

**REPORT TO UN VAW TRUST FUND ON JOINT PROJECT IN SUPPORT OF ACTIONS TO
ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

TFVAW/LAC/GUY/RT&HSH/04

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cc: UNIFEM

Project Executors: Help and Shelter and Red Thread, Guyana

INTRODUCTION

Since funds were received in April 2005, this one-year project should have been completed and reported on in March/April 2006. We offer our sincere apologies for the delay in submitting what has in fact become an interim report and relatedly, in requesting an extension to the deadline for completion. This delay was caused by changes in the conditions under which we were working (see below) and the difficulty we had coming to a clear understanding of these changes and then working out what they meant for the project.

We now try to ensure that this report clarifies the following:

1. Our analysis of changes in the conditions and implications of the changes for the project
2. Our proposals for completing the project in a way that responds creatively to the obstacles met in order to arrive at the desired outcomes;
3. Planned activities completed and results obtained, as well as planned activities not completed and the reasons why;

The report on activities completed and not completed is included in an Appendix along with an outline of expenditure to date.

1. ANALYSIS OF CHANGES IN THE CONDITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROJECT

As the project application explained, the context of the project is a history of race conflict in Guyana between the two largest race groups, Guyanese of Indian and African

descent. The two main periods in Guyana's modern political history when this conflict led to communal violence were 1961-1964, with 1964 as the most violent year, and February 2002 to the present. For both periods there is a dearth of official reports. For the more recent period, reports were produced by ethnic organizations of Indo-Guyanese girls and women being sexually assaulted but the numbers and the nature of the abuse were disputed. There were also reports of the rape of Indo-Guyanese girls and women and a few more anecdotal reports of rapes of Afro-Guyanese women during the violence of the early 1960s, which have also never been addressed, as well as reports of women encouraging sexual abuse and violence against other women. Condemnation of this violence against women and girls has been slight except from Indian ethnic organizations documenting and condemning the violence against Indo-Guyanese women and girls (Red Thread being an exception, though even we did not act strongly enough). Even where cases of sexual abuse and violence against girls and women were acknowledged and documented by these organizations, they treated them as racist but not sexist. The project was designed as a step towards filling these silences.

However, in the period since we started working on the project the conditions of violent conflict in Guyana have grown more complex: criminal enterprise, the narcotics industry, and some political, race/ethnic organizing have not only become increasingly militarized but increasingly overlapping with each other. Allied to this, the fact that the gunmen operating in each of these areas are generally from one race/ethnic group even when their employers are of different race/ethnic groups has made it increasingly difficult to identify motives for any act of violence, including the violence relevant to this project. Most of the violence has taken place on the East Coast of Demerara, the area from which many of our contacts and the women we hoped to interview, come. In one of the communities (Buxton, which we described earlier as the epicenter of the violence) there is an increasingly heavy military presence. We found that increasingly both our contacts and the women we approached for interviews were either silent (silenced) and/or that "race loyalty" had led to a hardening of racial positions among them, leading to the real danger that the quality of the data gathered would be compromised. There were implications in the first place for our schedule and in the second, our approach.

Re the schedule: Table 2 outlines reasons why we took 8 months to complete the work we did, including the compilation of much secondary data. This took us to December 2005. However, with national elections (always a period of heightened tension between the groups) scheduled for August 2006, the situation in 2006 became more volatile and more tense. Beginning in January, there were a number of high profile assassinations (including one of a Minister of government, and several of media persons, one of whom was a key organizer in his ethnic group) throughout the year, all of which increased the anxiety, uncertainty and fear. The immediate run up to the elections created a still more uncertain political climate, with a polarised Elections Commission (GECOM) and Parliament, a series of legal challenges to the legality of actions taken by GECOM and to the election date, and deep dissatisfaction over the voters list among some of the opposition parties. In this context, one election ad that aired on a number of the television stations drew attention to the violence that accompanied the two previous elections, was explicit in highlighting the aggressors as African-Guyanese, and implied that two of the contending presidential candidates were implicated. On an almost daily basis, letters published in the three daily newspapers addressed the question of the racial division in relation to the political landscape. Discussions of the need for national reconciliation and how this might be engineered implicitly harked back to the country's history of violent conflict. In other words, for the whole period the context was one not only of violence and the fear of violence but of increasingly partisan discussion of who was responsible for it. Given this climate, we kept postponing the starting dates for the interviews, looking for a period in which the race/ethnic tension was easier, finally realizing around July that it was impossible to conduct fieldwork until after the elections had concluded. With elections held on August 28, the current climate can best be characterized as an uneasy peace. (There have been five or six fires of unknown origin since the elections, increasingly assumed to be arson arising from dissatisfaction about their results) In terms of our new timeline, therefore, given that the prevalent "wait and see" mood will affect the data gathering process even with our amended approach (see below), we propose to wait until the latter part of the year to return to the field to conduct the required interviews and follow-up discussions. We estimate being able to complete interviews by the end of December 2006, conduct some follow up discussions in January 2007, transcribe and analyse what we've gathered in February and March 2007, and provide results by April 2007.

Secondly, in terms of our approach. After long consideration we came to the view that conditions make it impossible to conduct primary research on violence against girls and women in race/ethnic conflict that relates to the contemporary situation. The same silences that our project intends to address are, in this very context, precisely the main obstacle to starting a conversation that begins with the present. Given that Red Thread is not interested merely in data gathering but in facilitating sustained encounters and collaborations among women across race divides, proceeding on this basis would have been deeply counter-productive to the intent of the project. Methodologically, it was not advisable to conduct interviews with women about race with a view to making connections among them across race, in a political climate that produced a lot of anxiety around questions of race.

Accordingly, we decided that beginning with an earlier historical moment provides another way into this extremely difficult area. Moreover, in many ways it is this period (the 1960s) that most commentators agree has been definitive in shaping the kinds of hostile encounters across racial divisions that have plagued Guyana since then. Since the over-riding aim of the project is to confront sexual abuse and violence against girls and women in race/ethnic conflict in Guyana, we propose proceeding as follows:

a) Carry out interviews to explore how race and racial identity come to have meaning for African and Indian women, their memories and experiences of the violence of the 1960s, what they have been told about the 1960s (and by whom/in what contexts), and what they “know” about racial violence in the present period. We also hope to pursue with these women some of the issues that have made this violence unspeakable – in other words, why is it so difficult to break the silence, and whose interests does the silence serve?

b) Analyse the secondary data we have gathered on both periods to see (i) whether and to what extent they report on violence against women; (ii) whether and to what extent they confirm the existence of separate narratives about the violence (ie, different narratives for the two race/ethnic groups).

Beginning the interviews with the violence of the 1960s rather than the violence of the present makes sense for the following reasons:

(i). As indicated above, what happened in that period has continued resonance today: it has never been adequately addressed and shapes race relations to this day, including relations between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese women. In some explicit and many implicit ways, the fear and anxiety surrounding the 2006 elections were linked to a memory of the earlier conflict.

(ii) The 1960s is arguably one of the most under-researched periods in Guyanese political history. Both in the books as well as on the streets, there tends to be an overwhelming silence around the mutual brutalities that occurred during this period. This has also led to different versions of the past – for instance Indian Guyanese and African Guyanese, when the matter is raised, tend to ‘remember’ different events, or to narrate the same event in a different way (an excellent example that made the newspapers several times this year alone, is offered by the mining town of Linden – African Guyanese recall the Sun Chapman ferry that was bombed, killing scores of African-Guyanese, while Indian Guyanese think of Wismar and the mass expulsion of and violence against their community). This silence around the 1960s has been even more pronounced in relation to the kinds of violence that women were subjected to. As conflicts from around the world indicate, ethnic and racial violence always has gendered and sexual dimensions, and our preliminary research in Guyana indicates that this was the case too. However, if there is little written about this period, there is even less work and conversation around what women’s experiences were, and how women coped. When the ‘woman question’ comes up, if at all, it is not really about women per se, but more about using the woman question to aggravate tensions, to get a community whipped up, to demonise the alleged aggressors in a highly generalized way

(iii) The fact that women and girls were sexually assaulted in the 1961-1964 period is not in dispute, although numbers were never officially established.

(iv) Given the distance in time from that violence, we anticipate that the question of victims and witnesses being silenced by fear would be less of an issue. What we will have to consider is that their recollections do not provide transparent access to the

'facts' of the past, and that the contemporary situation in the country will, in ways we will have to explore, shape their conversations about an earlier historical and framing moment.

(v) We already know that some written evidence is available, including records for May 1964, the period when 2 sets of rapes occurred – one against an individual Afro-Guyanese woman elder and one against many Indo-Guyanese women and girls – as well as other sources; for example a report by the British regiment sent to quell the violence of May 1964 provides some documentation of the rapes, while an official report and documents written by key Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese leaders (for example, a former President and a former Army Chief of Staff) provide contesting/opposing accounts of the same sequence of events in the 1964 violence: the latter are very useful in terms of demonstrating the existence of two parallel “histories” of the violence – one Indo-Guyanese, the other Afro-Guyanese.

(vi) Some potential interviewees, including some who experienced or witnessed violence against women in the sixties have been identified and approached and have agreed to give testimonies.

2. STEPS FOR COMPLETING THE PROJECT

Table 1: Amended objectives and activities to meet them

Objectives as in project application	Amended objectives where necessary, with comments	Activities to meet objectives/Timeline?
a. To ensure that there is a public record that provides as full as possible a picture of the extent and nature of sexual abuse and violence against girls and women, both Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese, in the race/ethnic/political conflict in Guyana.	a. To compile a document on sexual abuse and violence against girls and women in periods of heightened race conflict in Guyana which: i. Provides testimonies of victims and witnesses of this violence; ii. Explores and assesses the existence of opposing accounts, both written and oral, of this violence; iii. Considers the impact of the violence and the existence of different, frequently opposed ways of telling that history on relations between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese and in particular, between Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese women. iv. Offers some preliminary suggestions on ways in which we might work to address both the violence and the divisions among women from different racio-ethnic backgrounds that it helps to produce	a. Interviews: i. Given the extremely sensitive nature of this research, and the fact that there has been an overwhelming silence to date on the conflict of the 1960s and particularly on the subject of women's sexual exploitation during that period, we have decided to begin with a small purposive and exploratory sample of 16 women, eight each from Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese coastal communities. Snowball techniques will be used to identify women; again given the nature of the study this is less likely to result in refusals. Given the historical turn in the research, interviews will be conducted with women who were at least teenagers (13-14) in 1961. The interviews will focus on: women's experience of race growing up, paying close attention to the families and

		communities they were a part of; on their memories, experiences and what they were told about the 1964 riots; on sexual violence against women and girls and any other reported incidents of sexual violence; on how this affected them; on their sense of why it is so difficult to talk about these issues All interviews to be completed by the end of 2006, follow up discussions in January, transcribed, edited and analysed by April 2007. If victims or witnesses agree to be photographed or videoed, this will be done within the same time frame.
b. To bring the issue up from underground and to force it onto the national agenda.	b. To bring the violence and the polarisingly different accounts of the violence up from underground and force them onto the national agenda.	An advocacy team is in the process of being assembled, although it does not yet include any victims or witnesses. The team and the material will be in a sufficient state of readiness to launch a public campaign in February 2007.
c. To empower the girls and women who have been victims to see themselves without shame and to	c. No change.	This will be addressed via the campaign referred to above.

find their own ways to demand justice.		
d. To begin to change attitudes in their communities so that the girls and women are seen as victims and not as having brought shame on their families.	d. To begin to change attitudes in the country so that the girls and women are seen as victims and not as having brought shame on their families. Comment: this objective is no longer limited to specific communities.	To be addressed via the campaign. In addition, the completed document will be delivered to key institutions.
e. To challenge and begin to change the attitudes of women who accept and even encourage sexual abuse and violence against girls and women of the other race.	e. No change.	This objective has already begun to be addressed within and through the network described at (g) below .
f. To take steps towards achieving improved implementation of the DVA as it stands while reviewing its adequacy and campaigning for changes if necessary.	f. No change.	Activities already in train. (1) We have endorsed proposals for changes in the rape law and will campaign for them. (2) We have begun training small units of community-based grassroots women trained in provisions of the DVA and will support them in their communities as they begin the work of advising and supporting women victims of domestic violence. (3)

		Work to date in the interior has shown that conditions do not exist for real implementation of the DVA; we are therefore planning to lobby Parliament and other organisations to take steps to address this.
g. To lay the groundwork for building a network of women from all ethnic communities, supported by men, who will consistently organize in defence of girls and women who are victims of sexual violence in race/ethnic conflict in Guyana.	g. To lay the groundwork for building a network of women from all ethnic communities, supported by men, who will consistently organize in defence of girls and women who are victims of sexual abuse and violence – at home/in the family, from strangers, or in race/ethnic conflict. Comment: Widened to address all victims.	In train. Have built network of women across race and begun a series of discussions on sexual abuse and violence against women and girls, – at home/in the family, from strangers, and in race/ethnic conflict.

APPENDICES

1. Table 2: Originally outlined activities which have been implemented and results obtained

Activities and objectives as outlined in application	Results of implementation
Activity: Meetings of Red Thread and Help and Shelter. Objective: To iron out arrangements for Help and Shelter's administration of the funds and the requirements for the narrative reports and accounts	Done; no problems
Activity: Assembly of project teams. Objective: To organize separate teams for the collection of primary and secondary data	Two teams were assembled: one for the collection of secondary data comprising 4 women, 2 with previous experience and 2 trained for the project; and one for the collection of primary data comprised of 5 women, all with previous experience. For both teams, the mix in terms of skills, experience, race/ethnicity and age is good.
Activity: Internal workshops. Objectives: To discuss with participants the issues underlying race/ethnic violence against girls and women in Guyana To provide practical training in interviewing victims of violence for those with less experience	3 workshops and 4 practical training sessions (for a total of 20 days) were successfully held. The internal workshops on the history of race/ethnic violence against girls/women in Guyana fuelled passion about pursuing the project.
Activity: Meetings with contact individuals and groups in the communities at the heart of the	(a) We identified contact individuals and groups for the more recent period of violence beginning in 2001, and these contacts agreed to facilitate

Activities and objectives as outlined in application	Results of implementation
violence and with individuals and groups that work in or with those communities.* Objective: To inform them of the project and request their identification of victims, witnesses and other key informants and facilitation of interviews	introductions to victims, witnesses and other key informants. (b) From contacts in the community described as the epicenter of the recent violence, we received credible reports of sexual violence against Afro-Guyanese women by an Afro-Guyanese criminal/military/political group; our contacts said they knew victims and we could get testimonies either from them directly or from people close to them. © Contacts in 3 Indo-Guyanese communities attempted to put us in touch with women and girls said to be victims and witnesses.
Activity: Purchasing equipment and materials. Objective: To ensure that we have available the equipment and materials needed for smooth running of the project	Purchases of equipment and materials needed made.
Activity: Compilation of incidents of sexual abuse and violence recorded. Objective: To bring together all recorded incidents from all sources since approximately May 2001	(a) By December 2005 each issue of the 3 daily newspapers from February 2002 to December 2003 had been reviewed and information compiled. However, the newspapers often did not state the racial origins of victims and perpetrators, although these could be guessed from the names of persons and locations. In addition, reports were not presented clearly enough to tell when there was sexual violence. (b) The Police were approached for their reports for the period February 2002-December 2003. Unfortunately since their records are not computerized only totals are available and we still do not have the promised break down of figures. (c) Reports of ethnic organizations were sought; only 2 had been compiled,

Activities and objectives as outlined in application	Results of implementation
	both by Indo-Guyanese organizations and one was for 1998; the relevant report was reviewed and information compiled A small booklet by an Afro-Guyanese male elder who was a former leader of an Afro-Guyanese organization was reviewed and information extracted.
-Verification of authenticity of victims, witnesses, other key informants identified by the contacts by brief interviews of 1-3 others in relation to each name provided. -To ensure, as far as humanly possible, that all incidents recorded in the final document are authentic.	It was at this stage that obstacles mounted: (a) First, we lost our most reliable contact with victims of the rapes in the community described above as the epicenter of the violence (he was a taxi driver and village activist who was killed in an accident). Although by then we had developed other contacts (all women), after a high government official said that he knew of the rapes they vehemently denied that there had been any rapes in the community. Reasons were fear of reprisal and a strong need to defend their community which was being collectively criticized and ostracized. In 2 cases the contacts grudgingly admitted that they knew of the rapes but placed the blame on the victims themselves and again refused to put us in touch with any. Repeated discussions were held in an attempt to persuade them to change their position but these proved ineffective. (b) Repeated efforts to interview Indo-Guyanese women victims were unsuccessful, with even the women who agreed to talk to us in the end proving evasive because afraid.