

▶ Fighting Violence against Women in Latin America



Raising awareness of violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women

► Counterpart

La Coordinadora Nacional de las Mujeres Negras (CONAMUNE; the National Coordinator of Black Women) is an Ecuadorian organization promoting the empowerment and political participation of women of African descent at the national level. The organization is based in Quito with provincial offices in Pichincha, Esmeraldas, Guayas, El Oro, Imbabura, Carchi, Los Ríos, Sucumbíos, Orellana and Pastaza.

The foundation for Afro-Ecuadorian Social Development, AZUCAR, which is also a member of CONAMUNE, coordinates the activities in the Andean region for RED MAAD, the African Network of Latin American and Afro-Caribbean men and women in the diaspora.

► Cooperation

Since 2010, the work of CONAMUNE and ComVoMujer has been directed at sensitizing the national authorities, particularly those located in the provinces of Imbabura and El Carchi, to the massive problem of violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women.

In order to make violence “visible” – including for those who may not want to see it - a pilot project was launched to train members of CONAMUNE to collect data on the different forms of violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women and to enter the information into a database.

The process also strengthened the leadership skills of the participating women. Now, they themselves can carry forward the political dialogue with national authorities to promote coordinated action to prevent and combat violence against women at the provincial level.

The project involved sensitizing and training 20 CONAMUNE women on the topic of gender-based violence to collect data to populate the database mentioned earlier. These women, now having real ownership of the methodological tools, conducted interviews to establish a baseline on the status of Afro Ecuadorian women. Their study showed the different forms of violence experienced by 950 African-Ecuadorian women from 52 communities in the Chota Valley, within the Provinces of Imbabura and Pichincha. For the first time, the historical and structural dimensions of violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women in the two provinces were documented.

► Lessons Learned and Impacts

The baseline study shows the raw and unvarnished reality of various forms of violence perpetrated against Afro-Ecuadorian women. Due to their ethnicity, their economic situation (they often live in poverty and extreme poverty) and the mere fact that they are women, the level of oppression and discrimination these women experience is often incomparably high.





At the same time, the baseline study also serves as a tool which provides guidelines and recommendations for political action to fight for the right of Afro-Latin American women for a life free of violence.

Importantly, the study was successful not only for its content, but also for the way in which the research was conducted. In order to create a document that reflected the Afro-Ecuadorian women's diverse perspectives on the fight against gender-based violence, it was important that they themselves became part of study. This was all the more important because they will use the study as a starting point for future political action and advocacy.

The Afro-Ecuadorian women were involved in all phases of conducting the study: in formulating the working plan, in adapting the methodology and tools to their own language and reality, and also in the last steps of publication and distribution.

The process had the additional and unexpected side effect that the CONAMUNE members, after completing the data collection, committed themselves to continue supporting the prevention and elimination of violence against women in their communities. As a result, a workshop was held

with women and community leaders to present the study and discuss a unified political strategy to combat violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women. Another workshop with social organizations and local authorities also took place, culminating in the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the prevention of violence against women. Moreover, the same women of CONAMUNE published their own first book on the subject without any assistance of outside "expert" organizations.

All this shows the degree of autonomy and the empowerment which the participating women and the surrounding communities have acquired. It also demonstrates the sustainability of the measures and makes it likely that CONAMUME's impressive battle against gender-based and racial violence will continue successfully in the future.

There are already early successes and agreements on the local level, particularly with the Secretaría de los Pueblos (Ministry of the People) and different social movements. In one of the agreements, the women were even given the role of monitors, whose task it is to verify that all parties comply with their commitments. This means that they are officially recognized in their duties of monitoring and accountability.



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