

GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE POLICY BRIEF

Addressing Negative Social Norms That Perpetuate Gender Based Violence: Policy Implications For Sustainable Engagement Of Girls And Women.

Social Norms:

Introduction and Origin

Social norms are defined as the informal rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies and have been extensively studied in the social sciences (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that govern what is and what is not acceptable in interaction or association with people (WHO, 2009). Norms determine standards of decency; commitment to family members and society at large; property rights; family members and society at large; property rights; conceptions of right and wrong and notions of justice. Norms are the building blocks of social interaction. Social and cultural norms highly influence individual and societal behaviour in a broad variety of contexts, including

how men should be treated, normalisation of violence against female gender, preferential education of certain genders, marrying girls at puberty amongst other norms as have been documented by several authors.

Social norms are often sustained by multiple mechanisms, including a desire to coordinate, fear of being sanctioned, membership in a group, or simply following the lead of others.

Studies over time have dug into the origin of cultural norms and a lot of theories have been advanced to explain this feature including; explicit arrangements where communities met and outlined their rules of engagement such as in places of work. This formed the origin of many laws applied in countries such as the side one drives on and speeding. Other sources include; relying on past interactions to guide new relations (Young, 2014)



Girls participating in GAA Advocacy meeting in Kwale County, Kenya

Social Norms and Gender Equality

Many development programmes have recently set out to address social norms, especially those infringing on girls and women rights. This has been advanced by the sustainable development goal number five of Gender equality. This has led to studies and programmes on how norms influence beliefs, attitudes, and actions that justify male dominance and reinforce behaviour and institutions that discriminate against women. A leading strategy has been that of engaging girls and women in advocacy. This includes making their voices integral dimension to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (Ellsberg et al., 2015).

Lessons from Girl's Advocacy Alliance project

The Girl's Advocacy Alliance programme

One such programme is the Girl's Advocacy Alliance (GAA) programme. This was a lobby and advocacy programme jointly implemented by three Netherlands based organisations namely Plan Netherlands, Terre des Hommes Netherlands and Defence for Children-ECPAT in strategic partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dutch Government (Dialogue and Dissent - Strategic Partnerships framework). The implementing partners were the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW); Women Empowerment Link (WEL) and Nyanza Initiative for Girls Education and Empowerment (NIGEE).

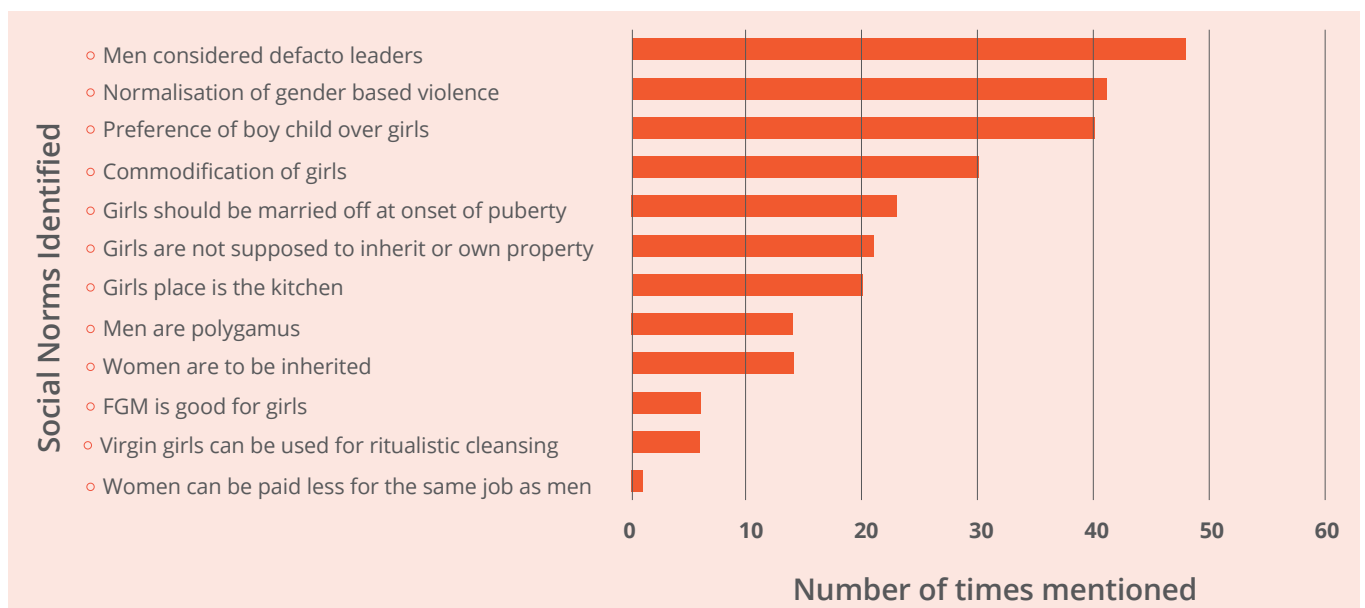
The programme aimed at ending gender-based violence and improving economic empowerment of

girls and young women in ten countries in Africa and Asia. In East Africa, the Girls Advocacy Alliance programme focuses on three countries (Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia) with additionally a regional focus, aimed at engaging with regional bodies such as the AU and EAC.

The GAA Programme in Kenya focused on economic empowerment especially affirmative action to increase decent job opportunities for vulnerable young women, while increasing the protection of vulnerable girls from sexual exploitation (through child marriage and commercial transactions) and child trafficking. Targeted areas are: Kisumu East in Kisumu County Matuga, Msambweni and Lunga Lunga sub counties in Kwale County and Kibera (urban informal settlement) in Nairobi County.

Men perceived as most influencing on perpetuating negative social norms

Data from the project learning agenda process indicated that communities perceive men as the greatest influencers of social norms that promote gender inequality. The most influencing social norms were normalisation of gender based violence against girls and women; girls and women roles perceived as limited to the household tasks (their place being in the kitchen); commodification of girls; denial of property rights or inheritance; and ritualistic inheritance of women. These findings were consistent with others studies by Ruxton in 2004 in Dehli noting men were resistant to change and promoted cultures that demeaned women and unpublished report by Salvation Army (2020) based on evaluation of their anti-human trafficking project in Kenya; both reports identify men as perceived perpetrators of human trafficking and link it to gender and power issues in decision making at household level.



List of social norms identified in GAA programme as most influencing GBV, child trafficking, child marriage and child sexual exploitation

Girls and women are most effective drivers of change

The GAA programme also established girls and women to be the greatest change drivers in these negative social norms, causing formation of new norms and shift in perception of males in old norms. This was also confirmed by another study by World Health Organization in 2009 Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women. The WHO report described successful change in social norms initiated in Nicaragua despite men resistance, leading to formation of new gender sensitive norms.

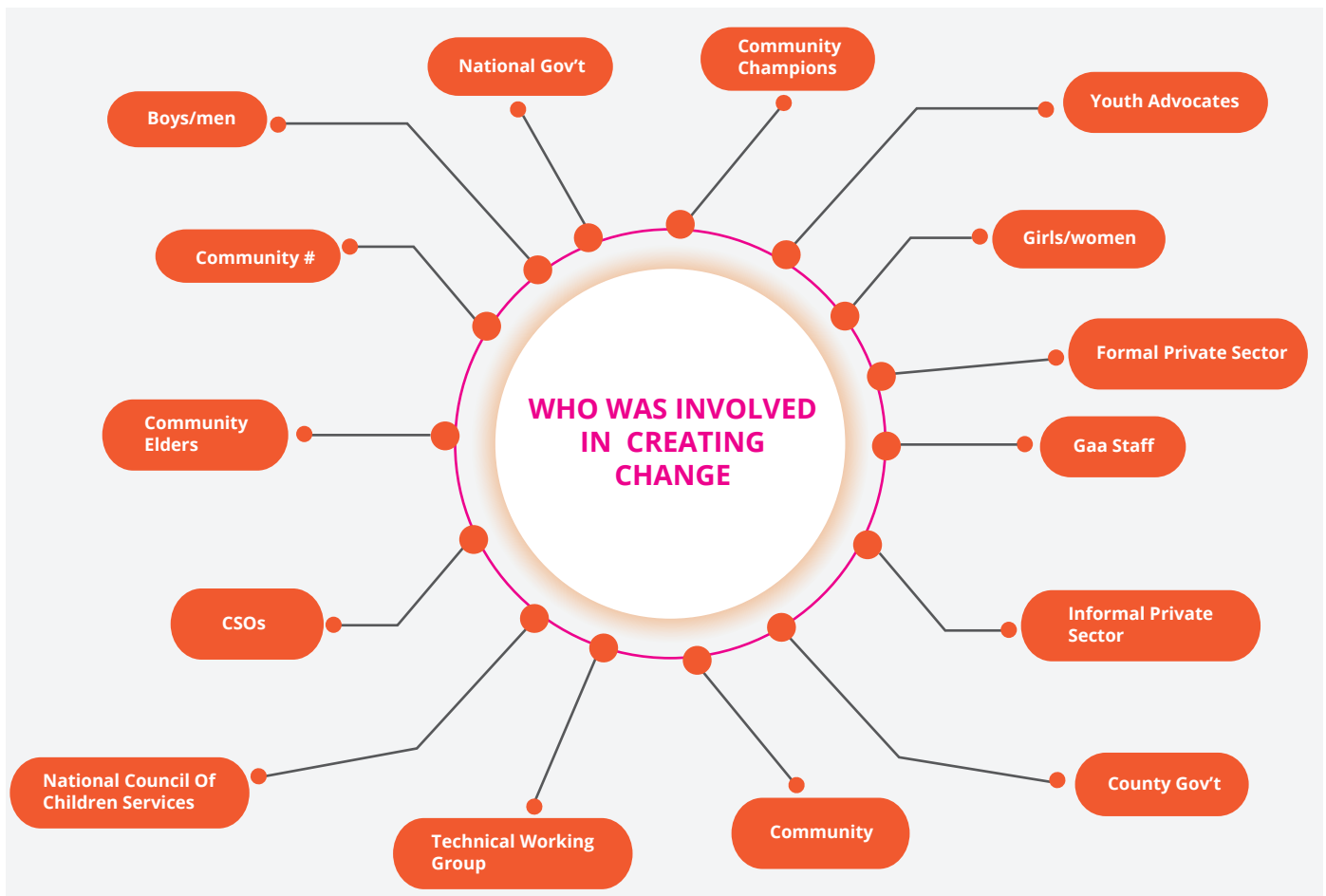
Men have become more visible in gender equality through awareness created by development programmes, but social inequalities and disparities in gender still exist. Studies indicate a growing number of men and boys are changing their attitudes and behaviours in gender-equitable ways through development programmes efforts (International Centre for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo, 2017 and Girls Advocacy Alliance 2020). For the most part, however, public policies have yet to adequately engage men and boys in overcoming gender inequality or addressing their own gender-related vulnerabilities (Barker, 2007).

Kenya as other world nations have not adequately involved men into their policy provision despite men being the power holders in need of convincing to share poverty equitable to women and avoid resistance in the long term (Mitullah, 2017). Kenya men still hold positive views towards gendered social norms such as gender violence, despite many years of sensitisation and programme involvement (Mitullah, 2017). However, few programmes have also spelled out incentives to men on why they would topple a system that clearly favours them (Ruxton, 2004). The result has been slow change to gender bias social norms (UNDP, 2007). The opportunity in involving girls and women as more effective change agents should therefore be seriously considered by policy makers and programme designers.

Gaps in girls and women engagement in Gender and Social Norms Advocacy

Data from the Girls Advocacy Alliance programme indicated that girls and women had moved from passive victim level stakeholders in the advocacy, to active and demanding self-advocates as indicated in the diagram and verbatims below.

Girl advocates from Mwangulu have been following up on early pregnancy and child marriage cases



through the Clinical Officer in charge of Mwena Dispensary... Experiences from Kwale County, Sept 2019

Juakali and Mkokoni girls club in September 2019 started the process of applying for a self help group registration certificate that will aid in acquiring loans and ensure economic empowerment in the club.

60 Girls Advocates in Seme and Kisumu West Sub counties from January 2019 start to hold peer to peer mentorship sessions to share experience, best practices and challenges as part of psychosocial support for each other . The forum also allows for experts invited as part of the mentorship process.

In December 2019, there is an increase in the number of girls in Kibera opening up on issues of GBV, CM and EE and taking action by participating more in community dialogues to change the norms that violate the rights of AGYW.

These and other signs harvested from the Girls Advocacy Alliance programme indicated the potential in girls and women to be self-advocate and to challenge the male dominance in perpetuating

social norms that hinder prevention of GBV and their economic exclusion.

Conclusion and Recommendation

While communities' knowledge, perception and practices have a strong hold on social norms, policy and programme provisions serve as important vehicles to fast-track required change. A gap identified in the GAA programme was that of empowering the girl and women led institutions or groups to sustainably engage in advocacy. Gender based advocacy programmes should intentionally put women in their design, implementation and monitoring. Further, girls and women led community level structures should be supported in form of investments, mentorship, review of development from a participatory approach that deliberately involves girls and empowers them due to the already established favorable results of involving girls in changing gendered social norms.

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