

Burundi study says coffee harvest linked to increase in gender-based violence

The April-July coffee harvest period in Burundi has been linked to increases in gender-based violence and the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Nairobi - It is not uncommon for women and children to be on the receiving end of both physical and emotional abuse during this period, CARE International, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in the country, said in a new report.

"Men were described as becoming more violent during this period as a strategy to scare women away from raising any issues related to money," the NGO said.

The coffee harvesting season is a period when men have extra cash in their pockets derived from the proceeds of sales to coffee associations, though it is usually women that do most of the coffee-picking.

CARE International in Burundi carried out research to assess the impact of the coffee harvest on families and women in particular. CARE said it would share the results of the study with development actors in the country in a bid to create awareness of the negative impacts of the coffee harvest on women.

Increased alcohol consumption

It said other negative impacts of the coffee harvest include: an increase in alcohol consumption; the interruption of school attendance; an increase in the workload of women and men, with little or no benefit for women; an increase in adulterous behaviour among both men and women.

The results of the study, CARE hoped, would help identify possible activities to mitigate these negative impacts on women, and also identify possible activities or approaches for preventing and reducing household conflicts.

The study - carried out in March in the provinces of Gitega, Ngozi and Kayanza - involved discussion with groups of women and men as well as individual interviews. Coffee is an important cash crop for many families in these provinces.

Ideas for improving situation

CARE said that through its in-depth discussions with women and men covered by the study, a number of ideas and opportunities had emerged with the potential to improve the situation of women, particularly in relation to coffee production.

These, CARE said, include partnering with local coffee associations - which are mainly made up of men - to offer training and support in gender sensitive approaches such as conflict resolution.

"Offering training and support in financial management and investment strategies would address the knowledge gap in these areas (something men pointed out during discussions)," CARE reported.

It said it would scale up peace and conflict activities such as supporting training in conflict resolution as well as supporting community level monitoring of conflict.

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