

Advocacy case studies

SUPPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

COUNTRY:	Central African Republic
THEMES:	Peacebuilding and conflict; sexual abuse and pornography; stigma and discrimination; violence and threats
ADVOCACY APPROACHES:	Building relationships; demonstrating good practice; educating community members; government officials: meeting with; research and analysis

The Central African Republic (CAR) has seen much fighting during its most recent crisis, triggered when armed groups seized power. Sexual violence has been an ongoing and prevalent tactic to intimidate communities, leaving many survivors traumatised. In addition, survivors often suffer stigma and discrimination within their own communities as a result of their experiences.

Tearfund wanted to help address this issue as part of its work in CAR, and spent time listening to survivors' needs to frame its response. Time and time again, survivors expressed a desire to find a safe space within their own faith communities. Tearfund recognised that because of their position in society, faith leaders could be highly influential in changing public attitudes towards survivors of sexual violence and help improve how they are treated. Tearfund therefore provided training for church and community leaders to help them tackle sexual violence in their communities and address the stigma surrounding it.

Alongside this work, Tearfund also built a good relationship with the UK government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) over a number of years, working closely with it as part of its UK Advisory Group. As a result, the FCO asked Tearfund to host a workshop in CAR as part of its Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. The workshop was attended by stakeholders from the CAR government, UN agencies, and international and national NGOs. It examined the issue of how to tackle the stigma associated with sexual violence in conflict. Tearfund subsequently took the recommendations from the workshop to a community group of women and men in CAR, including survivors of both sexes, to consult with them and receive feedback.

Recognising the significance of Tearfund's findings from the workshop, including the importance of engaging faith leaders, the FCO used the report to inform its public policy recommendations, and to shape its "Principles for global action on tackling the stigma of sexual violence in conflict". These Principles were launched at the United Nations General Assembly, where the crucial role played by faith leaders was highlighted.