

**Development
Support Agency**

African Women Supporting African Women

Annual Report 2004-2005

About Development Support Agency

Mission

Vision

Guiding Principles

Current Activities

DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AGENCY is an African women's organisation set up to relieve poverty, sickness and distress of African women by raising awareness, disseminating information and advancing education among African women, including refugees and asylum seekers, displaced and trafficked women, and those facing all other forms of abuse and exploitation in rural and urban communities, in England & Wales and Africa.

Mission

Our mission is to support and promote an integrated approach to issues of poverty, ill health, injustice and imbalances in gender relations in African communities, both in England & Wales and Africa.

Vision

Our vision is a world in which African women and their communities are empowered to promote their interests and live free of perennial poverty, ill health, lack of decision-making and other forms of disempowerment and exploitation.

DSA is guided by the principles of: Participation, Sustainability, Transparency and Justice.

Our work falls under four thematic areas:

- Capacity Building
- Community Health
- Community Involvement
- Project Support

Our Current Activities

- Information & advice
- Training workshops and outreach events
- Counselling Services
- Drop-in and Referral Servicet
- Advocacy and Support
- Networking and information sharing

Acknowledgements

Awards for All

African
Communities
Project,
Hammersmith and
Fulham PCT

Bridge House Trust

Big Lottery

European Social
Fund Fast Forward
Grants

King's Fund

Lloyds TSB
Foundation

Refugee Community
Development Fund
(the Home Office)

Renewal
Community Chest

This annual review summarises the project activities that we carried out during the last year. We have through these projects highlighted the health and development issues that affect African women in the London Boroughs we currently work in. This has been a significant step forward for us as an organisation, building on our achievements since our launch in September 2003.

We worked hard to strengthen our Community Health and Capacity Building Programmes through a series of project activities that attracted women, men and young people to our events. We used opportunities of networking and partnerships to further promote our mission and projects. The challenge for us in the years ahead is ensure the sustainability of projects in England and Wales, and especially as we commence our capacity building programmes in Africa.

The projects we have carried out among African women and young girls in the eight London boroughs we currently work in highlights the need to expand on the personal skills development issues that affect the totality of the African woman. For example, the health and social complications arising from the practice of female genital mutilation have ripple effects on the victims' sense of self-worth, their ability to support themselves economically and make meaningful contributions to the community. The project reports summarised below will give you some insight into the problems that affect African women in the community. We hope that in the coming months and years, we would be in a position to provide our beneficiaries with the skills they need to proactively support and protect themselves from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

I would like to thank our funders for their support, without which we would not have been able to continue with our programmes. I would also like to thank our volunteers, especially those that support our seriously traumatised beneficiaries. Thank you indeed for your commitment to the welfare and advancement of African women.

I would also like to commend the executive committee and staff for working tirelessly to support and promote the mission of the organisation.

Annie Mubanga
President

Community Awareness Events

WE HELD FOUR workshops and three outreach events. The purpose of these workshops was to raise more awareness on the issue of FGM, a practice widely spread in African communities in England and Wales. The consequences of this practice are detrimental to the well-being of African women. There were a number of issues raised during the workshops:

■ Women's health is severely affected by the practice of FGM which is done in the name of culture to preserve family and community honour, or in the name of religion as a means of "purification"

■ The role of men in perpetuating the practice because of their demand for "virgin" brides

■ The fact that this practice persists despite the physical, social and psychological scarring of affected women and the evident violation of women's human rights led most participants to conclude that the main reason is to control women's sexuality

■ The rise in sexually transmitted infections among mutilated married women and "virgins"

■ The challenges being faced by communities and individual members trying to stop the practice such as the fear of being stigmatised and ostracised by the community

■ The fear expressed by young women that they might not find husbands within the community if they resist the practice

■ The lack of publicity and awareness within practising communities of the existence of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 which prescribes up to 14 years jail term for those who commit the crime.

"FGM is practised to give men the capacity to oppress women"

"I will not like to marry a circumcised woman because she will not get excited during sex, and this will affect me"

"I have been made aware of what is going on in preserving cultures among immigrants. I thought they left all that where they came from"

"It is our religion and a culture, the parents have been through it, so should the daughters, the pain will soon go away".

ENGLAND & WALES PROJECT ACTIVITIES

We were able to replicate the community meetings we organised during the last year in Hammersmith and Fulham, with women and men from practising African communities in Brent and Harrow.

For the first time, we were able to organise a community event for participants from African countries that practice type 4 FGM, and emphasised the consequence of accelerated sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

The empowerment training workshops highlighted the interconnections between gender and power relations in the African community, and the threat of sexually transmitted infections. A total of 72 participants attended the events directly organised by us.

Our community outreach events reached over 250 others. We used three outreach events to address the practice of female genital mutilation as a child rights and child protection issue. This has enabled us to start a networking campaign to work with statutory and voluntary agencies on the issue.

Funded by Awards for All

"We should have more workshops and it will be helpful to bring our children to see what has happened to us. Most of my children do not know about FGM"

"It is our religion and our culture"

"I am shocked to hear that people practice FGM here in the UK"

DROP-IN AND REFERRAL SERVICE

DROP-IN and Referral Service for victims of female genital mutilation: This was a pilot drop-in and referral service run with a grant from King's Fund. The aim of this pilot was to African women severely traumatised by their experiences of female genital mutilation and affected by sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Our volunteer community advocates supported the service with information pack including fact sheets, flyers and educational video. While the women were enthusiastic about the service, the greatest challenge was reaching the men. They would not come to the centre. The community advocates resorted to engaging them at home, community centres, colleges and mosques. For this reason, they could not form part of the statistics for clients that accessed the service at the centre. Moreover, fewer women than expected came to the centre.

They preferred to meet as a group, somewhere closer to home, and anonymous.

The information pack consisted of the illustrated types of FGM, the effects of FGM, a list of clinics for reversal services, and a summary of the FGM Act 2003 and an information video. The fact sheets and information video were very good resources, and they helped to raise awareness of the issues and centres for clinical repair service.

Funded by King's Fund

ENGLAND & WALES PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Counselling Service for victims of female genital mutilation

This was another pilot project. The counselling service targeted women victims of this practice. We noticed that women who attended our training workshops were asking questions that were fundamental to their womanhood. These were questions on painful sex, no sex, marriage breakdown, fear of and fact of divorce, perennial sadness, headaches and headaches, every evening and flashbacks. We organised this pilot to give them a culturally appropriate counselling and support. We had advertised one-to-one and group counselling sessions.

A majority of them preferred the group counselling sessions. The first time we organised the session, the women came along. But during the second and subsequent sessions, they came with their daughters. It was apparent that they needed to give each other support, talk generically and get all the answers they needed. However, those that sought one-to-one counselling support provided much insight into the traumatic world of most victims of female genital mutilation. We heard things like: "I just want to be normal", "I am HIV-positive, even though I have only had sex with my husband", "My life was over when I was eight", "I am just afraid", "Sex is too painful", "It is our culture and our burden as women, there is nothing we can do about it", "I think that one day, the pain will go away, somehow", This pilot scheme has now ended, but we are hopeful of further funds to extend and expand this service.

Funded by Bridge House Trust

"I just want to be normal"

"My life was over when I was eight"

"I think that circumcision is a cruel thing to do to a person and I think that girls should have to make their own decision and not have their parents make it for them"

Sexual Health & HIV Project

We organised a pilot sexual health promotion project to complement and strengthen our female genital mutilation project. The project aimed to highlight the high rate of sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV, in the African community and the likely link with the practice of female genital mutilation. It also aimed to address the link between female genital mutilation and some unhealthy sexual lifestyles by men and women from practicing African communities.

Before this project, we had organised a series of training workshops and community outreach events to raise awareness in the boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith &

Fulham, Harrow and Brent.). Among the several issues raised at these events was painful sex being experienced by women that have been mutilated and stitched up, and the fear of infections, especially, HIV/AIDS from husbands who have sex with other partners outside marriage.

We organised two outreach events on this. The speakers during both events were clinicians who highlighted the reasons why the practice of FGM could be linked to the high rate of sexually transmitted infections in the African community.

These include during and post mutilation risks such as:

- HIV and other infections through group FGM rituals
- Partners going outside marriage to have sex
- Marriage to rich older men with many wives
- Anal sex to avoid pregnancy
- Anal sex within heterosexual marriages
- The practice of dry sex

Funded by Lloyds TSB Foundation

"The whole session was very informative and educative"

"We need research to back this up"

"We should invite more men to these workshops"

"Dry sex which is practised by many people from Africa should be given attention - may be organise a workshop on this topic"

" You should include basic HIV awareness in future workshops"

Personal Skills Development

"Quite empowering, interactive and a good eye opener"

"The practice interviews and presentation skills were very good"

"I learned the importance of volunteering"

"I found the information on how to depend on myself and start my own business very helpful"

"I have learned that you can start a business with small capital and be successful"

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

Personal Skills Development

THIS PROJECT AIMED to organise a series of personal skills development workshops and seminars to enable our volunteer community advocates and beneficiaries of our health project to find employment or set up their own businesses. The project covered topics on volunteering opportunities, curriculum vitae writing, interview skills, project management, and personal empowerment skills, effective presentation and communication skills, business planning basics, and practice interviews. The programme was run over three weekends.

The participants represented women from six African countries: Angola,

Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Zimbabwe.

We encouraged beneficiaries by giving them volunteering opportunities to support victims of female genital mutilation. This gave them the opportunity to assess counselling, community advocacy and social work as likely areas of employment and further training. We also gave letters of reference to those that volunteered for us, and those we prepared for interview. Two beneficiaries got jobs in the course of the training. After the training sessions, two others got part-and full time employments. But two beneficiaries decided they were better off going back to school.

We are actively seeking further grants to expand and extend the project.

Funded by European Social Fund Fast Forward Grants

Africa

THROUGH OUR COMMUNITY Involvement Programme, we have started consultative meetings with prospective partners in the in six African countries we propose to work in: Nigeria, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania. We have during this time developed a comprehensive Community Involvement Institute to enable us commence our work with the rural and urban-poor communities in these countries.

The primary aim of the Community Involvement Programme is to encourage

African women, men and youth to harness the natural and human resources in their communities for their collective development.

Through support for community initiatives, the programme will draw on the expertise of members of the community to address issues of poverty, health, education, the environment, disability, gender inequity, orphans, widowhood, violence, gender violence, community safety, conflict and peace management.

The first series of CII's in each of these countries will run from **April - November 2006**.

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2005

INCOMING RESOURCES 2005

Grants Received (Restricted)	2005	2004
Awards for All	4,900	0
African Communities Project	0	5,000
Big Lottery Fund	1,999	0
Bridge House Trust	4,950	0
Refugee Community Development Fund	2,470	0
Lloyds TSB Foundation	2,500	0
Kings Fund	5,000	0
Renewal Community Chest	3,000	0
European Social Fund (Fast Forward Grants)	8,892	0
Donations	0	50
Total Grants Received	33,711	5,050

Grants Expended

Direct Charitable Expenditure	31,155	4,710.33
Management and Administration	75	0
Total Grants expended	31,230	4,710.33

Fund balances brought forward 4,557 339.67

The above is a summary of the Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2005. There were no recognised gains and losses for 2005 other than those included in the statement of Financial Activities. The full accounts have been audited and the Auditor's report was Unqualified.

**Board
Members**

Network

Funders

Board Members

Annie Mubanga - President
Margaret Zimba - Vice President
Susan Mbugua - Treasurer
Mary Kanu - Secretary
Grace Macauley - Member

Network

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
Environment & Health Action Network,
UK & Kenya
Sizanani Africa
Zimbabwe Women's Network
Women Environmental Project, Nigeria
Policy & Development Centre, Nigeria