

Cummings Africa Foundation Kicks Off SGBV Trauma Trainings

By **Tina S. Mehpaine** - January 7, 2021



Dr. Francien Chenoweth Richardson

The Cummings Africa Foundation (CAF) has commenced a four-day Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) trauma training for community leaders, healthcare professionals, policymakers and civil society organizations.

The training that began on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at a local resort (Musu Spot) in Congo Town, focuses on establishing key concepts and approaches to persons who may have very little or no knowledge working with SGBV trauma survivors and develop the capacity of those who are currently working in the SGBV prevention and response arena but require additional specialized training.

CAF action strategy in addressing SGBV trauma is through Assistance, Advocacy and Awareness (3As). CAF recognized that Liberia and the world continue to battle the scourge of COVID-19, but there is another crisis, rape and SGBV, that can no longer be taken lightly.

The teaching also focuses on bringing awareness on SGBV in Liberia and understanding SGBV causes and effect as well as identifying sense of reactions to trauma and supporting survivors of SGBV to rebuilding their lives and regaining their sense of dignity.

CAF is a philanthropic organization that provides educational and other supports to Africans, particularly Liberians.

Dr. Francien Chenoweth Richardson, a professor of Psychology from Immaculata University located in East Whiteland Township, Pennsylvania in the Philadelphia Area, developed the training. She also served as a lead facilitator for the workshop.

Dr. Chenoweth said SGBV is a public health crisis because rape is the second-highest crime in Liberia. "Yes, we have a pandemic going on right now, but I will consider SGBV issues to be even closer to COVID-19."

She highlighted abusers, batterers and perpetrators and strategy used by perpetrators to commit child sexual abuse.

During her presentation, participants shared their stories on how they have contributed to SGBV. "When I was growing, I lived with my aunt in Bong Mines Bridge, Burshrod Island. My aunt's boyfriend (name withheld) at night will be touching my breast and buttock, and whenever I told my aunt, she will say I am lying" says Blessing Moore, a participant.

A heated panel discussion followed moderated by Faith Akovi Cooper, Country Director of International Rescue Committee (IRC). During the discussion panelists were asked to share

with participants their role in combating SGBV cases within their fields of work.

In her introductory statement, Counselor Joyce Reeves Cooper said rape is a malice against humanity and as such, there is a need for collective effort to end SGBV. "Families members are major contributors to rape and SGBV because they do not report cases that usually happened in their homes."

She added that criminal Court 'E' was established to fast track cases but due to lack of funding from the government, they are weak in performing their duties. "Criminal Court 'E' should have two judges to hear SGBV and rape cases at all times, but because there is no fund, it has only one judge."

Oneta Roberts, Director SGBV/Domestic violence Unit Program for Rural Liberia, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), said women in rural Liberia always feel that they have been forgotten because of cultural norms and traditions. "Our main challenge is gang rape because it involved juvenile. Rape is wrong," she said.

Lena Cummings, Project Coordinator, Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), said WONGOSOL has always and will continued to advocate for women whether in politics or health. "We have conducted several training for men. We teach them the rights of women and how to support women," said Lena.

Eric Nadge, National Coordinator, Servant of Prayer (SOAP) Men's Ministry, said SOAP is not only working with men and boys, they have also started working with women and girls. "We create a platform that all girls meet and discussed issues that are effecting them in their various homes." Joseph K. Kowel, Supervisor, Liberia National Police (LNP), also said that rape is a crime against humanity and the role of the police is critical. He added that LNP lacks logistical support and as such, they have not been able to fully track SGBV cases.

Tina S. Mehnpainé

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