendering rape still a serious threat to women. When one considers that it is the rapist who benefits most from the silence on the part of the judiciary, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that social attitudes and their articulation in the legal process operate to protect not the victim but the rapist. As things stand now, being raped is what is punished and what at the same time constitutes the crime.
The reasons provided by rapists for their act is that the victim was ‘walking alone’ or at the wrong place at the wrong time, or that she was asking for it during a date. Let us grant that such sexual myths are true. But what of child victims? It is too obvious to state here that there is a need for arresting and convicting rapists so that they don’t go about raping more people at will.

As we all know stronger laws and better enforcement mechanisms are needed to protect people. In Ethiopia the absence of such laws and enforcement mechanisms will continue to be a constraint on the protection of victims and prevention of rape.

Conclusion

To conclude, it has to be reiterated that rape is an act of sexual intercourse without women’s consent. It is a pervasive form of gender-based violence. As a result, women suffer physically, socially, psychologically and emotionally. Rape is simply the ultimate weapon men use to exercise their power over women and to exhibit their alleged natural domination. It is an act of hostility, power, control, humiliation, degradation and attack on a woman’s body, on her feelings and on her whole life, since, in the final analysis, it is a violation of the most sensitive part of her body as well as her psyche.

Rape is not just the problem of the developing world; it is a global problem that needs global attention.

Recommendations:

⇔ Education is the best solution to stop violence against women, specifically rape. The education administered in this direction should include facts about rape, the risks involved, the consequences it entails, ideas about the law regarding rape, and issues of women’s full potential and human rights, all of which must be integrated into the curriculum. Empowerment of women, public sensitization, and economic independence will not come without educational effort. As a result the society will understand rape as a social illness rather than an accepted invisible norm.

⇔ The problem of rape takes place within a social setting, and it can not be treated and analyzed apart from the larger framework of social attitudes and practices in which it is embedded. So, to build a gender-based, violence-free society and to bring social change towards the elimination and prevention of rape, attitude change is very important and here the media can play a vital role in. The media can serve as a catalyst in creating a strong forum for awareness-raising, advocacy, publicizing laws and penalties, and disseminating positive moral values in ways that can reach everybody. The media also have a tremendous capacity to provide response mechanisms to victims, as this will help break the virtual conspiracy of silence surrounding the whole question of rape. Such steps will initiate victims of rape to report the crimes immediately to the police, who in turn will be initiated into catching the rapists and bring them to a court of law.

⇔ Creating networking between NGOs, police, hospitals, women’s and children’s institutions and judicial authorities in order to share information and exchange experiences that definitely will help in the prevention of rape, protection of victims and, finally, the elimination of rape.

⇔ The amount of research done on the subject is so inadequate that it is difficult to figure out how to tackle the problem of rape from different directions. Therefore, research should be conducted to understand the problem in terms of why and where it happens, on whom and by whom it is perpetrated and, finally, how to tackle the problem.
Gender-sensitization training should be given to police officers, legal assistance workers, court personnel, hospital workers, adolescents, teachers, families, the media, etc.

There should be a strong follow-up by the state for the effective implementation of laws and for the handing out of strict penalties.

In order to ensure the success of the ongoing efforts to promote the sustainable development of the country, it is important to improve the status of women in the political, social and economic spheres.

Rehabilitation centers should be established to provide services, such as health, psychological and other emotional support to victims of rape.

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RAPE CASES

CASE 1: TWO GIRLS RAPED BY A 38-YEAR OLD MAN (WOREDA 7)

Aberash and Meron 11- and 12- year old girl children in grade 4 and 5, respectively, are friends. The family of Aberash earn their living retailing fuel wood and other items and Meron’s family live on the income they get from house rent.

The two girls were raped by a guard of a government office around their house while they were playing.

It was learned from the children’s testimony and the police investigator who handled the case that the man had raped the two girls by alluring them with an offer of money and bread. The girls often play in the small field in front of a nearby telecommunications compound. One day, while they were playing, the said gatekeeper asked them to come and play inside the compound if they liked. He also told them that he would give them money and bread.

The first day they got inside trustfully and played for some time before they returned home. The next day, they went there to practice some acrobatics. After playing for some time, they wanted to use the toilet and asked the man for his permission, which he granted. But as they tried to come out of the toilet, the man caught hold of Aberash and deflowered her and then he did the same to Meron. Meron also said that, while he was raping Aberash, she tried to escape but she could not, for he had already locked the door and no one was around to ask for help. It was then that he turned onto her.

The two girls also said that, because he had promised to give them money and bread, they did not resist much and kept quiet for the time being. But after deflowering them, he gave them only ten cents each.

The girls’ families reported the case to the Wereda (7) police, which has a Child Protection Unit (CPU) of Forum on Street Children Ethiopia. The CPU handled the case and proceeded with the investigation. The investigation showed that the man had indeed done the alleged act even though he denied it. Medical evidence from a hospital also showed that the two girls were deflowered. The girls received medical assistance and counseling service.

The CPU charged the man at a court of law with raping two minors by using deception. Finally, the court found the man guilty and sentenced him to seven and a half years of imprisonment.

CASE 2: A GIRL RAPED BY A RELATIVE IN WEREDA 15

Helen is an eleven-year old girl who lives in her sister’s house in Addis Ababa. The brother of her sister’s husband, who lived with them at the time, raped her. Because the house is small and they did not have enough sleeping quarters, Helen and the man who raped her used to sleep side by side on the floor in another room. One day, late in the night, he took off all her clothes and deflowered her. He disappeared for few days only to repeat the act on another night. It was then that a relative of hers learned of the abuse and brought her to the Child Protection Unit to report the case.

Now Helen is living with the man who sued the rapist. But the perpetrator of the crime has disappeared, and the attempt to hunt him down has so far proved unsuccessful. The
case is still pending. Even though the court had ordered a warrant for the man’s arrest, no one seemed to know his whereabouts. Helen is now getting the necessary medical and psychological support by the Wereda CPU.

CASE 3: A GIRL RAPED BY A STRANGER (WOREDA 15)

Meseret is a 14-year old 8th grader at Mesrak Goh School (in the Cassanchis area). It was in the vicinity of the school that she met the man who raped her. The man allured her by telling her that he had found a job for her. Then he took her to a car parked nearby and introduced her to someone who was waiting in the car. The man in the driver’s seat started the car and drove in the direction of Merkato. On the way, they bought her some soft drink, which she later found out was laced with gin. As she took the ‘soft drink’, she got drunk. Then the man took her to a hotel and rented a room where he deflowered her. He was asked to pay more for the blood-smeared bed sheet. After a few minutes, the driver came in and took her back to her place. She reported the case to the Wereda CPU.

The Unit tried to investigate the case, but to no avail, as the victim could not identify the abuser. She is currently getting counseling service at the CPU.

CASE 4: A CHILD RAPED BY STEPFATHER

“What I know is that he’s my father. I do not entertain any thoughts that he could harm me,” said a 12-year-old victim, recounting her tragic experience of rape by her stepfather to the court.

“It was around midnight. I was fast asleep when he took me to his bed, struggling to rape me. When I tried to free my self, he showed me a knife and warned me that he would cut my throat if I didn’t obey his orders,” she said. He then put a piece of cloth in my mouth so that I would not scream. He raped me! When I got tired, he took off the piece of cloth out of my mouth, but then, I did not have strength to move or even breathe. I fainted.”

“He dressed me up and took me to a private clinic. I was bleeding badly. I saw blood running down my legs. The doctor gave me an injection and handed me some pills for restoring my strength. He told me that I should take them because my stepfather had insisted that the he should prescribe some medicine,” she explained.

Because she was very sick she could not go to school, or even get out of her bed for the next 15 days. “When he did this to me there was nobody home. My mother was out of town. He warned me to tell everybody that I had caught cold,” she added.

The rapist was sentenced to 13 years of rigorous imprisonment, in view of the fact that he did not have any criminal record before.

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Rape in Ethiopia
Discussion and Debate

[This forum was held on the 25th of January 2001, when the campaign on violence against women had just started.]

Dr. Konjit Fekade was asked to explain briefly what the national campaign on violence against women, which was planned to take place in Addis Ababa between the end of January and the beginning of February, was all about.

Dr. Konjit was the chairperson of the 11-member committee (task force) that organized and facilitated the activities of the campaign on violence against women. This task force came into effect after the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and two other organizations called a meeting in November 2000 to deliberate on the theme of the campaign. The aim of that meeting was to organize a nation-wide rally in the short-term in order to make known the many types of violence that are committed against women in the country. The aim of the rally, it was said, was to bring awareness to the society, as the majority of the population was not aware of the many crimes that are committed against women. The idea was to have the voices of women heard, with the view to addressing two groups: the government and civil society.

After the task force members met, they thought that it would be very ambitious to have a nation-wide rally at this stage. So they decided to start with a rally in Addis Ababa for the moment, with the view of extending the campaign to the other regions after the Addis Ababa rally was over. The campaign on violence against women would not end with the rally, but would, in the long run, continue through various other means, such as conducting research to document the causes and effects of the violence.

The committee also came to the conclusion that just having a half-day rally might not bring out the desired impact. It was, therefore, decided to have different types of activities two weeks prior to the rally, such as organizing this forum. Other discussions were held at the university, schools and different communities.

Dr. Konjit said that, in addition to holding these fora, the task force had contacted the media (TV, radio, press) to give coverage of all the activities and to devote some of their programs to the chosen theme. Different organizations who have air time on the FM radio, such as Pro Pride, Save the Generation, Unity College, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and others, allowed the task force to use their air time for discussion on the theme with the public.

Another activity planned for three consecutive days prior to the rally was a candlelight vigil at the Meskel Square. The vigil was meant to sensitize the public to the magnitude of the problem and get support for the rally that was planned for Saturday the 10th of February.

Dr. Konjit said that the committee had also established approximately 40 cases on different types of violence against women (not just rape), which they were planning to document. These cases were collected from EWLA, Forum on Street Children and from different communities. The aim of this documentation is to show the seriousness of the problem, because there are many people who persistently deny its existence.

The committee has further prepared a brochure on violence against women and distributed it among the public.

After Dr. Konjit's brief presentation on the campaign and its goals, the discussion started
with some questions related to the presentation by the resource person.

The questions were about the people committing the crime and those affected by the crime: Who are the abusers and who the victims? Can the rapists be separately identified from the rest of society, and is there a way of categorizing them? What are the impacts of rape on the victims?

In response to the questions the presenter said that rapists didn’t belong to a specific group, and that they were generally men from all categories (priests, teachers, neighbors, fathers, and so on), the majority of whom were between 13 and 78 years old. The victims, she said, were usually girls and women between the ages of 1 and 60, with a higher category falling between 5 and 25.

Some examples of cases that prove that rapists don’t belong to a specific category of people:

- A priest raped his godchild's daughter who was 10 years old. He raped her after calling her to his house for some spiritual ritual.
- The other was a 16-year-old girl who went to church to receive holy water for the purpose of curing some sickness. The rapist was a 30-year-old priest.
- Another rapist was a trusted messenger of a family, who was given the responsibility to take their 15-year-old child to Addis Ababa from Southern Region for education. He raped her.
- A heart surgeon raped his housemaid and helped her abort the fetus when she became pregnant.

Regarding the impact of rape on the victims, the presenter said that it varied from psychological trauma to death. For example, when rape is committed on young schoolgirls, the impact is devastating not only for the victims, but also for their families.

Some of the specific harms caused by rape on the victims were discussed further:

- Rape restricts girls’ movements (hindering them from going to schools, markets, etc.);
- It terrorizes girls and women and keeps them terrified (especially when rape is committed within the ‘sacred’ and ‘protective’ unit of the family/household by someone they trust and expect protection from);
- It creates physical harm and psychological damages/scars;
- It limits girls' and women's opportunities for achieving equality and promotes harmful cultural practices that are discriminatory against them;
- It is one of the major violations of the human rights of girls and women.

There were also questions raised regarding such issues as where and why rape was committed.

The presenter said that rape was committed anywhere and everywhere: in the apparently safe surroundings of one's household, in schools and churches and, definitely, in the woods and dark corners.
The question of why rape is committed was discussed intensively. What are the causes for rape? 'Why do people rape?'

The causes or motivations for rape are very complicated, because they are related to many factors in life.

- **Changing Culture**: very often, rape is blamed on the victims, given the cultural context they live in. Arguments about women’s dressing styles, behavior, or the challenges these pose to men are viewed from the vantagepoint of cultural norms. In the given cultural setting, many assume that culture is static, and any change is resisted. For example, nowadays, men blame women for arousing their (the men’s) sexual urges by wearing short skirts or other types of tempting dresses and make-ups, or walking alone in the night or in quiet places. But this argument was contested by some participants who retorted that the main thing was that men were also human beings, and they should, therefore, be able to control their feelings, no matter what. The point is: "Women's behavior or dressing styles should never be an issue or used as an argument!" It should never be seen as a cause for misbehavior by others.

- **Tradition and culture**: It was interesting to note that one of the reasons given as to why men rape was that it was part of tradition and culture. It was pointed out that, in some rural areas and among some communities in Ethiopia rape and many other types of violence (harmful traditional practices) committed against women were embedded in the culture. But where did this violent culture in these communities originate from? The response given was that one ought to look into the historical background of the country, where conflict has been a part of life for many. And this, it was said, was reflected in behaviors and attitudes.

In order to throw light on tradition and culture as being evolutionary processes and part of history, one of the participants spoke on the 3000-year history of the country. He said that Ethiopians had a 3000-year history of which they were very proud. But, still, he wondered why this historical glory was not reflected in people’s day-to-day lives, ethics, attitudes and interactions.

The violent culture embedded in this historical background of the country, which is marked by conflict, might have helped cultivate and strengthen the wrong perception men have of women and the concomitant violent behavior they express against them: the attitude is that of the powerful vis-à-vis the powerless. One question raised at this point was as to whether there was a link between the country’s being ranked lowest in human and economic development and highest in poverty, HIV/AIDS, etc. and men’s attitude towards women and female sexuality. This was answered in the positive, because, it was said, underdevelopment is perpetuated and perpetrated by the very fact of men’s attitude (cultural or traditional) towards women. An example given was that it was men who dominated every aspect of life, and therefore, it should be them to take the blame for the state the country is in now. Related to this was the prevailing hypocrisy among men. Hypocrisy is said to be reflected very clearly in gender relationships, where, for instance, men who talk publicly about liberty, equality, freedom, and feign gender-sensitivity, etc., are the very same people who go home and commit such crimes as beating, battering, and abusing their very own wives.

Many participants called for an end to those aspects of culture that encourage any kind of violence against women, including abduction, early marriage and rape. They said that such things should be taken very seriously, because there is nothing more serious than the dehumanization of women and girls.

- **What is crime, and when does a given act constitute a crime?** Because of the cultural setting, it is not clear to many what constitutes a criminal act and what not.
For example, discussing intimate relations and sex in Ethiopia is considered taboo. This is possibly one reason why there is a misconception about what constitutes violence. In a culture that condones many violent acts against women, it is difficult to determine what constitutes a criminal act and what does not.

- **Socio-economic factors.** Socio-economic factors, such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, high rate of unemployment, etc., are blamed for the increase in violence and crime.

- **Open access to stimulants.** The increase in access to and consumption of alcohol, qat, hashish, etc. adds to people's propensity to engage in violence and crime, as they cannot think clearly under the influence of such substances.

- **Peer pressure** encourages men to rape.

- **The influence of modernization and globalization.** In the urban areas the increase of rape is blamed on western technology and modernization, such as the introduction of videos and access to the Internet. This means that people are exposed to different cultures, including pornography, which they imitate indiscriminately. Modernization imposes different moral codes on society, and the negative impact of some of these codes should not be ignored.

The factors mentioned above were questioned by some other participants, who wondered whether those really were the main causes of rape. They were of the opinion that attributing rape, committed against women, to chewing qat or watching video would not hold as a viable argument, because rape was not committed by a certain category of men only.

Here are some of the arguments that rape is neither a new phenomenon nor something adapted from the west.

- "Rape has always existed in the Ethiopian culture and still continues under the guise of culture."

- "Rape has always been there. The major point is that people have never condemned it. This is because of the way people were brought up."

- "In the countryside, our mothers and sisters used to be raped in the farms and while going long distances in the bushes alone. After we became adults, we also came to know about different rape cases, but we never told anyone about them because we were not told that rape would hurt women, nor that it was a crime. So we accepted it and lived with it."

- "Abduction is one aspect of our culture, and it is prevalent in the countryside and some urban centers. It is neither a new phenomenon nor a matter of western cultural influence."

Another question asked was: ‘What is the magnitude of rape?’ These days much publicity is being given to rape. It appears that there is an enormous increase in rape cases. How can this be explained? The response, given to this was, that the reasons could be many. The increase in rape may be due to behavioral change of society that is becoming more violent, or it is becoming more visible now because women are discussing it openly.

Here is an example of how the openness of victims of rape is leading to the revelation of more cases:

"In Harar, a man old enough to be her grandfather, called a 6-year old girl and asked her to bring him some ember. He then asked her to take it to his house where he raped her,
saying that it was a punishment for bringing the ember late. The little girl told her family about the incident, and the man was taken to court. This rapist was a tailor for women’s clothes, and while the case was presented to court, six women came out into the open and claimed that they had been raped by the same man, but had kept quiet for so long."

This shows that the practice goes on everywhere, but is getting publicity only now.

After the discussion on the crime of rape, the focus shifted to the issue of penalizing rapists. How was one to deal with rapists, especially those who rape children? (This question was raised apropos of the recent rape of a one-year old baby-girl who died in the process.) Some of the suggestions were:

- Rapists should be exposed publicly;
- They should be made aware of what they have done, promptly taken to a court of law, and punished accordingly;
- People/society should stop protecting criminals.

Regarding child victims of rape, to the extent that they know nothing about sex and have no sexual urges whatever, it was suggested that the crime perpetrated on them should not be called rape, that it was in reality torture and murder, and it should, therefore, be dealt with accordingly.

In this regard, the laws in many countries are not women-friendly, though legally they should be so, since many countries have adopted constitutions guaranteeing the protection of women’s rights. The reality is very grim, however. Any crime or violence committed against women is either hard to prove or not taken seriously. This shows the extent to which patriarchal institutions go in the protection of the status quo. Crimes committed against men reach the global media, but the daily torture and mutilation of women is not even worth mentioning in the local news. The laws are all beautiful, with excellent provisions on the protection of women’s rights, but the practitioners are not sensitized when it comes to implementing them accordingly.

The law regarding rape in Ethiopia was also looked into. It was said that the most effective way to stop any crime from becoming a perennial problem is having an effective legal backing from the judicial system. It is the manner in which the law is implemented that can encourage or discourage the proliferation of the crime. What does the law say on the crime of rape in Ethiopia?

In Ethiopia, the penalty in the penal code for rapists is 15 years of imprisonment. However, it was noted that, considering the problems of HIV/AIDS, rape nowadays amounted to murder. Imprisonment of 15 years is not enough for a rapist who ends up infecting his victim with the deadly virus. Such a rapist should get life imprisonment. Rapists in Ethiopia are generally given very lenient sentences, and very often they are released within a short time or on bail. The reason is that the crime of rape is not considered a serious offense. The result is that rapists are encouraged to continue committing their crime on other innocent victims. The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association has been lobbying to have the sentences given to rapists increased (depending on what they cause to their victims), with a provision of a minimum sentence of 5 years. As the penal code stands now, rapists can be released within a couple of days, because there is no provision in the law for a minimum sentence.

The issue of the responsibility of society to stop the crime of rape was also discussed at length. It was noted that the protection of criminals by society has led to the rampant increase of crimes being committed. This was viewed in two ways:

1 On the one hand, there are many protective mechanisms available for men at public level. The rampant increase of violence against women was blamed on the
protective mechanisms available for criminals in society. To begin with, there are too many taboos related to speaking about rape, which is usually kept secret. Patriarchal societies are known to have many mechanisms and institutions that safeguard and protect the rights of men and help maintain the status quo. Reasons and excuses are invented for the actions of men, while women are always blamed in one way or another for the things men do. Such protection of men’s interests is actually the main cause for the violence they commit against women to have become so rampant, because it has never been condemned and there has been no one coming forward to condemn it. And now there are many more factors helping men to find solace in their actions: Westernization, VCRs, porno videos, drugs, alcohol, the Internet and so on.

On the other hand, there are also various protective mechanisms for men within the private level, their sacred homes. It has always been stressed that the house is a sacred unit in which no outsider should intervene. What is also always stressed in the name of protecting the honor and image of the home and its members is that one should not tell things that happen in one’s household to outsiders. And this is the other factor that should be blamed for the many violations against women that are not heard about, the rationale behind the silence being that the sacredness of the family unit has to be protected. Some of the most serious abuses against women take place within the confines of the household. Husbands, brothers, sons and other relatives, too, commit rape. But what do the women do? For the sake of the protection of the family, women don’t speak about it or even force others (daughters, maids, and sisters) to hush it up.

A participant related the following story as an example: "My aunt had a son who had a mental problem. He raped the housemaid and she became pregnant. When she told this to my aunt, my aunt became so angry that she insulted and beat the maid. This led to the maid committing suicide. When another maid came, she was also raped by the same son and got pregnant. She was also fired when she told that to my aunt."

This is an example of the extent of the protection given to criminals by women or family members. This behavior of protecting and justifying the abusive actions of men and blaming the victims has become so natural that the victims sometimes don't even see the reason why they should report incidences of rape. Many victims are so entwined in this belief that they feel embarrassed and afraid to tell anybody what happens to them. This develops further into an established cult that women are to be blamed, that they are made to suffer, and that no harm comes to the men who commit the violence. This is sometimes also proven in the court cases of rape victims who might have dared to report their cases. It is they themselves who are punished. (A good example is the case of the 17-year old Nigerian girl who was raped by three men and was punished for having had premarital sex). But this should not be the way! As was stressed by many participants.

Towards the conclusion of the discussion the following question was posed: 'What can be done to stop this violence?'

The responses were many:

- The victims should feel responsible and understand its disastrous consequences.
- Victims should be open and frank about their situations and tell the public about the violence committed against them, because it is only then that the problem can be solved.
- Women have to stand up and fight.
- People should not protect criminals because of their relation to them.
Women have to discuss the problem openly in their homes as well as in public in order to create social awareness.

People have to cooperate and work together.

Education is needed to change the attitudes of society.

It is important to create awareness within families and among communities on new laws and the rights of women.

It is necessary to create awareness about the seriousness of the crime among all groups of society (men, women, students, priests, community leaders, government, and so on).

Advocacy and lobbying must be carried for the strengthening of the punishment for rape.

Research must be conducted. Because of lack of facts and figures to show the scope and magnitude of the problem, there is a misunderstanding regarding the violence against women, thereby leading to a denial of its existence in Ethiopia. To solve a problem, it is imperative to have a good understanding of the issue. Therefore, studies and research on violence are needed in order to come up with solutions.

More discussion is needed to come up with solutions to the expanding problem.

Counseling and aid should be provided for victims of rape.

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The Campaign on Violence Against Women:
How Did It Go?

The fora that were held in schools, kebeles and among NGOs in Addis Ababa during the two weeks prior to the rally on the 10th of February 2001 brought to the attention of the public the broad and deep dimensions of violence against women. The high prevalence of rape in the country was unexpected. A panel of three people reflected on the whole process. They gave brief presentations from different angles. This forum was not meant to be an evaluation or assessment of the rally on violence against women, but it was rather aimed at having a look into the problems that were encountered, the positive outcomes observed, and the results, if there were any. The main aim of the panel was to reflect on what can be done in terms of future organizing of such types of rallies.

The panelists were:

- **Dr. Adanetch Kidane Mariam**, member of the coordinating committee of the campaign, who reflected on the overall process of the campaign;
- **Ms. Tewedaj Kebede**, a journalist, who presented the media coverage aspect of the campaign; and
- **Mr. Melakou Tegegn**, who gave an overview of the nature of violence against women, especially in the light of what could be done in the future to eradicate it.

**Dr. Adanetch**

Dr. Adanetch gave her personal view of the campaign, since the committee had not yet evaluated the process.

First she spoke on how the campaign was initiated. The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association had earlier held two consecutive meetings. The first one was on gender networking, at which the issue of the increase in violence against women and children was raised. The second meeting took place in October 2000. At that meeting the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, which is helping and supporting the victims of violence by providing legal aid, noted that there was such an increase in the many forms of violence committed against women that they had difficulty in handling the overload of cases. It was then, at that meeting, that it was decided to do something together about the increasing violence against women in the country.

A committee of 11 volunteers (9 women and two men) was elected at the following meeting in November. The mandate of the committee was organizing a campaign on violence against women. The members of the committee met weekly to discuss strategies on sensitizing the public in Addis Ababa. The main organizers involved at the time were the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, the Addis Ababa Democratic Women's Association and the Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office. The Rally was meant to initiate the first phase of the campaign, which was aimed at voicing public dismay against abuse and violence against women. The media were intensively utilized to broadcast the campaign.

**The process of the campaign**

The process of the campaign on violence against women included the organization of fora, debate and discussions in all the six Zones of Addis Ababa, involving schools, communities, NGOs and so on. A candlelight vigil was held for three consecutive
evenings at the Meskel Square, which was then followed by the rally on Saturday the 10th of February 2001.

Dr. Adanetch said that the aim is to continue and to extend the campaign to the other regions of the country.

As to the question of how the campaign proceeded, Dr. Adanetch responded that, in her opinion, the campaign went as planned:

- The committee of volunteers were very committed to see to it that the campaign and rally achieved the set goals;
- The media were cooperative;
- Civil society was engaged;
- Schools and some colleges (with special commendable reference to the Unity College) were not only interested but also participated actively;
- Most importantly, the people directly concerned about the issue were fully engaged. Concerned people were those directly affected by the crime of rape and other physical abuses; namely, the victims, their daughters, mothers, grandmothers, etc.;
- Petitions bringing the problem to the attention of the Parliament and the Prime Minster's Office were sent, to which they responded by committing themselves to see to it that violence is dealt with accordingly.

Dr. Adanetch ended her presentation by noting that what took place was just a beginning.

Ms. Tewedaj Kebede

Ms. Tewedaj said that most of the media (TV, Radio, and the Press) covered the campaign on violence against women very well. Examples: Eletawi Addis (the Unity College Newspaper) publicized the event on its Front Page, both as news report and in the form of articles in the opinion column. Addis Almaz, Tobia, The Daily Monitor, Addis Tribune, Ethiopian Herald and Addis Zemen publicized the campaign on their front pages as news, while the Reporter and The Sun published articles about the campaign.

Regarding the electronic media, the campaign was covered by ETV (Ethiopian television) only in its news program. This came as a disappointment, since many people in Addis Ababa in the main use this medium. But there was extensive coverage on the radio, both by FM Addis and Radio Ethiopia. This was particularly encouraging, since the radio is widely used not only in the urban centers but also in the rural areas. Many people learned about the campaign through the radio. The radio also covered the campaign in detail through discussions and debates on the many forms of violence committed against women. It is through the radio that many people heard for the first time about the many types of violence committed against women.

Ms. Tewedaj said that, to more or less the same extent when there is a positive side to something, there would also be a negative one. There were people questioning the magnitude of violence against women and wondering whether the whole thing was not an exaggeration. Such people always try to deny the seriousness of anything that has to do with women and women's rights. For example, there were some articles in the newspapers suggesting one ought to keep quiet rather than making the issue public. (See the English weekly Newspaper: The Reporter, 21 February 2001; article: 'Some
Danger of the Gender Issue’ where the author tries to argue that the likes of the EWLA are not satisfied with famine being the only derogatory synonym of Ethiopia, as they are on the verge of introducing another such synonym to their country: rape. The author congratulates the likes of the EWLA for their concerted efforts to erase Ethiopia from the tourist map! The argument appears to be that, by publicly presenting the issue we will expose the country to the world, thereby negatively affecting for the worse the image they already have of it. Ms. Tewedaj stressed that this idea of hushing up issues should not be supported, for it was ignorance about the problem and denial of its existence that has actually led to its exacerbation.

In conclusion, Ms. Tewedaj said that when it came to the question of whether the media had done well during the campaign to raise public awareness, it could be said that they had indeed contributed a great deal, but that should not be taken as sufficient. It was noted that the media produced nothing special about the event other than reporting about it as news. Once the event was over, there were no news, so no more reporting. In this way, many important issues that need further extensive coverage by the media are usually ignored after the event has been reported. What is needed, then, is a series of follow-ups or progressive reports to keep the public constantly aware and to be able to bring the desired attitudinal change.

Mr. Melakou Tegegn

Mr. Melakou started by noting that institutions or government departments, established to deal with issues that are detrimental to this country and development in general, whether it be climatic change, the environment or women’s rights, were completely disempowered. They have no real power to institutionalize any substantial activity in their own respective fields.

For example, it is the job of the Women’s Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister’s Office to deal with the general question of gender in this country. They should have been more active and visible during the campaign on violence against women. But they were nowhere to be seen or heard. And related to this it should not be surprising to see that law enforcement, as far as violence against women is concerned, is extremely low. On the other hand if the state does not do anything to stop the spread of violence against women, civil society should take the lead. Civil society can do a lot to change what seems to be an impenetrable fortress; namely, the male practice of violence against women, whatever forms it take.

Mr. Melakou dealt with three issues:

- What causes violence against women?
- What is the global response to this universal crime?
- What are the particularities of violence against women in Ethiopia?

2. What causes violence against women?

The causes of violence against women can be generally located within the dominant discourse, or what is generally in the minds of people, what people understand about human relations, development, and so on. Whatever is in the minds of people is informed by the dominant discourse, which is constructed by human beings in such a way as to fit the interest of the dominant classes in every society. Men, or what amounts to the same thing, patriarchy is dominant, and, therefore, it should not be surprising that the dominant discourse is also patriarchal. In other words, what dominates the discourse, the paradigm, the ideology, the outlook is patriarchy. This patriarchy reinforces the oppression of and violence against women directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, so that the situation is perpetuated through generations. One of the elements in the dominant discourse is the construction of sexuality. Sexuality is viewed by the
dominant discourse in a very distorted way. It looks down upon female sexuality and exaggerates and glorifies masculinity. Therefore, it is resorted to by all forms of ideology, all forms of paradigms and different outlooks. So, at the level of discourse this is inculcated in the minds of individuals, not just men but women as well. People accept masculinity as prevailing over female sexuality. This is an accepted and an unquestioned reality. Those who tried to question it have been banished, and in some cases, the swords of Damocles have been drawn upon them. There are many examples in the Arab world where women rose up to demand their rights and equality, only to end up in jail, or even being executed. And it is this ideology that has generated the violent psyche in the mentality of people. “Masculinity is constructed in such a way that it has a lot violence embedded in it. And this violence is specifically directed against women. An important point in this is that the dominant discourse is preaching and rationalizing the inequality existing between men and women, whether overtly or covertly.” The so-called most democratic societies also have this inequality preached in a very refined manner.

Examples of some problems at the practical level that gave rise to violence against women:

- Drunken men.
- The lack of opportunities for women to own property. This lack of property right dis-empowers women and subjects them to men’s will; this by itself degrades women and invites violence, particularly physical violence.
- Misuse of religion. There are followers of the Muslim as well as the Orthodox Christian faith who attribute female genital mutilation to the Koran or the Bible, which in both cases is completely false.
- Economic exploitation of women, etc.

These problems are not an Ethiopian monopoly; they are global.

2 Given this reality, what is the world doing?

The United Nations came into existence in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, with the main aim of bringing peace and security to the world. But how about bringing peace and security to women? What has the UN done in this respect? What has each nation done to end violence against women and bring about the peace and security they need both at home and in public? The reality is very gloomy when it comes to this.

However, it should not be denied that, whatever has been done at the global level to address women’s issues constitutes an important step forward. There is no doubt that some of the international inter-agencies have done a lot in this respect. There are very important international covenants such as the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as others addressing the issues of women’s inequality and the violence perpetrated against them. The problem is that, when it comes to actual practice, there is a very sharp contradiction.

What the world says at global fora and what actually happens in practice reflect a huge gap, revealing what can be referred to as global hypocrisy, with its particular manifestations at the national level in the various countries. As far as the international community is concerned, there is a clear-cut case of global hypocrisy, particularly by global forces such as the World Bank and the IMF, who force conditionalities (Structural Adjustment Programs) and economic policies on poorer countries where most of these conditionalities, as proven by many reports and research (such as the disengagement of
the state from the economy and social services like public health and education), have negatively affected the position of women. UNDP reports have consistently highlighted this every year (since 1993): that ‘the position of women has deteriorated globally’. This deterioration should not be seen separately from the globalization programs and what the World Bank and IMF are telling countries to follow in the sphere of economic policy.

Then again, not everything should be blamed on the World Bank and the Bretton Woods institutions. There is a huge level of national hypocrisy, too. Local governments are also to blame. What have local governments done to uplift the burden of women? What have they done to end violence against women? At the Beijing +5 Conference it was noted by a United Nations agency that, out of 176 countries, only 8 had followed and implemented the agreement of the Beijing Platform for Action at that time. This hypocrisy at the level of political power is both a global and national/local phenomenon.

3 What is the particular case of Ethiopia?

It is important to draw on the particularities of the oppression and marginalization of women in Ethiopia. It should be noted here that the marginalization of Ethiopian women differs from that of Sudanese or Somali women. Particularities are derived from a given country’s unique political and historical situation. Unless these particularities are identified, it will be very difficult to understand the problems and bring about solutions. Knowing the particularities can give rise to the formulation of proper strategies to combat violence against women. The questions that need to be raised in this regard are: What are the causes of violence in a particular setting? What is the proper strategy to deal with the problem? What can civil society do? Who is going to do what? Who can go to what extent and what can each sector (government, civil society and so on) do? What are the limitations of each sector and stakeholders group, and who are the target groups, etc.?

Some things are within the capacity of each sector. For example:

a) The government. The 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia has excellent provisions for the protection of the rights of women, and there is a gender policy at the national level. These by themselves can be sufficient to launch a campaign against the violence perpetuated against women. The Constitution is the most important legislation that Ethiopian society has. The paradox, however, is that there can be excellent articles in the Constitution, but what good are they if they are not implemented and there are no effective reinforcement mechanisms in place? Therefore, any strategy addressing efforts to end violence against women should take this into consideration. People should support the law enforcement agencies in the realization of the Constitution’s provisions as well as the government’s gender policy to protect the rights of women. One strategy is to make sure the laws as well as the principles are enforced, something that the society, too, has to have a hand in.

b) What can civil society do? The campaign on violence against women held two weeks ago is the kind of experience needed at the national level, not just once or twice, but on a continuous basis, given the increasing level of violence the country is currently facing. But any action taken in this regard should not start in a vacuum. We have to learn from other countries. The experiences of such countries as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka in Asia and South East Asia can be drawn upon. In these places the women did not struggle against violence against women all by themselves. It was not the efforts of a few NGOs or associations but national campaigns that involved every sector of civil society that made the difference. The problem in Ethiopia is that the NGO sector and the civil society sector are sharply divided along professional or particular cause lines. If it is the unions, no one
enters that terrain, and the same goes for women’s associations/organizations. The sectors are against each other. There is no horizontal relationship and reflection of solidarity among civil society organizations. When it comes to eradicating this violence against women, it should not be NGOs, development practitioners or individuals alone but everybody and every sector that should be involved. They all should be mobilized into a movement, and that is called a national action. This can be done only if people make time to sit together and come up with strategies and think about how to create networking among the different sectors.

c) The third level concerns what **individuals** can do. Ethiopia is said to have one of the oldest histories in the world, of which the people are proud and should be, considering that they were able to avert the encroachments of invaders and maintain their independence. But that is only one side of the story. Are they positioned to look into their own problems, reflect upon those problems and try to do something about them? As much as people are proud of their past, are they prepared to look into their own weaknesses related to the serious problems of development they face? Ethiopia is probably one of the three least developed countries in the world and well known for its poverty and the periodic famines and starvation it has been suffering. Now, within a short period of time, the image of the country as harboring rapists raping one-year-old babies will be added upon this already vulnerable image. It is very urgent now to reflect on one’s own social values, and at that level individuals should be mobilized to combat violence against women, because it is not just organized civil society and/or the state alone that can deal with this serious and rampant problem. The hypocrisy spoken of at the beginning of this discussion is not only global or national but also individual.

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The Campaign on Violence Against Women: How did it go?  
Discussion and Debate

After the three presentations the floor was open for discussion.

Dr. Adanetch, the first presenter, was asked about the next steps planned for the campaign.

Her response was that, since the committee had not met yet, it was not known what the next steps would be. But she expressed her conviction that the campaign should continue at all levels (government, NGOs, civil society, family and individuals).

The motto should be "no more violence!"

Some doubts were raised regarding the target groups of the campaign. Is the campaign inclusive or is it limited only to certain classes or groups of people? The campaign, it was revealed, was not meant to address any specific group of people but the society as a whole.

The participants of the forum were asked to reflect on the campaign and rally around it, and also to make suggestions/recommendations as to how things could have been done better.

- Many participants of the forum affirmed that the issue was a burning one and it must be dealt with.
- Some participants found it disappointing that there were people who had committed themselves to participate in the activities of the campaign but failed to do so in the end.
- One problem raised was that there were people who had wanted to participate in the campaign, but somehow did not have access to the particular media publicizing it, and they were, therefore, not aware that there was a campaign going on. There are many people who don't use the media, because they don't have the time to do so. Some strategies were suggested in this regard for next time around:
  
  # Use different information channels in addition to the formal media to inform the public. These can include the use of posters and banners at kebele and woreda levels, in churches, coffee shops, etc.
  
  # Inclusion and active involvement of men and effective utilization of their resources in the future. Sensitization and involvement of women only (as in taking cases to court, going to the police) will not help minimize the problem.
  
  # Establish a system whereby victims of abuse - both actual and potential - can have free services and training on how to protect themselves from future abuse, as well as how to present their situation to law enforcement agencies.
  
  # Training and sensitization of institutions and places where victims of abuse can go: the police, clinics or hospitals, courts, etc., because many cases are not taken seriously by those who run or work in such institutions.
  
- Regarding the continuation of the campaign, it was suggested that people should not just organize a campaign and forget about it the next day. What is important in this regard is the self-determination of people in order to be able to take initiatives
by themselves to continue the process.

- People who make negative remarks should be challenged. Many women recalled how they were challenged within their own surroundings (workplaces and homes alike) about the seriousness of the campaign, and how they were asked what they were trying to prove or gain. Others challenged the existence of the problem of violence itself.

After the discussion and debate on the campaign, the focus shifted to the role of the media in such campaigns. What strategies or what ways should be found to make the media more responsive to campaigns of this kind in the future?

Ms. Tewedaj responded by saying that most journalists usually wait for some event to happen and then report on the case as news. After the event is over, the reporting, too, will be over. She said that to encourage the media to continue reporting on these kinds of issues, it is necessary to conduct continuous programmes specially designed to address them. Another way of keeping the media interested, Ms. Tewedaj stressed, was to have victims of abuse reveal their cases to the media to get nation-wide support and to raise public awareness, with the view to seeking solutions. In this regard, a participant related how case studies have been successful in creating nation-wide awareness, for example, on the legalization of abortion in Germany.

"In Germany in the 70s there was a lot of campaign to legalize abortion. That was a very big issue. The media was utilized to make that campaign nation-wide. There were also organizations from civil society that were at the forefront of the campaign, but in the end it was the media which turned the issue into a topic for a nation-wide discussion. The media brought to the forefront some famous women who publicly declared that they had aborted (relating how they went to the Netherlands for abortion, where it was legal). These celebrities were TV actresses, singers, etc., who were famous and looked up to in the society. By highlighting the examples of such respected people, the media triggered the desired effect. A very big campaign then started, with extended discussion on TV, radio and in the papers." This is how the media took its own course in the creation of awareness on a certain issue.

Another example of how the media could be effective: ‘Female genital mutilation has been there for years and years. And it was not taken as an absolute big issue, apart from some local initiatives taken to get few supporters. But the book published by the Somali model, Waris Diri, brought the issue up to the United Nations.’

These are examples on how the media can be used effectively to provoke public attention and concern.

A critical comment in this respect was that, for the media to interview famous personalities and highlight cases to create awareness means that they actually have the personnel devoted to the cause and who actually could go searching for people who are victims. It is at best doubtful whether something like that can be done in Ethiopia, where the media use a top-down approach, and where the individual reporters are not free enough to go information seeking, issue hunting, finding resource persons, and then publicize case histories on their own initiative.

It was further argued:

- The Ethiopian media system is extremely underdeveloped. There is no room in the present media for social issues and development programs, such as environment, gender, and urban poverty.

- Media specialization is also non-existent. Except on the state media, both electronic and print, there is hardly any specialization in the private media, save for Eletawi Addis and some other papers like Ruh. Gender reporting is particularly
• The biggest problem the media face is **lack of financial resources and the lack of manpower**, which limits their capacity to go wherever necessary and collect information and news. That is actually the main reason why most of the outlets just report on issues in general terms without probing into the relevant facts and details.

The need for training personnel in specialized fields was particularly stressed. It was also suggested that some kind of network should be established in order to be able to cooperate with the media.

There was also some concern raised about the sustainability of the campaign. The fear was that unless those concerned can make sure that the process continues in one form or another, the whole idea may disappear from people’s minds, giving way to the persistence of the problem of violence against women.

So how can the process be sustained? The following are some of the suggestions forwarded during the discussion:

- Gender desks in the various institutions could find ways to continue the process;
- Organize more fora like the current one and conduct frequent debates and discussions in such a way that ideas gathered from one such forum could be used to create another forum;
- Networking to share ideas and design further strategies.

The discussion, then, shifted to Mr. Melakou’s presentation.

The question persistently asked had to do with why there is so much violence against women. The gender imbalance in the system, that is, women’s subordination to men, was stressed as one of the reasons. But does that answer the question of why a 60-year old woman or a one-year old child is raped?

Mr. Melakou said that, to come up with solutions and strategize actions to eliminate violence, one had to look at the **particularities** of what made the rape of a child of one a criminal offense. There are many factors contributing to the violence that exists today. Maybe it is not just one factor but a combination of factors leading to such crimes. According to Mr. Melakou’s observation, the level of social frustration among the youth in Ethiopia is probably among the highest in the world. The increasing crime and violence can be attributed to this frustration. When thinking about finding solutions, it is such particularities that should be taken into consideration. Unless these particularities are identified, the position of the youth in this country cannot be generalized in terms of comparison to those in, say, Kenya. Mr. Melakou added, however, that stressing the need to identify such particularities should not be understood as an attempt to rationalize or justify the criminal and abusive behaviors and acts of the youth.

A participant added that the present generation was more frustrated because of unemployment, less educational opportunities, and overpopulation, the result being that today’s youth spend their time creating all the ills society is facing now. But why so many ills now that were never heard of in the past? What exactly is happening to the present generation? Some of the responses given were:

- The older **generation** had a different lifestyle and habit from the present one (different cultural values);
• There is also a differentiation in behavior and actions between the different categories of people in society: the educated and the uneducated; the rich and the poor; the dominant and the marginalized; superiors and inferiors; girls and boys;

• Lack of proper exposure to social values also leads to more social ills. People who are not properly exposed to positive social values pick up the negative aspects and imitate those;

• Modern life is more individual and self-centered at the expense of the social and moral values of traditional life;

• There are more serious socio-economic problems now that were not there in the past, and these are a direct cause of ill-behavior.

• Capitalism, materialism and globalization contribute in one way or another to the social ills.

The following suggestions were forwarded in order to eradicate violence:

⇔ A new approach of moral education that brings about behavioral change combined with academic education needs to be put in place;

⇔ In order to achieve equality between the sexes, gender should be included in the curricula at the primary school level. The ministry of education should consider this, and civil society should push for its implementation;

⇔ Moral education should not only be given in the schools but also at home, because the pillars of society are its individual members.

One of the issues raised was as to how women could protect themselves when they were attacked. One participant suggested training in self-defense, which was discussed further.

An example was given of a woman in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who was trained in karate and opened a training school for women, because, she believed, women needed to know how to defend themselves when they were attacked. The argument is that, living in a violent society, women cannot depend on the police or their male relatives to protect them around the clock. Therefore they should equip themselves with techniques to be able to defend themselves. There are many examples in Latin America, too, where women have acted individually or in groups to protect themselves.

There was also an example of an extreme case of revenge of a well-known case in the 80’s in India by a women, Phoolan Devi. Phoolan Devi was gang-raped in a rural village and she was devastated by that act of violence. She joined a rebel band and through time became the leader of that band. She was well-known as the "Bandit Queen". The first thing she did then was to go back to that village and kill each one of them who had gang-raped her. When this rebel group was captured by the police, Phoolan Devi was brought to trial. That trial was one of the most advertised and well-publicized trials in the history of India. Many women organizations joined hands and went out to defend her. In fact Phoolen Devi was elected in her constituency as a member of parliament in 1996.

There are many such kinds of individual cases of revenge by women, but generally women are known not to be so revengeful. Many women continue their lives with the very criminals who abuse and torture them daily without being able to do anything about their miserable situation. This misery of women is actually supported by many
institutions in society, where women are taught not to fight back or even reflect on it.

There were different views regarding this issue of equipping women with the said techniques of self-defense. Some participants were against it on the grounds that violence would breed further violence. Others were all for it. Those who were against equipping women with the techniques to defend themselves considered long-term solutions, such as moral education and equal socialization of girls and boys. This suggestion, though a welcome one, was considered only as a long-term solution that could take generations. The fact is that violence is being committed every minute of the day, and there is no time to sit around and reflect over long-term solutions. What is needed at the time when the crime of violence is committed is immediate action. The simple question asked was whether a woman should let herself be raped and killed simply because she should not answer violence with violence. If she did not fight back, would the criminal stop his actions? The response was a resounding NO! It was argued that the criminal would go out and rape another one, and yet another one, because things would be made easier for him to continue since no one would fight back. Actually, not fighting back, it was said, would add to the already existing mechanisms of protecting the criminals who think they are justified in their actions, thereby making them believe they even have the right and freedom to use violence while their victims are not supposed to do so?

What kinds of solution would be practical at the moment? That was the question raised at the end of the forum.

One suggestion was that long-term solutions should be turned into short-term, practical solutions that can help both women and men cope in a violence-ridden society. Education and equal socialization provide one such solution. Educating more women about their rights and socializing boys into less aggressive behaviors are issues that can be worked on now. It was stressed that short-term and long-term actions can be combined. As society grows more violent, people should equip themselves with self-defense, as everyone is a potential victim of crime.

As was mentioned above, silence is not the solution, and women have to fight back using all the means available to them. The very image of women as defenseless beings is contributing to their victimization. And this image is what needs to be changed urgently and radically. Denying women the possibility of defending themselves only encourages criminals to indulge in their crimes. By giving women a chance to defend themselves and fight back, both the criminals and the crime can be stopped.

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