

## **Chiku's Story**

### *Rape Cases & Forced Marriages*

Chiku\* is a hardworking 23 year-old dressmaker and a first born in her family. She was the main bread-winner for her family when she ran a successful tailoring business in her village. Many young men had approached to marry Chiku but her priority was to care for her siblings, and hopefully as a devoted church member, settle with a nice Christian man later. All that has now changed; Chiku is living in hiding in Karagwe town in a rented house. She works indoors all day and is always accompanied even for short trips to the market. Chiku lives in fear and is hiding from a man who claims to be her "husband".

On her way home from work one day early 2008, Chiku was abducted by four young men wearing masks, blind-folded and forced into a car playing very loud music. Her assailants claimed that her "fiancé" had sent them to fetch her, yet she was not even in a relationship. She knew the person they were referring to, a wealthy married young man from the area. It turns out he had chased away his first wife and was looking for someone to care for his children. He had passed by her work place a few times wanting to chat, but she had ignored him. In response, he would curse at her and swear he would marry her. Nevertheless, she says it was not something she put to mind or took seriously. She barely knew him and assumed he was just drunk.

Chiku was forcefully driven to his home where she was locked in a room amidst her screams and protest. The men beat her, tore her clothes up to shut her up and she sustained bad injuries from these. Within a few hours her "husband" who at first tried to reason with her, raped Chiku with the help of the four men because she was fighting with all her strength. She was locked in a room with this man. Within 24 hours, her father and the police were able to trace and rescue her and arrest the man. By bribing the police, the man was released from prison same day. His four friends were never charged with any crime.

Chiku's aunt asked WOMEDA for help, and an 18 month journey of medical and legal processes began. The man tried to settle out of court claiming Chiku had agreed to marry him in a customary marriage. The man's father, a rich respectable village elder, offered Chiku's father a lot of money to avoid the criminal case which attracts a 30-year jail term or life sentence for rape of minors. Her father, though not a wealthy man declined the offer which most men in the area would gladly have accepted. This would have counted as dowry to the court. Many fathers 'sell' their daughters into marriage in this way, and WOMEDA has been doing advocacy on this issue.

Chiku lost the case early this year even though WOMEDA lawyers had given clear evidence. Her father was approached by a court officer to give a bribe he could not afford; her assailant could afford the bribe and thus the case was decided. This was a bad display of a corrupt justice system that oppresses the poor. The man who is now free has threatened to come back for Chiku; that's why she is in hiding. WOMEDA has appealed to the high court but this will take time. In the meantime, WOMEDA continues to give counseling support and will work for justice to be realized for Chiku and other women like her.

\* Names have been changed to protect the identity of the client