



## County Government of Mombasa

### MOMBASA COUNTY OPENS A TOLL-FREE LINE AND SETS UP A SITUATION ROOM FOR SURVIVORS FOR GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND REPORTING

#### Context and Challenge

Cases of gender-based violence have been reported to have increased across the country due to the stay-at-home directive and the curfew imposed by the government. In this period of the pandemic, the County Government of Mombasa noted a decline in the number of reported cases at the GBV Rescue Center (RC) at the Coast General Hospital and the police stations. However, there was a slight increase in cases that were being reported through other stakeholders within the Mombasa County GBV Technical Working Group (TWG). For example in March and April, the GBV RC at the Coast General Hospital reported thirty-five (35) cases while fifteen (15) cases were reported at the police station as opposed to sixty to seventy (60-70) cases that were being reported through other stakeholders. The sharp decrease in reported cases was linked to the curfew, stay-at-home and social distancing directives. GBV cases are sensitive and privacy is required during reporting. However, with social distancing at the police stations without a dedicated GBV desk, it meant that survivors were not assured of privacy as they had to speak louder. The low numbers in the reported cases were also attributed to the relocation of the rescue center at the Coast General Hospital to a different wing which was necessitated by the need to have a quarantine center within the hospital. The County through the GBV TWG saw the need to have a toll-free number that would support calls and SMSs for the residents.

#### Response and Action

The County reached out to partners within the TWG to support the toll-free calling and SMS line to support residents during this Covid-19 pandemic. The County also saw the need to set up a situation room to follow up on the cases through trained social workers. The situation room acts as a call center and also deals with survivors who walk in to report cases of GBV and information on the referral pathways.

Sauti ya Wanawake through their partners is supporting the toll-free number 0800 720 587 and SMS number 21094 for a period of three (3) months from May to July, 2020. The County is expected to budget for this initiative after July for



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sustainability. The process of acquiring and operationalizing the toll-free number took a maximum of two weeks. To ensure efficiency, the County has ten (10) people working at the situation room and has also linked the toll free number to various extensions for people within the TWG to ensure that a psychosocial tele-counselor is always available to receive a call from the survivors. Six (6) of the workers at the situation room are employees of the County while the other four (4) are volunteers from the community. This was informed by the fact that volunteers drawn from the community have firsthand experience in dealing with GBV at the community level and possess a certain level of awareness of some of the issues that are reported. The workers are able to complement each other well and work together effectively. The County has also facilitated the workers at the situation room with an allowance to cater for their meals and transport since they work in shifts.

For awareness creation of the initiative, the County has been involved in a series of sensitization activities and outreach within the sub-counties, using various platforms including; door to door sensitization through social workers and use of local radio stations.

### Outcome and Results

Through this initiative the County is now recording more reported GBV cases and they are able to work on referral effectively through the support of other stakeholders within the TWG. So far the County has been able to reach out to the survivors who are calling and also visiting the center for support and also has an efficient referral system in dealing with reported cases. This has also led to the County receiving calls from survivors of GBV from neighboring Counties.

### Lessons Learned

Some of the key lessons and challenges the County has learnt and faced through implementing this initiative include:

- The need to have a budget that can support some of the survivors who visit the center is key. Some cases are very sensitive, e.g those of rape, and the need for immediate rescue action is required. The County has faced challenges from some of the survivors who are unable to support some expenses like transport and thus the County wishes to establish a kitty to support some of the survivors. In the next phase, the County has planned to acquire a van that can support in transporting the survivors to police stations and hospitals in a bid to safeguard evidence to be collected for medical and medical-legal purposes to ensure that there is no loss of evidence as the due

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process is followed.

- There is need to review the viability of safe houses because whose unintended consequence of refuge accommodation in safe houses has been that safety is secured by fleeing rather than perpetrators of violence being excluded.
- There is need for continuous resource mobilization within the Department to support activities due to the constraints in budget especially during this pandemic period where all the efforts are concentrated towards health and other sectors.
- A strong TWG is very key because the County need not bear the entire burden, there is need to work together with stakeholders on the GBV referral pathway including gender champions and male champions.
- The County has also noted a rise of cases being reported from the neighboring County of Kilifi. Joint coordination and intervention of the two Counties is necessary.
- The County has also faced challenges where residents use the line to report unrelated issues. Further sensitization is required on the importance of proper usage of the line.

### Recommendations

- There is need to map out GBV hot spots within their jurisdiction and the related violence experienced in those areas because of the different dynamics that are experienced within different wards. This is also key to support stakeholder mapping and budgeting for various wards/sub-counties within the Counties. This is also key to support the development of appropriate and inclusive messaging even during awareness creation through various platforms. This is important to ensure that the message being shared is relevant and specific to certain areas.
- There is need to have trained personnel to offer psychosocial support to some of the survivors that call and also visit the situation room for help.
- There is need for Counties to work collaboratively in cases where there are jurisdiction issues and survivors need to be referred to their respective Counties for support.
- There is need to adopt a multi-sectoral approach when dealing with GBV for effective stakeholder participation and resource mobilization.