The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Mitigating the Problems of HIV Positive Women in DebreMarkos District

BehailuMulate(MA)
College of Social Science and Humanities, DebreMarkos University, P.O. Box 269, DebreMarkos, Ethiopia, E-mail: behailu328@gmail.com

Abstract
Despite the budding interest in the study of the problems of HIV positive women, it is surprising that very less empirical research has actually been conducted on this area of study, especially from the feminist perspectives. Previous research works have focused on the causes and the impact of HIV/AIDS. These studies focus on the economic causes of HIV AIDS and the psycho-social problems of HIV positive women. But none of them had fully addressed the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problems of HIV Positive women in Ethiopia. Due to this research gap, it is particularly important to investigate the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problems of HIV Positive women in Ethiopia. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to discover the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problems of HIV Positive women in Amhara Region of Ethiopia. By doing so the present research aimed to fill the gap between the previous studies and the current facts about the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problems of HIV Positive women in Ethiopia.

1. Introduction

A study conducted by gender and development group (2004) shows that, HIV/AIDS poses an unprecedented threat to human welfare and socio-economic development. In many regions of the world, including Africa, the Caribbean and parts of Asia, heterosexual transmission plays a major role in HIV infection and is therefore greatly affected by gender-based power relations and gender disparities. The epidemic is becoming increasingly feminized: globally, nearly 60 percent of people living with HIV are female. The growing feminization of the pandemic not only reflects women’s greater physiological vulnerability to infection, but also their social and psychological vulnerability created by a set of interrelated economic, socio-cultural and legal factors.

Gender inequality is a serious obstacle to sustainable poverty reduction and socio-economic development, in part through its impact on HIV/AIDS (Ibid). Research conducted by the World Bank shows that the more unequal the relations between men and women in a country, the higher its HIV prevalence rates. For example, in South Asia, where the epidemic is in its early stages, the low status of women has been identified as one of the main risk factors. Because the epidemic is largely fuelled by gender-based cultural, social, economic and legal vulnerabilities and risks, addressing the interconnections between gender inequality and the risk factors for infection or the burden of care can yield significant payoffs. All development programs, and especially HIV/AIDS interventions, can contribute to a sustainable response to the epidemic if such programs and interventions recognize and address gender-based inequalities, risks and empower women.

According to UNAIDS, one of the key lessons learned from the fight against HIV/AIDS is the need to address gender inequality, which is “a contributing factor to the epidemic and needs to be addressed in the long term.” Thus, approaching HIV/AIDS programming from a gender perspective would improve the effectiveness of national HIV/AIDS control strategies and international actions in support of national strategies.

In Ethiopia women faced political, social and cultural challenges that undermine their human worth and dignity. They suffer from economic poverty, social discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and cultural subjugation and HIV/AIDS Pandemic. Despite women’s numerical significance, and their remarkable contribution to the economic development, are place to the disadvantage position with no or weak authority and decision making power in the control and management of resources, and in social affairs. Such inequality emanated from the traditional norms
and values adhered by the majority of the rural community. Due to these social, economical and cultural reasons, women are highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection too reference is needed (Arowolo, 2010).

As far as these diseases concerned, a study of women and girls by CVM (ComunitaVolontariper il Mondo) (2004), indicates that Ethiopia is one of highly affected countries by HIV/AIDS Pandemic. Some reports reveal that nearly 1.5 million people in Ethiopia are currently living with HIV/AIDS. According to the 2007 single point estimation, the national prevalence rate is 2.1 of which 38% is just from Amhara region; the prevalence rate of the region is also 2.9 % which is more than the national prevalence 2.1%. In Amhara region the AIDS epidemic is highly affecting women and girls in increasing amount; general prevalence rate of women is 3.2% which is significantly greater than male prevalence 2.2%.

Thus, in order to tackle this problem in general and to prevent HIV/AIDS epidemic in particular and thereby empowering women economically, socially and politically were the concern of many international non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions.

As far as empowerment is concerned, in response to the prevailing situation that undermine women’s human worth and dignity “Women empowerment project” was implemented in different regions of Ethiopia by different civil society organizations (CSOs) and different humanitarian non-governmental organizations. A study conducted by gender and development group (2004) shows that, to date the WB has contributed approximately US$1.7 billion to fight the pandemic. The extent to which these resources contribute to a sustainable response depends on how well the work addresses the gender-based cultural, social, economic and legal vulnerabilities and risks that fuel the epidemic.

In addition to this, ComunitaVolontariper il Mondo project was one of non-governmental organization that was implemented and contributes a lot in six districts of Amhara regional State by giving attention for HIV/AIDS prevention. Hence, the very purpose of this study is to investigate the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problem of HIV positive women in Debremarkos district. Therefore, the overall objective of this study was to investigate the role of non-governmental organizations in mitigating the problems of HIV positive women in the study district.

2. Research Methods and Materials

This research has employed qualitative research approach. The rationale to apply this approach is mainly associated with the purpose of the study and the merits of the qualitative approach to attain that purpose. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), qualitative research is important to describe and display phenomena as experienced by the study population, in fine-tuned detail and in the study participants ‘own terms. Strategies provide specific direction for procedures in a research design (Creswell, 2003). For this study phenomenological design has been used. Martens (2005), highlights phenomenology as an individual’s perception and meaning of an event or experience. The emphasis is to understand the experience or phenomenon from the participations points of view. Phenomenology is a qualitative research that tries to discover the meaning, perception, perspectives, understandings and feeling of an individual or group of a particular extent or experience (Mertens, 2005). In this study, both primary and secondary sources have been utilized to address the stated objectives and to answer the basic research questions. The primary data has been collected from the study area using in-depth interview. On the other hand, secondary data were collected from books, reports, magazines and internet sources for the purpose of literature.

It is obvious that while conducting research, data collection is mandatory. Hence, instruments of data collection are tools through which data would be collected from various sources (both primary and secondary) for further analysis of the issue under study. For this study interview (in-depth interview and key informant interview) have been employed as an important data gathering instrument. To select the participants of this study, purposive sampling technique was employed in this study.

The information from the interviews, which had been combined in the form of notes, was organized according to themes. Method of data analysis in phenomenological research uses in-depth interviews with people who have experienced the phenomenon. Leadly and Ormrod (2005) see data analysis of phenomenological study is the identification of common themes in participants’ description
of their experience. Though this method was lengthy and time consuming yet, it helps to get verbal data. Gathering information in this way encouraged participants to articulate their life experiences.

4.7. Results and Discussions
4.1 An overview of participants Profile
Table 1: Participant Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Means of livelihood before intervention has been carried out</th>
<th>Means of livelihood after intervention has been carried out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Cooking the pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Worker (laborer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Daily worker</td>
<td>Selling bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Selling bread</td>
<td>Mini shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daily worker</td>
<td>Mini shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Daily worker</td>
<td>Selling of charcoal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No business at all</td>
<td>Selling of food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. Almost all participants provide similar response regarding the changes on their livelihoods before and after the programs intervention as well as the effectiveness of the program intervention. That is why the researcher is obliged to take only ten participants.

From the above table, it is clear that majority of the participants were found in the age between 29-35 who are the most productive sector of the society and most vulnerable group of the society for HIV/AIDS. Similarly the World Bank report (2004) shows that the most productive sector of the society were exposed to HIV/AIDS and other epidemic diseases. This indicates that HIV/AIDS targets on the most productive sector of the society and thereby affect the overall productivity and development of the country.

In addition to this, the table shows that majority of the participants are single in their marital status. This is due to that as the researcher interviewed most of the participants revealed that, they are engaged in prostitution for a long period of time and their children is the outcome of it and informal marriage as well. Moreover, the table also shows that majority of the participants were illiterate and uneducated. Thus lack of access to education and training has negative impact on the life of women and thereby expose them to HIV/AIDS and other related diseases.

Furthermore, from the above table it is not difficult to judge that before NGOs’ intervention majority of participants livelihood(means of subsistence) were daily laborer that un able to feed themselves as well as their families. In line with this the participants forwarded that life was too destitute before the organization provides valuable assistance for us. In contrary to this, after the organizations intervention, almost all participants livelihood undoubtedly changed. They further forwarded that the organization humanitarian service dramatically changes their life and their families as well particularly in economic and social dimensions.

Above all, the researcher try to conclude that international humanitarian organization plays a significance role in alleviating the problem of HIV/AIDS positive women by providing training to the community, financial support, material support and educational support for their children.
Table 4.2 Profile of Key Informant Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Position/Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Key informant 1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Women and youth director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Key informant 2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1st Degree</td>
<td>Family guidance officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Key informant 3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1st Degree</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS expansion monitoring director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Key informant 4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS expansion monitoring Vice director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Type of Services Rendered By the Organization and Women Empowerment

4.2.1 Awareness Creation, Training and Women Empowerment

As key informants forwarded that, though the some programs will phase out, currently nongovernmental organizations play a decisive roles in making people aware of the importance of achieving gender equality, facilitate training, follow up training and this intern has positive impact on the life of women. As far as awareness creation and training is concerned, the organizations continuously provide training and increased awareness of parents and communities about the value of educating girls, encourage influential members of the government and community to speak up about AIDS and provide active leadership, offer financial, social support and training and education opportunities to female AIDS orphans to prevent a recurring cycle of poverty and infection, and provide training on reducing the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS at national, regional and local levels and involve the media.

Thus, one can understand that the above mentioned services rendered by the organization can empower women in one or in another direction. In this respect, woman who was 29 old explained her life situation before and after the organization program intervention in awareness creation and training in the following ways:

*Before the program has been delivered (awareness creation and training), I was a women that has no relation with somebody else. I always segregate myself from the nearby community and aspire to die. Indeed I fear the nearby society and these societies have no positive attitude towards me and my children too. Consequently, many times I was eager to kill myself.*

*However, after the program intervention, I am to say many thanks for the services that the organization provides for me and my families. Today the organization comes up with continued efforts for advocacy, sensitization, and educational campaigns for attitude and behavioral change. Indeed, many of the negative attitudes of the community about HIV/AIDS Positive women and men have been dramatically changed. Consequently, I mix with the nearby community easily and build social capital and empower myself (participant 1).*

From this one can generalize that the organization program is vital in alleviating the problem of HIV/AIDS Positive women through awareness creation and training.

In similar vein, woman who was 35 old explained her life situation before and after the organization program intervention in awareness creation and training in the following ways:

*Before awareness creation and training is rendered for me and the community I seem like a tortoise covered by shell. That means I always hide myself from the community. This is due to that most societies have wrong assumption that HIV/AIDS can transmit from one individual to the other individual through eye contact, non-sharpen material exchange, through shaking of hand, sleeping together and feeding and drinking together. In contrary to this, after awareness creation and training has been delivered by the organization to me and the community unexpected change has brought among us. Of these changes socialization is the primary one that avoids my fear and frustration. Moreover, I easily mix with the nearby society and made Equipand traditional Edir (participant 2).*

Thus, one can understand that women were marginalized from the community before training and awareness creation as a strategy is proposed by the organization. But after the organization
increases awareness about HIV/AIDS epidemic and offer training on this area, women were socially empowered.

Generally, the training program and awareness creation strategy of the organization encompasses provide sex education to both girls & boys, starting at an early age, before they become sexually active, educate adults, adolescents, and children about gender relationships, negotiating safe sex, and the rights of both men and women to request condom use, or to say “no” to unwanted or unsafe sex, provide training to educators, health care professionals, and government and community leaders about HIV/AIDS, make condoms accessible to all, including young girls, in ways that do not stigmatize users for sexual activity, encourage open discussion of sex, focusing on educators, parents, health care professionals, and government/community leaders, train authorities to be more sensitive to issues regarding violence against women and encourage community groups/organizations that deal with violence against women to join HIV/AIDS projects, and support the formation of such groups. Above all, the training and awareness creation program of the organization has significance effect on the life of women and thereby socially empower them.

4.2.2 Financial (economic) support and women empowerment

While it can be seen that definitions of women’s empowerment have, from the outset, encompassed an economic dimension, this dimension has become increasingly visible within the international policy discourse in recent years. The Beijing Platform for Action spoke of the need to promote women’s economic independence, including employment, and ‘ensuring equal access for all women, to productive resources, opportunities and public services’. The Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and women’s empowerment adopted an increase in women’s share of non-agricultural employment as one of its indicators of women’s empowerment. ‘Full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people’ were later added as a target in relation to the overarching MDG on halving extreme poverty. Thus, in order to empower women economically and find their own means of subsistence the organization provide 2524 birr for each HIV/AIDS Positive women and other vulnerable group of women. As the view of Key informants the money that the organization provides for each HIV/AIDS Positive women has circular nature. That means the money will be financed for women until they become self sufficient and afterwards the money will be transferred to the other women who are not getting it before. As far as the effectiveness of the program is concerned, some key informants forwarded that even thought we have financial problem, man power problem and government intervention on the service that the organization render, the existing program undoubtedly change the life of women and empower them economically.

In similar occasion, woman who was the age of 32 explained her life situation before and after the organization program intervention in financial support in the following ways.

I was an irregular daily laborer in DebreMarkose University with daily allowance of 20 birr and I used this money for my family consumption including for education. Life was very difficult to manage my family especially to full fill my children’s needs and interests. But after NGOs provide 2524 birr I transferred my means of livelihood from daily worker to selling of tella (3 times a week) and get 80 birr profit for each day. Then, when I compare the previous life with this day, there exist a formidable or tangible gap. This is due to that, at this movement though I am not lived in luxurious life I and my family are not found in bad situation (participant 4).

From this, it is possible to conclude that even though the funds that the organization provided for women is not too much, it brings a visible change in the life of women economically and it empowers them financially.

4.2.3 Education, material support and women empowerment

Regarding educational and material support, key informants forwarded that the organization is currently provided educational and material support for children’s and daughters of HIV/AIDS positive women. The services rendered by the organization include, improve women’s access to education, providing instructional materials like exercise book, pen and pencil as well. Thus, the
organizations assistant of children’s and daughters of HIV/AIDS positive women in areas of education and material has directly or indirectly benefited the parents and thereby empower them.

Here, woman who was the age of 34 explained her life situation before and after the organization program intervention in areas of education and material support in the following ways.

*I had three children and one additional orphan child and a total of 5 families. Our means of livelihood depends on by selling bread. Three of my children’s have access to education not including the orphan one. Although three of my children’s have access to education, available materials are not fulfilled for them. Consequently, my children encountered a problem of academical achievement and the orphan one faced a problem of having access to education. This is because of my limited income and money to finance them.*

*In contrary to this, after NGOs provide 2524 birr for me and assist the orphan one educationally and materially, our means of livelihood dramatically changed from selling of bread to opening of a shop. This transformation enables me to assist my children including the orphan one educationally and materially. Indeed, currently my families are found in a good situation except my health problem and I am interested to say many thanks for NGOs (participant 3).*

Generally, in areas of education and material assistant the organization plays a great role for children’s and daughters of HIV/AIDS positive women including the orphan child and this in turn has a positive implication on the life of women (empower them economically, socially and materially).

**References**


Study of women and girls survey in Bahirdar, east Gojjam, South Gondar, facilitated by CVM, 2004


