

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY 15 STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE

CLAPPING WITH BOTH HANDS



actalliance

Gender report 2012



Gender equality and women's empowerment are at the heart of ACT Alliance's vision for a better and more just world. They influence all aspects of the alliance's work from humanitarian relief to long term development and advocacy.

ACT, a global alliance of Christian churches and related organisations, views gender equality as integral to human rights and socio-economic growth, which can only be sustainable if women take part in the process as equals. ACT prioritises approaches to development that both address inequalities in women's access to political and economic structures and acknowledge the specific ways in which women make choices in economic activities.

Gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in many societies. While there has been progress on gender equality in some countries, women in many parts of the world suffer from violence, discrimination and under-representation in decision-making processes. When a humanitarian crisis occurs, gender inequalities are thrown into relief even more acutely. In such situations, women, young girls and boys, the most vulnerable members of the population, are exposed to an increased risk of violence – in particular sexual violence.

The title of this ACT gender equality good practice publication, "Clapping with both hands", signifies the need for women and men to be jointly engaged in strategies to promote gender equality and gender justice. It takes men and women working together to succeed. The publication brings together 15 case

studies demonstrating gender good practice from programmes run by ACT Alliance members and their partners around the world. It seeks to increase gender awareness, promote learning and trigger appropriate actions among all ACT stakeholders.

I would like to thank all ACT members who contributed to the publication, with special thanks going to the author of this report, Tracy Apoll, and ACT's gender working group for their valuable contributions to learning.

May we continue to do everything we can to ensure that gender equality and gender sensitivity are promoted in the work of all humanitarian and development agencies, so that all people – women, men, boys and girls – have fair and equal access to the kind of assistance they need, as is their right.

John Nduna General Secretary
ACT Alliance, Geneva, February 2012

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“That gender equality and women’s empowerment are goals in their own right and central to all other Millennium Development Goals¹ – must be more than a mantra. It must become a lived reality for women and men and boys and girls in all countries.”

Michelle Bachelet Head of UN Women

The promotion and achievement of gender equality is vital to meeting the needs of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people. Women represent a disproportionate number of the poor. They are more likely than men to face discrimination in healthcare, education, employment and the law. Women are also vastly underrepresented at all levels of government and often have limited opportunity to influence decision- and policy-making. Women tend to work

in the informal employment sector, which is often invisible to economic policies, government budgets and trade regimes.

Gender equality, as defined by ACT Alliance, is “the equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards”. Without gender equality, many individuals are unable to access resources, participate in political activities, influence decision-making in the home, enjoy positive

relationships with the physical environment and ultimately meet their full potential as embodiments of God’s image. Any strategy that aims to address issues faced by the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations must have gender equality at its core – in order to understand fully the underlying causes of poverty and injustice and seek out effective solutions.

Undertaking activities without regard to gender is called being

‘gender-blind’. Gender blindness creates the conditions for projects, activities, policies and decisions to be made without regard to the different effects they may have on men and women. It can result in interventions failing to meet communities’ actual needs, or monitoring and evaluation activities being unable to deliver accurate results. Gender blindness can also exist within organisations and governments when these bodies do not explicitly identify who makes

decisions or how decisions affect people differently.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), no country in the world enjoys full gender equality. Despite this, there have been many achievements in advancing gender equality around the world. This document provides 15 examples of such achievements, in the form of case studies that highlight the effective promotion of gender equality in the workplace, the church, decision-

making bodies and social attitudes. This document showcases the work of leading organisations that contribute to achieving gender equality through a range of projects, whether addressing violence against women, early marriage or women’s lack of access to, or control of, resources. Most importantly, it highlights the hope, strength, resilience and persistence of women and men who believe that their communities can benefit from increased equality.

¹ Eight international development goals that all 193 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organisations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015

Children at Ifo Extension refugee camp, Dadaab, Kenya

AFRICA KENYA, TANZANIA, SOUTH AFRICA AND MALAWI

MAN ENOUGH

ADDRESSING MASCULINITY IN THE HIV AND AIDS PANDEMIC

Women are at greater risk of contracting HIV than men and tend to be worse affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. But men play a significant role in the spread of the disease because of cultural norms and notions of masculinity. In order to address these issues, Canadian Churches in Action (CCA) has begun to train its partners in Africa to look at the pandemic through the lens of gender, with particular emphasis on the role men play in the pandemic.



Project title

Gender and human rights in HIV and AIDS education in Africa

ACT member

Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF)

Implementing partner

Canadian Churches in Action (CCA) in collaboration with Southern African AIDS Trust (SAT) African Partner Organisations

Funders

Presbyterian World Service and Development (PWS&D) Canadian Baptist Ministries United Church of Canada

Location

Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi

“Gender equality must be at the core of all our actions. Together we must energise the global response to AIDS, while vigorously advancing gender equality.”

Michel Sidibé UNAIDS Executive Director

Gender inequality the crux of the HIV crisis

In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 60% of people living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are women. Gender inequality and the violation of human rights make women and girls particularly susceptible to HIV. Women and girls often lack control over their bodies and information about HIV, while also having fewer resources to allow them to take preventative measures. Women face two main disadvantages in negotiating safe sex: their economic dependency and their lack of legal protection from violence. Certain traditions and customs, including bridal inheritance, polygamy and early marriage, place women in situations that increase their risk of contracting HIV, which can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Women's lives are also more affected by HIV than men's. In many situations, it is the woman's role to care for those who are sick or dying. It is women, often grandmothers, who care for orphans. Stigmatisation and social exclusion prevent women who have contracted HIV from seeking help or engaging in income-generating activities. Women who are widowed by AIDS can face property or custody disputes or be forced into becoming second wives to their brothers-in-law.

Despite increased awareness that women are more susceptible to HIV for social, cultural, and physiological reasons and despite the fact that women are now being infected by HIV/AIDS at a higher rate than men, many organisations continue to focus on promiscuity and 'risky behaviour' as priority areas for prevention. The fight against the pandemic largely overlooks gender inequality in social, cultural, political and economic spheres. Meanwhile, local or cultural constructions of masculinity can also play a large role in the spread of the disease. One particular constraint in reducing HIV infection is men's lack of engagement in awareness-raising activities that focus on their behaviour, masculinity² and the rights of women. The lack of focus on equality, coupled with a decrease in funding for HIV programmes, led members of Canadian Churches in Action (CCA) to start a programme to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on target communities.

Assessing agency capacity to address HIV crises

In 2008, CCA conducted an assessment of its African partners' capacity to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS in several communities. The results revealed that, despite good projects and

excellent intentions, few of the partners had adequate training or organisational structures to deal thoroughly with core issues in the crisis, including gender equality and human rights. Few partners had gender or human rights policies for either their own organisations or the projects they ran. Within the organisations, men tended to be in leadership and decision-making roles, while women tended to work first-hand on issues at the grass-roots level. At the project level, data was not disaggregated by gender, which led to weak analysis, evaluation, monitoring and project planning. The assessment exposed the need for an increased awareness of gender equality, with a specific focus on how men's behaviour and notions of masculinity contributed to the spread of HIV. Furthermore, it showed that those affected and/or infected needed to be empowered to exercise their legal and human rights.

Increasing capacity through participatory training

Once the assessment was completed, the focus shifted to training partner staff. It was crucial to the goals and objectives of the project that the African partners were involved both in developing the educational tools that would be needed and in implementing

² Masculinity "pertaining to men. It is used to speak of the roles and behaviour that are traditionally assigned to men and sometimes of the properties or characteristics of men", as defined by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in "Created in God's Image: From Hegemony to Partnership", 2010



A member of the Keishkama Trust in South Africa makes a point during a meeting on gender



Participants in a gender workshop in Tanzania relax at the end of training

Men's roles excerpt from toolkit Men's roles vary, depending on their relationship with others

This project focused on men as

- Husband and boyfriend
- Brother and cousin
- Father and uncle
- Friend and colleague
- Manager and supervisor
- Community leader and faith leader
- Stranger
- Customer
- Teacher
- Celebrity
- Sports star

Gender and human rights in HIV and AIDS education

Training modules

- 1 Introduction and guide for facilitators
- 2 Understanding human rights
- 3 Mainstreaming gender
- 4 Human rights and gender in organisations
- 5 Biblical references

the training. Although an agency was hired to facilitate the project and process, the partners remained active throughout. They guided the curriculum content, development and training; they participated in a training-of-trainers programme; and they continue to replicate the training at regional and sub-regional levels today.

In 2010, CCA produced a training toolkit containing five modules. It was launched at a five-day training-of-trainers workshop to prepare agency staff with community facilitation skills and curriculum knowledge so that they could in turn train others in their organisations and communities. The workshop brought together 26 participants from four African countries, representing 18 of CCA's partner organisations, attended the workshop. As follow-up to the training, CCA is working with its partners to identify ways to support their work and develop tools for measuring results.

Ensuring relevance in differing cultural contexts

To ensure that there was a high level of retention, a commitment to skills transfer and that content was culturally appropriate, the participants were required to bring three skills to the training: related experience in the training of faith and community

leaders in issues of HIV, human rights and/or gender; a good relationship with their colleagues and communities; and a good understanding of community dynamics, particularly relating to gender. Since many of the partners were faith-based organisations, a biblical resource module was included in the training and toolkit. The biblical module aimed to support trainers in linking gender and human rights with biblical references, including Bible passages, prayers and discussion-starters, all of which could be interwoven with the other modules. At the beginning and end of the training, each participant presented plans as to how they would replicate the training and share the new knowledge in their respective organisations and communities.

Addressing masculinity and male behaviour

Besides increasing awareness of how gender inequality and HIV are related, the project also set out to empower people affected and infected by HIV and AIDS to exercise their legal and human rights. To achieve this objective, the training and subsequent activities had a special focus on how men's behaviour and notions of masculinity have contributed to the pandemic and the violation of women's rights. Discussions

focused on two main questions: how can men best use their privilege and power to promote sexual and reproductive health, and how should men's roles in promoting reproductive health link to gender equality?

The key message conveyed was that men can use their privilege and power in several ways to promote sexual and reproductive health (SRH), especially in view of HIV and AIDS. The most immediate way in which men can promote sexual health is through responsible actions in their own sexual lives. Because of their gender roles, men often have power over women in sexual decision-making. With power comes responsibility. Men can use this responsibility to protect themselves and their sexual partners from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI), as well as unwanted pregnancies. Men also have power in the family, the community and the workplace. They can use this power to support gender equality and reduce women's sexual vulnerability.

Promoting gender equality must be central to men's roles in SRH promotion. Women's lower social, economic and political power is at the root of their greater vulnerability to HIV. Increasingly, HIV/AIDS is becoming a women's disease in Africa. In taking action on HIV, men need to listen to women, acting

as allies rather than protectors, and challenge sexist attitudes, behaviours and policies.

Lessons learned

Churches in Africa have been viewed as responding very slowly to issues related to HIV and AIDS and being too cautious in addressing human sexuality through education or prevention strategies. As gender and gender relationships are central to issues of sexuality, CCA decided to develop biblically-based resources to guide discussions, raise awareness and encourage action.

Conclusion

Within the first year of the project's existence, partners are observing successes that include policy changes, adoption of the message in church settings and active participation by both men and women at community level. The 26 participants from the initial training-of-trainers session have provided extensive reports on how they are applying their plans using what they learned about gender and human rights in HIV and AIDS. In 2011, CCA began preparing for a second training course involving more than 20 new African partners in various countries.

Contacts and further reading

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Canadian Churches in Action
<http://churchesinaction.ca/what-were-doing/hiv-aids/>

Silent no more: the untapped potential of the church in addressing sexual violence

www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/document/2011/20110321_Silent_no_more.pdf

Project title
Equality for Albanian women

ACT member
Bread for the World

Implementing partner
Useful to Albanian Women (UAW)

Funders
HEKS, Switzerland
EED, Germany
Caritas Sant Polten, Austria

Location Albania

ALBANIA

TALKING HOW PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS ARE CHANGING WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS TOUGH

Political and economic change marginalise women

Following the collapse of the socialist regime in 1990, Albania went through a period of profound political, economic and social change. Then, in 1997, the country experienced a financial crisis in which a large part of the population lost most of its savings and the economy collapsed. Earning one's living by legal means became increasingly difficult, unemployment surged and the underworld flourished. Globalisation, population increase, rapid urbanisation and migration made the situation more challenging.

Albania's recovery from economic, social and political instability has been slow and difficult, and the effects of this instability, especially on women, have been profound. Although women tend to be better educated than men, employers in both the private and public sector prefer to employ men in the few jobs that are available. Social problems and continued turmoil in political and economic life have affected gender relations. Existing gender relations favour men and stereotypes based on gender are deeply engrained in society. Women's status is traditionally low, and they are excluded from political and

cultural life. Violence against women is widespread, and women's vulnerability is exacerbated by poverty, above-average unemployment and the absence of property rights.

Social justice through a gender lens

The organisation Useful to Albanian Women (UAW) was founded in 1993 to inspire, encourage and support girls and women to defend their own and their children's rights against all forms of discrimination. In assessing the need for social justice in the capital city, Tirana, and eight other regions, UAW determined that unemployment and lack of education were among the greatest challenges facing Albanian women and that a concerted effort to promote gender justice was needed to address these challenges. The organisation designed activities and campaigns to improve women's status by raising awareness of the need for greater equality and helping women to access vocational training and employment opportunities.

Economic empowerment through self-help initiatives

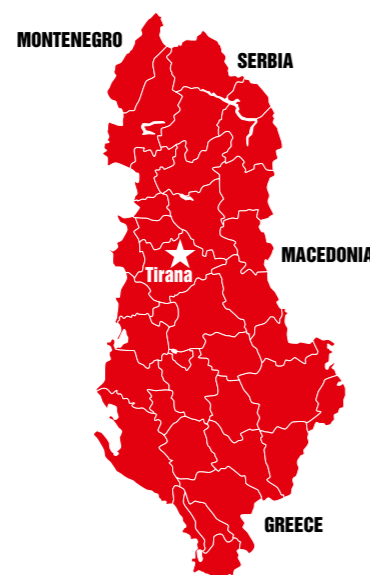
UAW was one of the first organisations in Albania to support women to find meaningful employment. It founded an

employment agency for women and girls with the slogan "Help yourself through work". It also established community centres with educational opportunities for marginalised women and children. UAW acts as an intermediary for women who seek work and prepares them for jobs by offering them training opportunities. After their training, women are awarded a certificate that is recognised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which are also taking steps to develop gender-sensitive employment policies.

Each woman who finds employment through UAW's employment agency receives a work contract signed by the employer and the employee. By offering education and work, women get a chance to create a better life for themselves and to live through a process of empowerment.

Individual and group support for trafficked women

A dearth of opportunities for women to find employment and meet their financial needs in Albania has resulted in an increasing number of women seeking marriage or employment abroad. Some of these women are promised jobs as domestic workers or in the hospitality industry, only to find



Over the past 20 years, Albania has seen many political and economic changes. These changes have contributed to the increased marginalisation of women. The organisation Useful to Albanian Women (UAW) is working to promote greater equality by raising awareness of the need for gender equality, supporting women to gain meaningful employment, providing counselling and assistance to victims of human trafficking and lobbying the government to create more gender-just laws and policies.³

³ Adapted from Bread for the World publication "Gender Mainstreaming in Practice"

“International Women’s Day is not a day to celebrate but a day to protest.”

UAW Campaign Slogan



Women take to the streets with loud hailers and banners

that once in their new country they are forced into prostitution. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, more women from Albania are trafficked than any other country in south-eastern Europe. Of those trafficked, almost 60% were tricked into prostitution and 35% were abducted.⁴ According to Save the Children, girls from Albania are amongst the youngest victims of trafficking worldwide: 80% are under 18.⁵ Because the trafficking of women in Albania is so widespread, UAW has joined other organisations to demand that the government take effective measures to control the problem.

The organisation participated in a campaign against the trafficking of women and contributes to the national strategy on the issue. It is fighting to bring the problem to public attention and promoting greater awareness of gender equality. It is also campaigning for the development of a successful national strategy to fight human trafficking.

Apart from advocacy and lobbying, UAW addresses the problem by offering support to the survivors of trafficking. This includes counselling and help in accessing shelters where women can receive vocational training. The organisation manages a telephone hotline for women, which provides information and counselling. A phonecall to the

hotline is often the first contact between a woman and UAW. Support for various women's groups started this way.

The organisation also facilitates groups in which women meet and discuss different issues, such as their education, health and psychological wellbeing. Group members have participated in roundtable discussions with representatives from the community, local government and civil society. Groups also participate in various cultural activities aimed at promoting women and involving them in the cultural and political life of the city.

Mobilising civil society

UAW also works to influence government decisions on domestic and international laws and treaties as they relate to Albanian women, by partnering with other national and international organisations, networks, coalitions and forums. Specifically, UAW promotes the use of a gender perspective on issues of domestic violence, trafficking of women, capacity-building and women's economic development. It also promotes cooperation between civil society organisations and governmental institutions.

In order to improve the situation of women in Albania, UAW has undertaken public campaigns against gender

inequality and sexual violence that also support the development of a women's movement. It has been carrying out awareness-raising activities to teach women about their rights and encourage them to reflect on their power and status – or lack of it – in society. This has stimulated dialogue about possible actions to change their situation, including women exercising their right to vote.

One of the largest campaigns UAW participated in was for International Women's Day. The campaign helped many people understand the day's importance in the Albanian context. The message "Not a day to celebrate, but a day to protest" was spread at the national level to encourage women to fight for their rights and raise their voices about the problems they face, including their lack of employment opportunities. National and municipal institutions supported the campaign activities. The event attracted considerable public attention and media coverage. Promoting a new image of Albanian women, the campaign reached many women and made them aware of ways to improve their status in society.

A second campaign was organised for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The campaign brought to the public specific

Contact and further reading

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UAW
www.uaw-al.com/html/about.htm

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Albanian gender profile
www.ifad.org/english/gender/cen/profiles/alb.htm

Creating economic opportunities for women in Albania: a strategy for the prevention of human trafficking
www.unifem.sk/uploads/doc/Albania%20report%20final.pdf

cases of women who had been violated or murdered. The campaign was largely supported by volunteers, who distributed leaflets and posters containing the stories of these women through the streets of Tirana. A notebook was also made available to the public, who were invited to use it to share their thoughts or report cases of violence against them or others.

Support for the campaign came from local and central governments as well as the Albanian Media Institute. The campaign was four days long; each day was named after one of the murdered women, and her story was the central theme of the day. The approach helped women to understand that domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon that must not go unnoticed and needs to be reported to the authorities.

Lobbying and advocacy for a gender-sensitive legal system

UAW also advocates for improvements in women's legal status. When cases of violence against women from the second campaign were taken to court, UAW observed the trials to ensure that procedures prescribed by the legal system were followed and that the stories were presented in an unbiased way in the media. The organisation also established roundtables and training sessions with journalists and judges.

In addition, UAW has been part of a coalition that fought for the implementation of an abortion law as well as one against child labour. It fought for the Family Code, a law that treats domestic violence as a punishable crime and obliges the spouse who committed the violence to leave the house and live elsewhere. In this way, the law protects and offers security for violated women. UAW also collected the signatures needed to submit an anti-violence bill to the Albanian parliament. It was the first time a bill was submitted through a bottom-up approach.

Lessons learned

Gender inequalities in Albania are linked in part to political and economic instability in the country, which has affected women more than men and made women more vulnerable as a result. To address the issues that Albanian women face, UAW learned that networking with like-minded organisations is crucial for the advancement of women's empowerment and gender equality.

Perhaps the greatest lesson UAW has learned is the one expressed by Sevim Arbana, UAW President. As Ms Arbana states, "It is possible to achieve change and to create a better society if there is the desire and the will to make a difference."

Conclusion

Although gender inequalities and patriarchal structures and notions continue to be accepted by both men and women, UAW is seeing changes. Both women and men are becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities in promoting gender equality through the organisation's educational and advocacy work. More women are getting involved in public campaigns and community actions. More are accessing meaningful work through UAW's employment programmes. And this is all contributing to wellbeing in the home, more women becoming empowered and fewer women needing to find employment outside the country.

For UAW, gender justice is integral to social justice and the formation of a democratic society. As a result of its work in campaigning for dignity, the empowerment of the poor and marginalised, and a just and democratic society, UAW has begun to raise the status of women in Albanian society. Today UAW is respected both inside and outside Albania as one of the country's most active non-governmental organisations.

⁴ www.ifad.org/english/gender/cen/profiles/alb.htm

⁵ www.childtrafficking.org/pdf/user/child_trafficking_in_albania_save_the_children.pdf



Children raise their hands for equality



Wearing the violet of the women's rights movement, Albanians put their names to an equality campaign



Boys learn valuable trade skills at a training centre for vulnerable youth



Girls express themselves through drawing at a community centre

BOLIVIA

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

HOME-BASED RESTAURANTS SUPPORT INCOME AND NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Project title

Ricomida promoting food security within an economic model framework

ACT member

ICCO & Kerk in Actie

Implementing partner

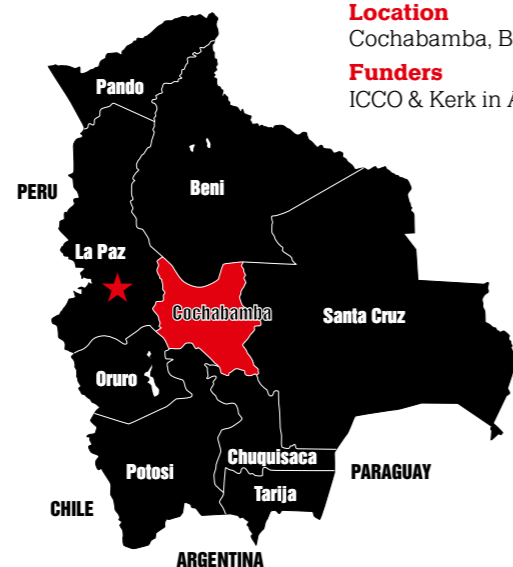
Instituto de Formación Femenina Integral (IFFI)

Location

Cochabamba, Bolivia

Funders

ICCO & Kerk in Actie



In Bolivia, malnutrition is simultaneously leading to undernutrition and weight gain. In an effort to address the root causes of both undernutrition and weight gain, the Instituto de Formación Femenina Integral (IFFI) is working with women to set up small home-based restaurants. These restaurants provide income for the household, contributing to the family's overall food security, and serve nutritional meals to clients as an alternative to fast food.

In addition, by enabling women to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the household, the restaurants afford women greater status and decision-making power.

Dealing with weight gain and undernutrition

Bolivia, one of the poorest countries in South America, experiences different forms of malnutrition. While 14% of children under the age of five are underweight, the prevalence of children who are overweight now exceeds those who are underweight.⁶ This might be linked to early childhood undernutrition as well as poor consumption patterns. If a child suffers from chronic undernutrition during the first two years of life, its metabolism is affected irreversibly. The child's chance of reaching its full physical, as well as intellectual, potential, is limited, resulting in short stature and a tendency to become overweight later in life. While Bolivia has been fighting undernutrition for many years, the fight against excessive weight gain and its related health risks is relatively new.

Women's ability to provide nutrition for themselves and their families intersects with their capacity to control resources and make decisions in the household. Many women work in low-paying jobs and are burdened with unpaid domestic work. Most are to some degree reliant on their husbands' incomes. Their shortage of financial resources and time contributes to their inability either to provide healthy food for themselves and their families or to ensure that they are eating a healthy diet.

Linking nutrition and income

Around five years ago, six women living in the Cochabamba area opened restaurants in their homes under the name Ricomida. These restaurants provided nutritional food in clean, hygienic facilities at low prices as an

alternative to the increasingly popular diet, which is high in carbohydrates and saturated fats and lacking in vegetables. In a country where it is common to eat two hot meals a day (one at midday and one in the evening), the potential client base was large enough to provide a viable income for the women. It also allowed them to balance their traditionally ascribed household and care responsibilities with a new role as income-generators.

To get the restaurants started, a women's training institute known as the Instituto de Formación Femenina Integral (IFFI) provided the six women with technical training related to running a restaurant, including food preparation and entrepreneurial management skills such as book-keeping, marketing and production. The purpose was to give the women the technical skills necessary not only to prepare healthy meals but also to run successful businesses.

Their training over, the women received seed capital from IFFI. They used the money to set up the restaurants, buying fixed assets such as stoves and cooking implements and other items, such as groceries, plates and cutlery. Once the restaurants were up and running, IFFI provided post-technical assistance to monitor and evaluate the restaurants' processes and ensure that they were meeting Ricomida's requirements.

Growth and independence

From the original six, the Ricomida association has grown to more than forty home-based restaurants and, in 2011, serves healthy meals to more than 20,000 customers a month. The restaurant owners are working to become independent from IFFI and

⁶ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACREGTOPNUT/Resources/Bolivia4-20-10.pdf>



Ricomida is a Spanish play on words meaning delicious **rico** food **comida**

thus exert more control over decisions affecting the association. In order to make the initiative sustainable, they plan to introduce an interest rate on seed capital for new restaurants, increase the membership fee and ask members to contribute 50% of the training costs.

The women have also set up a committee that defines the guiding principles for the association and outlines directions for Ricomida's growth. Through the association, women have been able to market and create an identity for their restaurants. They benefit from being able to bulk-buy ingredients to keep quality up and costs down. And their needs as business owners are also met by the association, which acts as a lobbying and advocacy body on their behalf.

Now we're cooking

The restaurants have had an impact on the women and their families that goes far beyond expectations. They are helping women meet many of their day-to-day needs, whether providing healthy food for their families, distributing household chores between family members, improving their own and their families' health or caring for their children while working. They also enable women to meet a number of more complex objectives by enhancing their ability to make decisions and negotiate power in the household, increasing their self-esteem, expanding their knowledge of economics and business practices, and giving them the skills to advocate for their rights as women and as business owners.

These restaurants have also had an impact on the wider community. People now have access to affordable, nutritious food, which improves their overall

health. Meanwhile, rural farmers are benefiting from the association's commitment to buying goat's cheese and bread at a rate much fairer than in the open market.

Lessons learned

The main lesson learned from this project is that not all women who want to start small businesses have the necessary entrepreneurial skill set. IFFI supports women to increase their capacity to run small businesses, but the issue continues to be a struggle as new candidates come forward.

Another lesson learned is that women entrepreneurs often assume both productive and reproductive or domestic work. It is therefore important that the training, timeframe and choice of business accommodates women's schedules and responsibilities.

Conclusion

There has been a lot of hype in the past few years about microenterprise development. Many regard it as a key tool for eliminating poverty. The Ricomida project goes beyond the hype, providing a clear example of how microenterprise can not only help to increase household income but also to raise women's self-esteem and decision-making power while making substantial improvements to people's diets.



Top left and above

Tipping the scales in favour of a healthy diet women of Ricomida home-based restaurants earn money and learn business skills while promoting good eating

Contacts and further reading

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The human right to food in Bolivia
http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_2659.pdf

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

LOVING WORKING WITH SOLDIERS YOUR TO REFORM THE ARMY ENEMIES



The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a country that has been called the ‘rape capital of the world’. Soldiers are some of the main perpetrators of the crime, instilling fear and mistrust in communities across the country. While many NGOs simply denounce the army as unsalvageable, Christian Aid’s partner, Central African Baptist Community, is working to engage the army, police and judiciary to put an end to the culture of rape and impunity for perpetrators.⁷

Project Title
Accountable governance

ACT Member
Christian Aid (CA)

Implementing Partner
Central African Baptist Community (CBCA)

Funders
Christian Aid

Location
North Kivu,
Democratic Republic of the Congo

The rape capital of the world

Violence against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a humanitarian crisis and a shocking violation of human rights. A recent study⁸ estimates that more than 1,000 women are raped every day in the DRC and that the perpetrators go largely unpunished. Since many men have been killed or forced to flee in the war, their wives and daughters have been left vulnerable. As the heads of households in many cases, women are forced to live in poverty and to risk their safety outside the home in order to meet their basic needs.

Among the main perpetrators of rape in the Congo are members of the rebel militia and the Congolese Army, the very people who are entrusted with keeping civilians safe. The Congolese army (the FARDC) has also been implicated in illegal mining and indiscriminate killing. As a result, in North Kivu, as in many parts of eastern DRC, the relationship between soldiers and civilians is one of distrust, if not outright contempt. Across the province, low-level harassment – stealing crops and livestock, assaulting villagers and threatening women – has been a constant feature of civilian-army relations.

Soldiers invited to be part of the solution

For many villagers, the idea that the FARDC could be considered part of the solution to their problems seems like a particularly distasteful joke. Nonetheless, it is clear that engaging with the FARDC, and helping it realise its potential rather than simply denouncing it, is key to peace in the region. A national army that works in the people’s interests has a crucial role to play in building a strong and democratic Congolese state.

Since September 2009, Central Africa Baptist Community (CBCA) has been working on a project to support army reform. CBCA has organised training sessions for 492 senior soldiers on topics such as civilian rights, child protection and ending sexual violence. Many of the soldiers learned about these topics for the first time during the sessions and began reflecting on the spiritual and moral implications of their actions. The sessions are conducted by a Congolese soldier – himself trained by the United Nations peacekeeping force – so that participants can discuss issues with someone who understands the conditions in which they live and work.

After the initial training, participants meet other soldiers to share what they

have learned. Sometimes these meetings are in formal settings, at other times in informal settings such as standing in line or having a meal together. The idea is that messages issued during the training will be passed from the participants down the chain of command so that as many Congolese soldiers as possible will be exposed to new ideas and a new understanding of how their actions affect the lives of others.

Reconciliation and relationship-building

In areas where the FARDC’s maltreatment of civilians has primarily involved lower-level harassment, CBCA organised reconciliation ceremonies to help repair relationships between soldiers and the villagers they live among. The collective airing of grievances and apologies has led, in the eastern Congo village of Kibati, to the creation of a mixed church choir involving soldiers and civilians, instilling a sense of companionship between the two groups and dramatically reducing the sexual harassment of women by soldiers.

Just a year before, the presence of these soldiers at church would have caused panic amongst their fellow choristers. However, following a CBCA-

“I feel proud of myself for speaking out about what he did to me, and I feel much more at ease, to know he is being punished.”

Woman supported by CBCA to press charges against her rapist

⁷ Adapted from Christian Aid trip report – Democratic Republic of the Congo

⁸ www.stonybrookmedicalcenter.org/medicalcenter/DRC

organised reconciliation ceremony, the relationship between soldiers and civilians is better than ever. The ceremony brought together villagers and members of the FARDC based in the nearby countryside. Soldiers and civilians were enabled to meet each other, there was a public airing of grievances on both sides and then soldiers and civilians, through a series of addresses and Bible readings, were asked to reflect on what they had in common rather than what set them apart. This relationship-building paved the way to start repairing years of distrust, fear and contempt.

Challenging the culture of impunity

Despite this, acts of rape are still all too common in the DRC, and they often go unpunished. Existing laws against sexual violence are rarely enforced, and victims are often afraid to speak out against offenders. To combat the culture of impunity, CBCA and Christian Aid work with the judiciary and prison staff to encourage a policy of zero tolerance towards rape (as advocated by the 2006 Congolese law on sexual violence). They have provided seminars and workshops to raise awareness of the law and encourage its application.

CBCA also works with community leaders to discourage traditional 'amicable' settlements in cases of rape where the accused pays compensation

to the victim's family rather than being prosecuted. CBCA is also helping women to bring cases against rapists (including soldiers) to try to end the culture of impunity. So far, CBCA has supported forty women with legal, financial and psychological support as they bring their cases to court. It has helped secure thirty convictions.

Supporting the victims of rape

Victims of rape in the DRC are often ostracised by their relatives and communities. In some cases they are physically abused or forced out of their homes, making them more vulnerable to further violence. As a result, CBCA provides medical help and counselling to both victims of rape and their families. To date, 145 of 252 women who have received support have been restored to a state of physical health, and nine women who were ostracised by their relatives following their rape have been accepted back into their families.

Lessons learned

CBCA knows that the process of changing the army's culture and restoring relationships between soldiers and Congolese citizens will be long and slow. Its work is dwarfed by the scale of the problem. The army has many factions; many soldiers have a vested interest in mistreating civilians; and the wounds inflicted run deep. But the

small steps CBCA is taking to reform the military and restore its relationships with civilian women and men have been successful. Crucially, the work has also helped CBCA learn ways to show support for, and faith in, those principled soldiers in the FARDC's ranks who are themselves appalled by the Congolese army's reputation.

Conclusion

The high incidence of rape in the DRC has been one of the grim hallmarks of the country's continuing conflict. The use of sexual violence against not only women but also men, children and the elderly, has earned it the epithet 'rape capital of the world'.⁹ But the CA/CBCA accountable governance project shows that another reality is possible. Cumulatively, the training of soldiers, police, courts and community leaders, combined with support to women and reconciliation work, have the potential to create the conditions for a change in army conduct. By focusing on cultural norms, concepts of masculinity and femininity and the root causes of violence, the project has deepened understanding of why the violence persists and what needs to be done to stop it. In engaging with the army, rather than simply demonising it, the project has developed a valuable method of supporting soldiers to reform the army from within.

Contacts and further reading

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Podcast Growing harmony in DRC
<http://audioboo.fm/boos/503942-growing-harmony-in-drc>

UN study on violence against women
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/SGstudyvaw.htm

⁹ Margot Wallström, the UN's special representative on sexual violence in conflict, 2010

“I hear NGOs denouncing us, calling us rapists. But rare are those who come to talk to us, to consult with us about the problems and what we can do about them.”

Major Janvier Bulambo Participant in CBCA training



Images above

A church choir consisting of soldiers and civilians practises in front of the church in the village of Kibati near Goma. The choir was formed following a reconciliation ceremony organised by CBCA to improve relations between villagers and soldiers in the region

Image left

Captain Bakome Kuliomushi Josue (left) was among Congolese army authorities who received civilian rights training organised by CA partner CBCA



ERITREA

FOR OUR DAUGHTERS' SAKE

A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INTERVENTION FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

Current education policy in Eritrea encourages girls' participation. But enrolment continues to be low, averaging about 44% for primary schools, 33% for secondary schools and less than 5% for tertiary institutions.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), in partnership with the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) and the Eritrean Ministry of Education, demonstrate how working together and engaging all levels of society can improve the participation and success of girls in schools.



Project title

Project for improving girls' participation and performance in education

ACT member

The Lutheran World Federation

Implementing partner

National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS)

Location

Eritrea

Funders

Church of Sweden
Finn Church Aid

“Political will is the sustained commitment of politicians and administrators to invest the necessary resources to achieve specific objectives. It is the willingness of these actors to undertake reform and implement policy, despite opposition. Conversely, lack of political will is the absence of such commitment and willingness.”

Making it happen: political will for gender equality in education

from Oxfam's Education and Gender Equality series

http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/oxfam_edPaper5.pdf

Educating girls for poverty reduction

Eritrea, in the Horn of Africa, is one of the world's poorest countries. Around 66% of households live below the poverty line, 42% of the population is considered illiterate and life expectancy is only 51 years of age.¹⁰ The country is also highly vulnerable to drought, which negatively affects food security.

Some of the country's biggest challenges in reducing poverty are the social, cultural and economic factors that prevent children, especially girls, from accessing education. Early marriages force girls to drop out of school so that they can have children and manage the home. The heavy burden of household chores limits the amount of time that girls can spend on homework and classes. Cultural norms place a greater importance on the education of boys, so families with limited financial resources may be forced to choose to educate their sons over their daughters. Although the government of Eritrea is committed to achieving the second and third UN Millennium Development Goals – to provide both boys and girls access to primary education and to eliminate gender disparity in education – the consistent low participation of girls in schools, especially at higher levels, continues to be a problem.

To help improve girls' participation and performance in education in Eritrea, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) developed the first phase of the project in 2000 to overcome some of the barriers

to education faced by girls. The project raises awareness in communities about the importance of educating girls, supports girls' academic and financial needs and advocates for increased resources and support for girls' education by the government.

Political will

One of the key philosophies of NUEYS' projects is that governments must fulfil their responsibilities by meeting their citizens' basic needs. As such, NUEYS does not provide continuous services. Rather, it temporarily fills gaps until the appropriate body can take responsibility. NUEYS specifically advocates for the rights of Eritrea's youth and holds the government accountable for its policies and obligations towards young people.

While NUEYS strives to work closely with the government of Eritrea to meet families' needs, the government also cooperates with NGOs to ensure that its ministries meet their mandates. Since prioritising girl's education lies within the Ministry of Education's mandate, the government insists that NUEYS and LWF cooperate with provincial administrators to ensure that the project harmonises with the ministry's overall strategy of education for all.

At the beginning of each phase of the programme, supervisors from the provincial administration offices of the Ministry of Education identify target schools for the project. They also participate in the monitoring of activities. The work creates an extra duty for the administrators, so they are given a



Parents take to the classroom to present their views on girls' education

¹⁰ www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2005/afr/er.html

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United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
 www.ungei.org



modest allowance by the government for their contribution. The government also participates in campaigns and workshops to promote the education of girls in communities.

Raising awareness and changing culture

Alongside its work with the government, NUEYS works with community leaders to advocate for girls' education. The community leaders encourage parents and guardians to keep girls at school and reduce their household duties so that they can study and attend classes. Community leaders are also speaking out against early marriages.

In addition, NUEYS organises training workshops, national media campaigns and monitoring visits, in an effort to raise awareness among the wider community of the importance of girls' education. These activities are aimed especially at encouraging parents to send their girls to school. The organisation explains the many benefits of educating girls, including a rise in the household's earning potential, improved family planning, healthier children, increased political participation and a lower risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.

Practical support eases household burdens

In order to be effective, political support and awareness-raising need to be supplemented with practical support to households. Domestic chores still need to be completed, financial resources are required to send girls to school and academic support is needed to help girls catch up with their education. To ease the practical burdens on households, the project provides families with financial resources to help cover the costs of educating girls. The project also pays teachers extra to provide tutorial classes, which has had the unexpected outcome of motivating teachers to stay in their teaching positions.

Lessons learned

Gender disparity in Eritrea is deep-rooted. Changing communities' attitudes towards girls' education is complicated. But this project has shown NUEYS that, by involving community leaders and government officials in promoting girls' education, and combining this involvement with awareness-raising, attitudes and cultures can change.

NUEYS has also seen that there are many barriers preventing girls from being educated and that, despite a family's desire to educate its daughters, it may be unable to. The organisation therefore supports families with financial resources to help cover the cost of education, and supports teachers to provide girls with extra tuition.

Conclusion

Through government support, advocacy, the encouragement of community leaders and financial support for households, communities in Eritrea are seeing significant improvements in girls' education. After the first eight years of running this programme, 20% more girls are making headway in their education and 43% fewer girls have to repeat levels. In some schools, teachers are reporting that girls are performing better than boys. Alongside these changes, parents and brothers are starting to share in the domestic chores to enable girls to spend more time studying at home.

This project demonstrates the importance of bringing together stakeholders from different sectors of society to achieve change. By working together, government, NGOs, community leaders, teachers, parents and students have created the necessary conditions to make a difference. As a result of this potent combination of political will, increased awareness and practical support, girls have been able to make positive, informed decisions allowing them to live the lives they want.



Images from top

Schoolgirls in Tigre hang out in the school yard
 A coordinator from the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students counsels a girl who desperately wants to attend school

The school principal (right) addresses Eritrean schoolgirls and their parents

Right from top

Accompanied by their parents, schoolchildren learn about gender equality from their teacher

The many benefits of educating girls include a rise in earning potential, healthier children and increased political participation

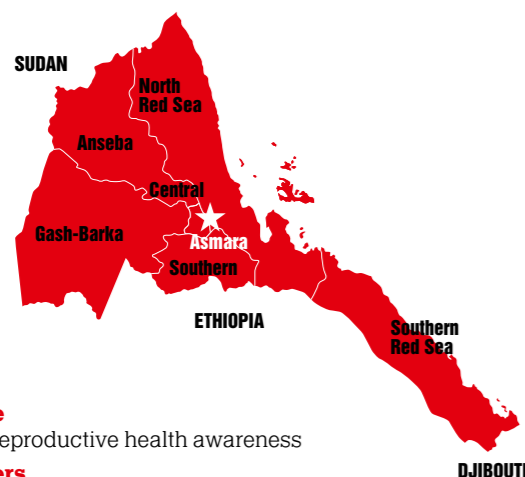


ERITREA

BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Women around the world lack freedom and rights concerning their reproductive health, a lack that is related to other manifestations of gender inequality. This project focused on improving gender equality with specific attention to reproductive health. It combined awareness-raising – which changed customs, traditions and beliefs – with advocacy that changed laws and ensured access to services.

**Project Title**

Gender and reproductive health awareness

ACT Members

Church of Sweden;
the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

Implementing Partner

National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW)

Funders

Church of Sweden
Finn Church Aid

Location

Eritrea

“The fact is that women have been trapped. Reproduction is used, consciously or not, as a means to control women, to limit their options and to make them subordinate to men. In many societies a serious approach to reproductive health has to have this perspective in mind. We must seek to liberate women.”

Dr. Nafis Sadik Special Advisor to UN Secretary General and Former Executive Director, UN Population Fund

Reproductive health problems are complex

According to the United Nations Population Fund, reproductive health problems are the leading cause of women's ill health and death worldwide.¹¹ Reproductive health problems may be related to various issues faced by families and individuals, such as their ability to plan the number of children they have and the interval between births, to make informed decisions about their reproductive health free from discrimination, coercion or violence, and to receive education on reproductive matters including female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). For women, the disparity in reproductive health services violates their human rights and compromises their ability to realise their full potential. It diminishes their capacity to access education and employment, to live without fear of pain or death, to participate politically and to enjoy social interactions. Women's reproductive health is affected by complex biological, cultural and social factors, which must be addressed in the context of gender equality and respect for human rights and health.

Positive steps by the government

Eritrea is making great efforts to improve its healthcare system. It is, in fact, one of the few countries that is on target to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to health. It has developed a sexual and reproductive health policy (SRHP) that states that the government aims “to contribute to improved quality of life and reduction of poverty through improvements in reproductive health, gender equality and equity, reduction in HIV and AIDS prevalence and harmonisation of

¹¹ www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_rh.htm

population dynamics with sustainable development”. However, despite the government's positive steps, access remains poor as more than two-thirds of the population live below the poverty line and more than half of the population live in rural areas. The Eritrean maternal mortality rate is high at 1000/100,000, the mortality rate for children under five is 55/1,000 live births, and HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis claim the lives of thousands of Eritreans every year. In 2002, the percentage of women who had undergone genital mutilation or cutting was over 89%.¹²

Raising awareness and promoting equality

It is in this context that, in 2003, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), began a programme to raise awareness of reproductive health rights and promote gender equality in five rural communities in the Northern Red Sea Region. The objectives of the project were to reduce the incidences of female genital mutilation, contribute to improving the quality of life of women and men of reproductive age and improve the overall status of women in their communities.

Building capacity in communities

To meet these objectives, NUEW formed gender committees made up of parents, students, teachers, elders, members of women's groups, religious leaders and government workers. These committees received training to build their organisational capacity and increase their knowledge of gender issues. Gender issues included gender-based violence, reproductive health

¹² www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea_statistics.html

Health-related MDGs**GOAL 4**

Reduce child mortality

GOAL 5

Improve maternal health

GOAL 6

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases



LWF programme monitor Akberet Fre

and analysis of how gender inequality contributes to violations of women's reproductive health rights. After the training, the committees began to play a pivotal role in implementing the project by sharing their knowledge with other community members.

Apart from the community-based committees, NUEW also worked with health workers and traditional birth attendants (TBAs). Together, the gender committees, health workers and TBAs raised awareness of reproductive rights, gender equality, the role of men in family planning, and the effects of female genital mutilation and cutting.

The groups have contributed a great deal to gender awareness in their communities. According to health statistics from local clinics and health stations, there has been an increase in the number of women of reproductive age seeking health services, including antenatal services, which play a role in reducing maternal and infant mortality.

Gender committees, health workers and TBAs are actively speaking out against FGM/C and early marriage in their places of work, in their neighbourhoods and at public gatherings. As a result, community members have increased their awareness of the practice and consequences of FGM/C. Interviews with community members indicate that, since the project began, the practice of FGM/C has declined by approximately 85%. Although the project cannot attribute these results solely to its work (FGM/C became illegal four years after the project began), the communities feel that it had an impact as it helped people justify the law and understand its implications.

Men's role in reproduction

Many people in Eritrea regard childbearing as a woman's concern and believe that there is no need for the father to get involved. This perception often starts at the family planning stage and continues through to pregnancy and childbirth. The gender committees have been working to change this perception. They have raised awareness about the role men play in childbearing, showing why leaving the responsibility to the woman limits her ability to exercise her reproductive rights and, in the long run, adversely affects the whole family. Since the project began, there has been an increase in the number of men accompanying women to health facilities to learn about and contribute to the reproductive health needs of their wives. This indicates a shift in men's roles in the childbearing process and greater support for women.

Government involvement

NUEW involves government administrators and staff in its projects, reflecting both a government policy requiring collaboration and coordination between NGOs and government offices and NUEW's own policy of engaging government agencies. The organisation's advocacy for a law prohibiting FGM/C played an important role in the government's decision to ban the practice. On this specific project, one government administrator who was part of the gender committee became a strong advocate within the government and the community after he learned what his daughter had gone through during and after her FGM/C.

Lessons learned

The project verified that opinions about the role of childbearing are deeply entrenched. Despite discussions of the role of men in childbearing and the effects of childbearing on women, 23% of community members and over half of the youth questioned in schools continue to support the idea that childbearing is a woman's concern and that the father does not need to be involved. The lesson learned is that changing traditional attitudes and beliefs through discussion, messaging and community leadership is a continuous process.

NUEW also learned that it is important to anticipate a range of possible barriers to project implementation. For example, at times it was difficult to schedule community activities, find venues, obtain sufficient resource materials and provide materials in local languages.

Conclusion

The success of the project demonstrated the importance of working with people at all levels of authority, from community leaders to elected officials, and empowering communities to take leadership roles in project planning and implementation. By working through gender committees and empowering them to define their own priorities and strategies, the projects become increasingly community-led. In the process, the role of NUEW changed from trainer and leader to enabler and facilitator. This allowed NUEW to move into new communities and focus on other priorities. In this way, the reach of the project has grown from five to 24 communities over six years.

Contacts and further reading

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United Nations Population Fund
www.unfpa.org/rh/



Eritrean schoolgirls gather, offer their opinion and share their experiences in a workshop on equality that involves their parents

GUATEMALA

PUTTING FAITH IN EQUALITY

Project Title

Gender equality in churches and faith-based organisations

ACT member

Conferencia de Iglesias Evangelicas de Guatemala (CIEDEG)

Funders

Norwegian Church Aid
United Church of Canada PWRDF
Church World Service

Location Guatemala



CHURCHES AND CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS MAKE GENDER A PRIORITY

Inequality in Guatemala is deeply rooted in traditions, culture, policy and practice. Women and children are the people most likely to face inequality, especially if they belong to indigenous groups.

A network of Christian churches and organisations is working to promote equality using a strategy of gender mainstreaming. They are looking critically at their own organisations to review policies and procedures that may exclude women from full participation in decision-making and receiving the benefits of the organisations. They are also looking at programmes to ensure they address the strengths and challenges faced by women.



Paula Bruna Velasquez Pastor tends tomato plants in Totonicapan. CWS supports local organisation CIEDEG to run a food production and nutrition programme in several areas of Guatemala. With their support, in Totonicapan in the indigenous highlands, villagers have increased their food production by using greenhouses and irrigation. FRB supports CWS to run a food security programme in the region

Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

UN Women

Inequality in society and the church

Gender inequality is rife in Guatemala. Women make up 51.5%¹³ of the poor in Guatemala. In the political sphere, women make up only 12% of the country's parliament. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that, in economic terms, women's percentage of GDP is a mere 25% while their labour force participation is nearing 50%. Only 63% of women over the age of 15 are literate, compared with 75% of men. School enrolment for girls is 64%, compared with 70% for boys.¹⁴ Violence against women, although prohibited by law, cannot be punished with a prison sentence and can only be brought to the court if physical evidence remains for more than ten days.

While many churches are involved in projects to address these injustices, they too embody inequalities in terms of women's participation in decision-making. The Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala, which represents approximately 60% of the population, has no female priests or bishops. The other 40% of the population is Protestant¹⁵ and, again, most leadership roles are held by men. Although women are becoming increasingly active as advocates and promoters of social justice issues, their leadership is only permitted up to a certain level.

¹³ National Survey of Living Conditions 2006 –ENCOVI
¹⁴ Gender Development Index, 2005

Mainstreaming gender

The Conference of Evangelical Churches of Guatemala (CIEDEG) is a non-profit association of churches and faith-based organisations committed to the processes of democratisation, peace, justice and social development in Guatemala. CIEDEG is working to mainstream gender by promoting a gender perspective and equal status for women and men in its member organisations and the programmes and interventions it supports.

Gender equality in organisations

A key component of CIEDEG's mainstreaming strategy was to train women leaders from within its membership and bring them together to form the Women's Ecumenical Network. This network now works to increase awareness of the need for gender equality and women's participation and decision-making within CIEDEG, its member organisations and churches and their projects. The network provides a gender lens to analyse policies, procedures and projects. It also acts as an accountability mechanism whereby network members ensure that the gender perspective does not get lost or forgotten.

CIEDEG has also developed and implemented an institutional policy on

¹⁵ Fewer than 2% of Guatemalans self-identify as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists or adherents of the Mayan faith

gender equality using a participatory process with its staff and members. The policy has four strategic focuses, as well as objectives and action items. The first strategic focus is to walk alongside women as they engage in theological and pastoral roles. CIEDEG recognises and encourages the participation of women in pastoral processes, especially their participation in biblical interpretation. The second strategic focus is to ensure women's equal participation in the leadership of CIEDEG: this includes guaranteeing women's equal participation in decision-making in all CIEDEG structures and bodies. The third strategy concerns the development and management of risk: when developing policies, procedures and actions in relation to natural disasters, CIEDEG ensures that the practical needs of women are at the forefront of decision-making. The final strategy is to increase the capacity of women in the Women's Ecumenical Network (La Red Ecueménica de Mujeres). CIEDEG works to empower the women of the network, whether those who are directly a part of CIEDEG or those from other areas of civil society.

As a result of these institutional initiatives, CIEDEG now has four women on its board of directors. The association also intentionally uses a gender lens



At Nebaj, in the indigenous highlands, villagers have increased their food production by using greenhouses and irrigation



Pedro and Martha from Rio Azul village enjoying some milk

Contacts and further reading

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UN Women gender mainstreaming
www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/
gendermainstreaming.htm

in developing, monitoring and evaluating policies, procedures and activities. Finally, CIEDEG encourages member organisations to provide space for women to participate fully in decision-making, planning and evaluation.

Promoting gender equality in programmes

The second part of an effective gender mainstreaming strategy is to make gender central to programme design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring, as well as combining it with a targeted gender programme. CIEDEG has implemented two programmes, on sustainable agriculture and risk management respectively, where the promotion of gender equality has been central to the programme's design, planning, monitoring and evaluation. Through its Women's Ecumenical Network, CIEDEG also runs a targeted programme to promote gender equality as a priority in and of itself. This approach is key to successful mainstreaming as it ensures that achieving gender equality is a goal in its own right as well as ensuring that the promotion of gender equality is taking place in other project areas.

Gender equality in agricultural interventions

In its agricultural programmes, CIEDEG

focuses on sustainable agricultural techniques. These include the collection and storage of rainwater, the use of organic fertilisers and compost, crop diversification and the use of live barriers. To ensure that women are able to fully engage in these programmes, CIEDEG assesses their practical needs as well as cultural and structural barriers they may face in accessing support. CIEDEG staff, who are trained to include gender in the agricultural workshops, help communities understand concepts such as masculinity and femininity, differences in the distribution of men's and women's labour and the ways in which these concepts and roles are socially defined and inhibit the development of the communities. Staff then work with communities to design programmes to overcome barriers and ensure that women's practical needs are met. CIEDEG also collects gender-disaggregated data in order to analyse whether or not women are accessing and benefiting from support.

Gender equality in risk management

Guatemala is a country that is prone to natural disasters, especially flooding. Women are disproportionately affected by disasters derived from

natural phenomena, especially when it comes to caring for the wounded and those who have lost homes or livelihoods. Women are also more vulnerable to natural disasters in that they often have limited capacity to recover without external intervention. CIEDEG, in recognising women's role in natural disasters, provides training and workshops to churches in disaster prevention and mitigation, encouraging women to play a leadership role by both providing and participating in the training. CIEDEG includes attention for women's role in disasters in their trainings and also promotes this aspect at other levels, such as the ACT Forum capacity building programme.

Gender equality as a programme

The Women's Ecumenical Network of CIEDEG focuses on the promotion of gender equality as a programme and as an issue that is present in all CIEDEG's organisational work. The network aims to empower women through workshops on gender, gender equality, human rights, violence against women, citizenship, reproductive health, liberation theology and emergency preparedness and response. It also accompanies victims of sexual, domestic and psychological violence by supporting women to bring their cases to the police and courts,

helping them access medical treatment and counselling, and joining forces with other organisations campaigning for greater protection for women.

The network works in public environments too, organising forums to discuss gender-specific barriers to development, and marches to provide women with the opportunity to protest and voice their concerns. It participates in national initiatives, including the Political Alliance of Women in Guatemala, the Council of Community Development and municipal development councils. The network has also developed important alliances with the Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women, the Human Rights Office, the Public Ministry and the Presidential Secretariat of Women. Through these alliances, the network has contributed to the advocacy of public policies for gender equality.

Including men in the gender debate

CIEDEG has encountered resistance from men when implementing its gender mainstreaming strategy. In some instances men felt threatened by the empowerment of women; in others they felt excluded from interventions they had traditionally benefited from, such as the provision of greenhouses to women. Gender inequalities are deeply rooted in culture, and traditions that

define men's and women's roles are often reinforced through biblical interpretation and theological discussions. CIEDEG challenges these interpretations and subsequent discourse through, on the one hand, dialogue with men using a theological approach and, on the other, by demonstrating that men benefit from equality with women through greater livelihood options and the overall wellbeing of the household.

Lessons learned

Women face multiple barriers in Guatemala. By mainstreaming gender, CIEDEG learned that women are able to make greater advances by forming groups than by working on their own. Groups provide women with the opportunity to support each other, learn from each other and demonstrate how they too can enter fields traditionally reserved for men – whether as leaders or agricultural workers. CIEDEG also learned that it is important to understand the specific constraints that women face and to design programme interventions accordingly. For example, realising that women in some communities have low literacy rates and no facility with the Spanish language, CIEDEG planned interventions that used interpreters and literacy components. Finally, since biblical interpretation and dialogue often

contribute to inequality, CIEDEG learned to use theology as a way to counter arguments that enforced unequal practices.

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming has been an important strategy for CIEDEG. By weaving gender equality into all aspects of the organisation and its programmes, it has been able to create institutions where women's voices are heard at decision-making and project level. CIEDEG has increased the percentage of women in leadership positions within the organisation and is ensuring its projects address the specific needs of women. The Network of Ecumenical Women within CIEDEG works to educate and empower women, ensures CIEDEG maintains its gender focus and advocates for the rights of women at local and international levels.

Gender mainstreaming is an international strategy being implemented by organisations around the world. It is a strategy that encourages the full participation of women in all aspects of life and brings to the fore the specific strengths and challenges of women and men, young and old, so that policies, procedures and programmes can promote equality for all.

INDONESIA

TURNING WOMEN INCREASE THEIR SAY IN COMMUNITY WATER PROJECTS THE TIDE

Project title

Community-based resource management on sanitation and clean water in East Nusa Tenggara

ACT member

Yakkum

Funders

Simavi, Netherlands

Location

Sumba and West Timor, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia



Girls and a little boy take water from a public well. Women and girls are the main beneficiaries of the water programme because they have greatest responsibility for providing clean water at home



Women are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to clean water and sanitation. They often have to travel long distances to fetch water, which reduces the amount of time they have to study or earn a living. They also spend more time than men caring for the sick, many of whom have illnesses caused by a lack of water and sanitation. Despite this, women from both matrilineal and patrilineal societies are often prevented from making decisions about water and sanitation, with the result that projects intended to improve matters often fail to meet their needs. This project focused on the opportunities and challenges linked to including women from both types of societies in decision-making activities surrounding water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects.

Women excluded from decision-making in water and sanitation projects

Sumba and West Timor have some of Indonesia's highest infant and maternal mortality rates, caused in part by a lack of access to clean water and sanitation. In the dry season, women travel long distances to reach streams where they can collect water. Sometimes the only water they can find is in stagnant pools that are also used by animals. In the rainy season, women collect much of their water from rain that has come down off their roofs. A dearth of sanitation facilities forces families to contaminate the ground around their homes.

Although women are disproportionately affected by this lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities, they are often excluded from the design and monitoring of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects. The result is that projects do not always meet women's needs or desires.

The exclusion of women from design and monitoring processes holds true in both matrilineal and patrilineal communities. In Indonesia's matrilineal communities, women's traditional roles, including childrearing and housework, limit their ability to participate actively in decision-making activities. In patrilineal communities, women's exclusion from

decision-making is made worse by their overall lack of power. The absence of consultation with women, the primary users of water, creates many difficulties and results in projects that are less effective than they should be.

Engaging women in WASH projects

In 2006, Yakkum began a project to address issues related to water, sanitation and health in Sumba and West Timor. The project provided families with access to clean water and sanitation with the overall goal of reducing mortality and morbidity rates. Thirty villages, some matrilineal and some patrilineal, participated in various construction projects, including gravity-flow systems, rain barrels, public and private latrines and wells.

Recognising that women are the primary users of water and sanitation resources, Yakkum intentionally designed the programme so that women would be actively engaged in managing and making decisions about the water resources. Yakkum used the same strategy with all the communities involved. It established community groups, or people's organisations, to manage the projects, made up of an equal number of men and women. It encouraged women to attend meetings, sit on committees and participate in

programme monitoring and evaluation. It also required communities to be open to women's active participation.

Over time, Yakkum staff noticed that women from both matrilineal and patrilineal communities faced barriers to participating in decision-making activities. But they also noticed that women from matrilineal communities were able to take a greater decision-making role, following Yakkum's intervention, than those from patrilineal communities. In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of community dynamics, barriers to women's participation and the reasons why more women from matrilineal communities than patrilineal communities responded to the programme, Yakkum decided to conduct a review.

It focused the review on three villages, two patrilineal and one matrilineal, and encouraged staff to engage in qualitative research in order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of each community. The research allowed Yakkum to map the communication patterns used by women to express their needs, assess their level of assertiveness in public decision-making processes and identify causal factors behind positive communication patterns.



Differences in women's participation between communities

In both the matrilineal and patrilineal communities, it is common to see women responsible for childrearing and household chores while men engage in income-generating activities and decision-making roles. It was therefore necessary to encourage women in both types of communities to participate in decision-making activities related to WASH projects.

Yakkum found that women from matrilineal communities participated more readily than those from patrilineal ones. In matrilineal communities, women are more accustomed to sharing their ideas and perspectives on issues that affect them. They are often part of women-focused organisations that advocate on their behalf and are comfortable communicating their needs directly to stakeholders in public forums. In addition, the predominantly male decision-makers are accustomed to listening to and considering women's ideas when making decisions. The result is that women's views are integrated into public policies even though the women do not personally assume the role of policymakers.

Research conducted by Yakkum in matrilineal communities suggests that women's control over resources and

inheritance, gender identity, roles in the public arena and the influence of previous gender equality interventions have contributed to the overall assertiveness of women in decision-making activities.

Challenges in engaging women in patrilineal communities

On the other hand, Yakkum found that women in patrilineal communities did not have the confidence to participate actively in WASH discussions. Although they attended meetings, they were reluctant to share their ideas with community leaders and public figures, and they did not have women's organisations to advocate on their behalf. The women preferred to communicate their thoughts through male indigenous leaders or the wives and daughters of important community figures. They were more likely to implement tasks delegated to them than to participate in defining the tasks and deciding who should be involved in carrying them out.

Lessons learned

The foundational project of providing water and sanitation to 30 communities became much more than a WASH project. By intentionally focusing on the participation of women, Yakkum learned that establishing appropriate processes was a more time-consuming

and challenging activity than the practical work. Yakkum also realised that, although the end of increasing women's participation in WASH projects might be the same across different communities, the means needed to be adjusted to meet the strengths and weaknesses of each. This could entail different kinds or lengths of intervention for different communities.

Conclusion

The active participation of women in decision-making and implementation activities went against the cultural norms and practices of the communities in Sumba and West Timor. Change, therefore, has been slow. But women in patrilineal communities are now attending meetings that they were previously not permitted to attend. By the end of the project in 2008, women had slowly gained the confidence to share their views and participate more actively in the project. Women in both matrilineal and patrilineal communities have learned that it is important to make their needs known so that interventions can be as effective as possible. As women gain experience and confidence as decision-makers, and thus increased power in their communities, there is every likelihood that their strategic interests will, in the future, be better served.



Above and left Groups from Belu District, Timor Tengah Selatan District and East Nusa Tenggara meet to discuss their water system programme

Contact and further reading

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KENYA

SPEAKING THEIR PEACE

Project title

Gender impact of Pokot/Turkana
peacebuilding intervention

ACT member

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
(CRWRC)

Implementing partner

Reformed Church of East Africa (CARE)

Funders

Canadian International Development Agency
Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference
Christian Reformed Church of North America

Location

Turkana and Pokot districts, north-west Kenya

WOMEN AT THE HEART OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Women are often viewed as victims in conflict situations. Yet women are important participants in both conflicts and subsequent peacebuilding processes. This case study highlights an effective way of including women and men, young and old, in participatory peace discussions, despite a culture of strict gender roles.

**The conflict**

Pokot and Turkana, two neighbouring districts in north-western Kenya, have a long history of conflict and violence. The conflict is primarily the result of competition over access to scarce pastureland and watering-points, which are essential to the food security of both communities. In recent years, the conflict has intensified and become more destructive as a result of the increased availability of illegal weapons and the pervasiveness of revenge as a justification for violence. The conflict is complicated by mistrust and a lack of communication between the warring parties.

Women have played important roles in the conflict. They have been the victims of violence, suffering the loss of family members, the denial of access to resources and rape. They have also actively engaged in the conflict as warriors, fighting alongside men. And they have been dedicated peacebuilders, encouraging their husbands and sons to surrender their weapons and taking part in peace committees – though their voices are often not heard.

Creating space for dialogue

In 2010 CRWRC and CARE-RCEA were approached by leaders from three border communities of Kenya's Pokot and Turkana districts to facilitate a dialogue that would reduce tension and conflict between their communities. Using a tool called deep democracy (DD), community members embarked on a journey to discover ways of fostering peace. The facilitators brought together community members of different ages and genders to discuss the dimensions of the conflict, people's readiness to intervene and strategies to foster peace. In Turkana and Pokot, where communities are divided primarily by age and gender, and where the voices of men and the elderly are heard and respected over the

voices of women and the young, deep democracy was useful in creating the space for dialogue.

Cultural dynamics affect participation

In April 2010, local assistant chiefs organised two group meetings, one in Turkana and one in Pokot. Each assistant chief was asked to form a group that represented their larger communities in terms of age, gender and role diversity.

When the groups first came together, they organised themselves according to cultural norms and practices. The women sat apart from the men. The older men spoke first, followed by the younger men, and finally the women.

In one instance, a woman broke protocol and spoke before the men. Her action prompted a community translator to limit women to stating their names. When the DD facilitator asked the woman to share her view, the translator went on strike and sat down. Fortunately, another person took up his role.

Levelling the playing field

In order to minimise future issues of cultural rank in the dialogue, DD facilitators used two equalising tools. The first tool was called check-in and check-out. This tool allowed every individual to introduce themselves and articulate how they were feeling. Although the order of speaking still tended to follow protocols, every person was given an equal opportunity to speak – some for the first time. For the women and youth, the chance to speak aloud at the start of the meeting made it easier to participate throughout.

The second tool was the soft shoe shuffle. This tool allowed people to express their ideas both verbally and with their feet. Through this tool participants were given the opportunity to voice their thoughts, while others could indicate whether or not they

Deep democracy is a facilitation approach that ensures both majority and minority voices are heard and respected. It emphasises that everybody matters, regardless of gender, age or ethnic background. Deep democracy goes beyond the sharing of ideas to the surfacing of beliefs, values and emotions. It places as much emphasis on process as on decision-making itself.

“In war-torn societies, women often keep societies going. They maintain the social fabric. They replace destroyed social services and tend to the sick and wounded. As a result, women are the prime advocates of peace.”

Former UN Secretary General **Kofi Annan**

shared the idea by moving closer to or further from the speaker. This process is designed to reduce rank differences among participants, enable people who are generally afraid to speak out to do so comfortably and empower disadvantaged participants to take part in discussions.

After these community dialogues, men and women discussed the inclusive style of the meeting. They also continued to engage jointly in dialogue and decision-making. This surprised the assistant chiefs, as women and men normally congregate and talk separately.

Wisdom in minority voices

A year later, two group meetings were organised by the local assistant chiefs, one from Turkana and one from Pokot. The groups discussed what improvements had been made in peacebuilding and identified steps for moving forward. In total, these meetings were attended by 69 women and 53 men, who represented the larger business community. The meetings followed a similar format to the assessment discussions, using a check-in and check-out exercise and the soft shoe shuffle. After the first day, each group agreed that creating a common market and increasing business ties between the communities were the best ways to build trust and channels of communication. On the second day, the two groups came together to review what they had each discussed the day before. As both groups had identified the idea of a common market and increased business ties, they spent the rest of their time together identifying how to start and run the market.

During the discussions, a majority (90%) of participants wanted to give

local chiefs leadership in the formation of the market. At this point the facilitators intervened, to ensure that the other 10% of participants had a chance to voice their ideas. This process, the 'deep' part of deep democracy, harvested wisdom and insight from a very small minority. This minority group suggested that, since the chiefs are often called away, which negatively affects progress on projects, it was important to have back-up leadership. All but one participant agreed that the chiefs should still take a leadership role, but with a back-up in place. The one person who didn't agree felt that it was important to have gender balance in the leadership. Accepting this new insight, participants agreed that the chiefs would take on the initial leadership role and then turn it over to elected community leaders. They also agreed that there would be gender balance in the leadership.

Lessons learned

Gender biases and rank protocols can lead to tensions in community meetings. To reduce tensions, it is important to have neutral facilitators who will not bring their own biases into the process and who can create activities that reduce tension. In this project, it meant abbreviating introductions and creating activities in which everyone could participate at the same time.

Conclusion

Deep democracy is a tool that has been used in a variety of situations involving complex cultural and relational issues. Most notably, it was used in post-apartheid South Africa in large corporations where, virtually overnight, workers were expected to become team players when the norm had been for

them to work in a racist, sexist workplace in which each employee followed rigidly defined roles in the societal hierarchy. Today, deep democracy is used in 20 different countries in contexts ranging from families and communities to churches and businesses.

In Kenya, this process allowed women and young people the opportunity to share their views, some for the first time. It took place in a society where strong cultural norms exclude women from key decision-making arenas. It gave men a better understanding of women's needs and views and fostered a culture in which women and men could continue their dialogue with each other. By the end of the process, men and women, the elderly and the young, had come together in a spirit of cooperation: they agreed to create a common market to increase business and peaceful interaction between the communities.

Contacts and further reading

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 www.crwrc.org/

Deep democracy
 www.deep-democracy.net/



Everyone in the group is encouraged to speak out: women, men, girls and boys



Women indicate their support for a speaker by shuffling towards them and away from those whose views they disagree with



Women and men mix during the sharing of opinions, known as the soft shoe shuffle

MALI

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

DEMOCRACY STRENGTHENED AS WOMEN ENTER GOVERNMENT

Project title

Increased participation of women in politics and public life in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, Northern Mali

ACT member

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

Implementing partners

Groupe de Recherche Femme Formation Action (GREFFA)

Association pour la Survie au Sahel (AMSS)
Association Sahélienne D'Appui au Développement Décentralisée (ASSADDEC)

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF-Mali)

Centre Malien pur le Dialogue Inter-partis et la Démocratie (CMDID)

Funders

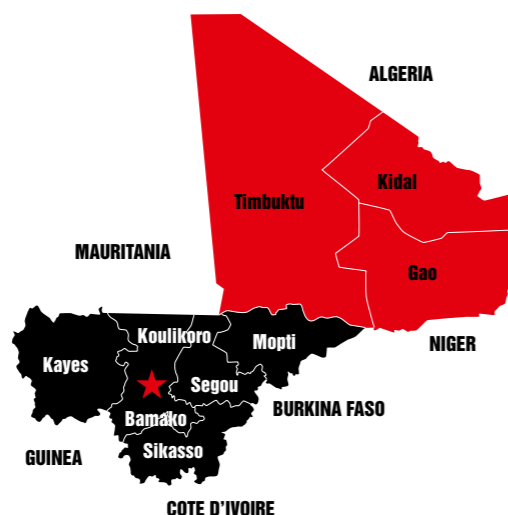
The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

Location

Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, Mali

Although women make up more than 50% of the global population, they continue to be underrepresented as voters and elected officials. In Mali, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) is determined to change that statistic. In cooperation with five local organisations, NCA is working to educate, empower and mobilise women to challenge the behaviour of duty-bearers and campaign for the adaptation and implementation of national legal frameworks that protect human rights.



Women excluded from public sphere

The constitution in Mali provides equal opportunities for women and men to take part in politics and public life. In practice, however, women are excluded from decision-making positions at all levels in the public sphere (national, regional and local). Only 10% of parliamentarians and 6.5% of municipal councillors are women. And of the country's 703 mayors, only seven are women. Low literacy rates and a lack of access to natural and financial resources, as well as the cultural belief that women are supposed to obey and not to command, keep women from participating in decision-making bodies.

Using a participatory approach to identify issues and design projects

In 2005, NCA conducted a baseline survey, which confirmed the democratic deficit of women in politics. They found that, especially in Mali's northern regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao, women were unable to exercise their political rights. To gain a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding women's low participation rates, NCA consulted women as well as political, community and religious leaders and municipal employees. Based on these consultations and the survey results, NCA began a project to increase women's participation in local decision-making bodies. The first target of the programme was the local elections of 2009.

Mobilising women

The programme engaged four Malian organisations who employed multiple strategies to increase women's participation in the public sphere. The first strategy was to conduct capacity-building exercises that empowered women and identified potential candidates for the upcoming local elections. In this phase, women's groups were formed and mobilised by reorganising existing women's associations and inviting new women to join. No less than 639 existing women's associations were made more efficient and consolidated into 190 new groups. The new groups comprised 30,291 members of previous associations and 1,019 women who were not involved in

any organisation or association prior to this programme.

This reorganisation process was followed by building the members' knowledge and awareness of issues such as citizens' rights and responsibilities, the decentralisation process, citizenship and women, female leadership, advocacy, how to vote, how to speak in public and the qualities that potential female candidates must possess. These groups identified potential women candidates, and they in turn were empowered and encouraged by the number and strength of the women surrounding them. Prospective candidates received a manual on how to conduct an election campaign.

Creating strategic alliances for the promotion of women

The second phase of the programme was to create strategic alliances to negotiate the inclusion of women candidates on the candidate lists of political parties. NCA's partners formed steering committees consisting of the following members: sub-prefect, head of fraction, village and district religious leaders – most of whom were men – as well as representatives from women's and young peoples' groups. Religious leaders were strategically included in the committees because of the respect they command in Malian society. For the women's new roles to be accepted by the wider community, it was essential that these men should publicly state that women had the right to participate in public life.

The committees received training on the same topics as the women's organisations but with a special emphasis on the need for women's participation in community decision-making forums and management in order to achieve democracy and good governance.

After the training, the steering committees organised meetings with leaders of political parties in order to advocate on behalf of the female candidates and develop an action plan to assist them in the electoral process. The steering committees' most important activity was in facilitating meetings to negotiate quotas for women in candidate lists. They decided to hold political

“Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they're never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent.”

Madeleine K. Albright
National Democratic Institute (NDI) Chairman



Putting women's interests on the agenda is important in increasing their ability to take part in decision making. The construction of wells in the villages gives women more time to participate in community development



Above
Salma Issa Maïga Diarra was tired of mobilising voters for male candidates. The capacity building organised by the programme gave her courage to run her own election campaign

Local Radio played a crucial role in the information dissemination of women's right to participate in elections in Mali and in decision making structures

parties accountable by asking them to declare publicly the number of women they would include at the top of their lists.

Raising public awareness

The third phase of the project was to engage the public in promoting women as electoral candidates. The steering committee collaborated with local radio stations to raise awareness of women's right to participate in public life, both as voters and as candidates. The radio programmes also announced the percentage of women who would be on the ballot, again holding political parties publicly accountable to their commitments. The radio announcements encouraged women to vote only for parties that included women in favourable positions on the ballots

Supporting newly elected women

The final phase of the project was to support the political system to empower women who were successful at the polls and won seats in local government. During this phase, NCA contracted a fifth organisation, Centre Malien pur le Dialogue Inter-partis et la Democratie (CMDID), to train political parties on gender politics and assist them in developing and implementing a gender programme. CMDID also trained coaches to assist newly elected women representatives in the execution of their roles. Elected women were also supported through training and a process where they could share experiences and create solidarity with other female councillors at local, district and regional levels.

Success in numbers

Despite the fact that the Malian National Assembly rejected a proposed law guaranteeing a 30% quota of women in its representation, the project in Northern Mali has seen remarkable successes. From 2004 to 2009, the number of female candidates increased from 229 to 352, and the number of women elected as councillors jumped from 12 to 17, an increase of 42%. Compared with municipal elections across the country, the three regions that participated in this project saw a 4% increase in women elected.

The project also saw increased public acceptance of women's participation in decision-making bodies and greater awareness among women of their right and duty to participate. Political parties reported a parallel acknowledgement among their supporters of the need for more female representatives.

Lessons learned

The process of registering women on candidates' lists and securing favourable places on the ballot is a long one. It requires constant monitoring and a sound understanding of the political environment. The work of supporting female candidates and sensitising the public to the need for women in elected office must begin long before the elections. And it must continue long after: once women are accepted onto candidates' lists, constant monitoring and sensitisation are needed to ensure their names are not removed before voting.

During election campaigns in Mali, candidates spend a lot of money to buy votes by distributing rice and other necessities, a practice that has nothing to do with the democratic process. One of the strategies of this project was to convince female candidates that they should not play the men's game of buying votes, but rather use their mobilising capacity to win people's votes. This could be achieved by persuading voters that society would improve for women and children if women were voted into office. The women did their best, but without transport and fuel to get around town to hold meetings, they were at a disadvantage. Undeterred, the women engaged in door-to-door campaigns, meeting prospective supporters at their homes. In the process, they became more aware of democratic processes and the importance of sharing their ideas as a way to win votes.

Conclusion

The programme owes its success to the multiple strategies chosen: forging a broad alliance of stakeholders, offering women support through training, confidence-building and political mobilisation, and creating solidarity

networks for women elected to public office. The mobilisation of women created optimism, determination and enthusiasm among the women themselves and others participating in the process. The decision to formalise the strategic partnerships as steering committees made members more inclined to participate actively than they would have without these committees.

The empowerment of women through different forms of training gave them the knowledge and confidence they needed to participate in the election campaign. The active involvement of male community and religious leaders lent legitimacy to the project of increasing women's participation in public life.

That project cannot end simply because there are now women in decision-making positions; it is crucial to follow up with elected candidates to assist them to fulfil their duties. If it is to achieve the long-term goal of building a stronger civil society, the programme needs to work with women's associations to enable their representatives to be accountable.

Thanks to the programme's positive results in getting women elected and subsequently supported once in office, local communities have asked for the project to be expanded. They recognise its value in developing the capacity of women and local organisations not only to contest future local elections, but also to participate in politics at country level, in Mali's national elections in 2012.

Contacts and further reading

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NCA women in governance project
www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/What-we-do/our-strategic-priorities/gender-justice/women-in-governance/

UNDP Democratic Governance
www.undp.org/governance/focus_womens_empowerment.shtml



Above
The introduction of mills in Mali saves women time, allowing them to take part in community development

Mali women gather to weave baskets

MOZAMBIQUE

BANKING ON WOMEN

PROMOTING EQUALITY THROUGH SAVINGS AND CREDIT UNIONS

Project title

Microfinance for women

ACT member

The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF)

Implementing partner

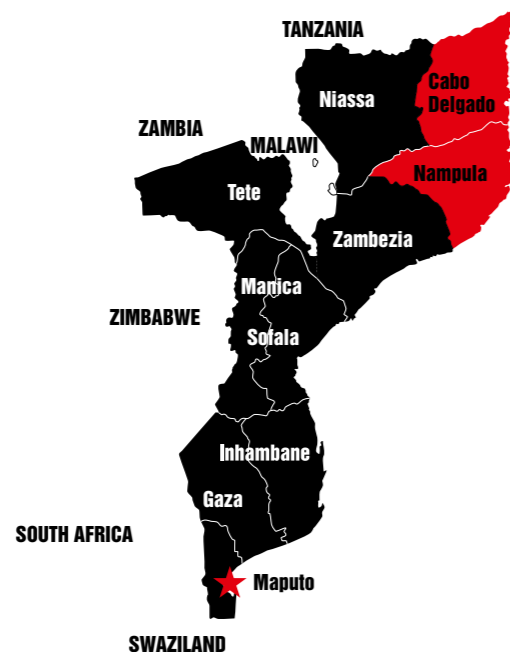
Caixa das Mulheres de Nampula
Nacala e Pemba

Funders

PWRDF
Cooperation Canada – Mozambique (COCAMO)
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Location

Nampula, Nacala and Pemba,
Mozambique



Microcredit institutions have become part of the landscape of development projects since the Grameen Bank showed the world that the poor were bankable. In Mozambique, the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) microcredit project has gone one step further. The organisation has set up financial institutions that are owned and operated by the very poor it wishes to support. These institutions, called caixas, are providing women the opportunity to access capital for small business ventures as well as a safe place to keep their savings. Caixas have also become catalysts for the further education of board members and tools for empowerment as women, many for the first time, are able to access capital without the need for a male guarantor.

Economic and physical vulnerability

A repressive colonial regime followed by 15 years of civil war left Mozambique in economic ruins as one of the poorest countries in the world. Economically, women were worse affected than men. The war left the country with few industries, a weak banking system, poor education and few job opportunities. To compound these challenges, traditional laws and cultures prevented women from acquiring assets, owning land or holding bank accounts. This reality, together with weak laws and poor protection against violence, left women vulnerable to physical abuse by their husbands. To make matters worse, women were forced to rely on their husbands for financial support and the upkeep of the families.

Many studies have shown that providing women with access to credit can decrease their personal vulnerability while also increasing their country's development prospects. Microfinance projects empower women by giving them access to and control over financial resources, through which they can improve their standard of living. The projects also provide opportunities for women to improve their literacy, management and organisational skills, leading to greater equality at the household and community level.

Reducing vulnerability through economic empowerment

In 1996, a group of women who were making and selling cassava cakes came together to look for increased economic security. They approached a staff member of PWRDF for support and training to set up a formal savings and credit system. With the small amount of money (approximately US \$0.45) they had saved through their cassava

business, they started a credit union and each purchased a US \$0.05 share to become members. These women were the first 47 members of Caixa das Mulheres de Nampula (Nampula Women's Credit Union) which, 15 years later, has ballooned to 4,500 members.

Today, 90% of Caixa loans are used to set up new businesses or expand existing ones. In many cases, women have become investors in their husbands' businesses because they are the ones who can access credit. This has earned them the respect of their partners and families and strengthened their capacity to participate in household decisions.

Building leadership

When the Caixa opened, its first step was to mobilise women to join its board of directors. None of the members had ever been part of a governance body before, as there remained an engrained belief that women were not capable of governing or managing financial institutions. The women needed training to acquire the skills and credibility necessary to make decisions in an environment dominated by men. A board development programme was therefore put in place to help the women understand their governance roles and responsibilities. As the board changes every two years, the training is repeated regularly to ensure continuity.

The Caixa board also adopted policies to strengthen the credit unions and ensure that all members had equal power. With financial assistance from the PWRDF, the board made all the existing members shareholders and required every new member to purchase shares. As a result, any major decision affecting the organisation cannot be made without full consultation of the membership.

For the practical operations of the credit union, the board's fiscal committee received training on the interpretation of budgets, bank statements, financial reports and audit reports. The board was also trained to prepare a strategic plan and read statistics and other relevant reports and documents pertaining to a microfinance institution. It was trained to carry out periodic spot checks to ensure that the organisation's guidelines and policies for record-keeping and cash handling were being applied by both management and staff.

Building staff capacity

At the staff level, the Caixa set up workshops to ensure that the female workforce was able to work effectively in a competitive and at times dangerous environment. Staff received training in technical areas such as computerised management information systems and marketing. The marketing training included sessions on gender and cultural sensitivity. Caixa encouraged staff to attend university and gave them time off with pay for exams and other academic obligations. Its policies were designed to be sensitive to the needs of a predominantly female workforce.

Although loan officers have traditionally been male, Caixa introduced female loan officers. It trained them to ride motorbikes to overcome the challenge of covering long distances and difficult terrain in the course of their work. It also encouraged women to compete at the same level as their male counterparts. Since loan officers are, at times, subjected to abuse while collecting loans, Caixa developed a policy that female officers would be accompanied by male officers when working in difficult areas. Caixa



members who abuse staff have their memberships terminated immediately and can only be reinstated after they have made a case at the Caixa annual general meeting.

Increasing membership capacity

Caixas provide ongoing training to every member with a savings account. This training helps women to be strategic about the types of businesses they open and what resources to invest in them while continuing to build their savings accounts. Caixas also train bairro líderes (neighbourhood leaders) to act as mentors to other women who want to open businesses. These leaders motivate and accompany women as they strive to succeed in a competitive market.

Convincing banks that the poor can manage a credit union

One of the biggest challenges faced by the Caixa has been changing the perceptions and beliefs of the officers of Mozambique's central bank. The Bank of Mozambique is the regulatory body for all financial institutions, and has more than 200 members. The size of its membership means that the Caixa has to be accountable to the central bank. But, in the early stages, there was little or no understanding within the Bank of Mozambique of how a community-based organisation whose membership consisted of poor, uneducated women could efficiently run a microfinance business and achieve such a high degree of success.

At one point, the Bank of Mozambique demanded that every board member have a university education. The board in turn argued that this policy defeated the purpose of women's empowerment in a province where adult female illiteracy

was more than 60% and the proportion of university-educated female Caixa members was lower than 5%. The policy was overturned following an aggressive advocacy campaign. At the same time, PWRDF addressed the issue of low education levels by establishing a bursary to give board members the chance to pursue higher education in the area of finance.

Universal intervention, local strategy

In a region where unemployment is very high, many women have become job-creators. Women have created competitive enterprises in the food, mining and furniture-building industries. They are now recognised as reliable entrepreneurs and courted by local politicians and banks. Women also report that they have been able to educate their children to university level through their savings accounts and business endeavours, a first in many families. The testimonies provided by Caixa members, their spouses, employees and community members are the best indicators of results. One of the members of Caixa Nampula ran for municipal elections, explaining that her years of democratic participation at Caixa events had given her the knowledge, assertiveness and confidence to run for elected office.

Lessons learned

One of the most important lessons learned was that development does not happen in the same way from place to place. To be effective, development programmes must take into account local realities. At times, donors made the mistake of bringing in consultants who, although they had knowledge of

Left
Fatima Mutela from CAIXA Nacala is a bamboo trader

Right: clockwise from top
Teresa Albino is a member of CAIXA Nampula and runs a restaurant

Carina Abias Zacarias is a CAIXA member in Nampula. She has two hairdressing salons and employs four people

Opening an account at CAIXA

First member of CAIXA

Zena Adelino Asssane from CAIXA Nacala is a furniture maker and employs six workers



credit unions and microfinance, had little understanding of the local context. The result was that much of the advice given was not relevant for the Caixa in Mozambique. Now the Caixa is much more strategic than before when looking for outside advisors.

Another important lesson is that microfinance is a highly skilled profession that requires significant levels of continuous training and investment. For organisations like the Caixa to be successful, donors must be willing to make long-term commitments.

Conclusion

Microfinance is not a silver bullet for eradicating poverty, but it helps. It puts resources into the hands of women and allows them to make choices that have an immediate impact on the lives of their families, such as better health and education for their children. The conditions need to be right for a microfinance project to succeed. Microfinance is a strategy that is being used throughout the world: but an understanding of local context, opportunities and challenges is crucial to its success.



Contact and further reading
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Microfinance as a poverty reduction tool: a critical assessment
www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2009/wp89_2009.pdf

NEPAL

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

WOMEN ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE THROUGH MICROFINANCE

Ethnic minorities and dalits are among the most marginalised people in Nepal. Women in these groups are doubly marginalised because of traditional gender roles. By engaging in gainful economic activity, the women are earning more respect in their households, making decisions about their own wellbeing and that of their children and gaining a stronger voice in community decision-making.

Programme name

Women's empowerment through knowledge and skills-based enterprise development

ACT member

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

Implementing partner

Society for Local Volunteers' Efforts (SOLVE) Nepal

Funders

Finn Church Aid

Location

Nepal



The intersection of gender, caste and ethnicity

Although the Nepalese constitution guarantees all citizens basic human rights and freedoms, the reality is that religious and cultural traditions prioritise men and boys and systematise discrimination against women and girls. Women's position in society is governed by patriarchal traditions and assumptions, not by the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution.¹⁶

Girls are raised with less food, healthcare and education than boys. Girls are often viewed as possessions – as burdens to their parents or bearers of boy-children for their spouses and in-laws. Women have limited opportunities to earn incomes as they lack assets, such as land and cattle. Nepal is one of only a handful of countries in the world where the life expectancy of girls is lower than that of boys.

In Nepal, gender and class intersect further to define people's status in society. Ethnic minorities and dalits are among the most marginalised people in the country. Dalit women face the same discrimination as women from other castes, but, as dalits, they are marginalised twice-over. Dalits are restricted from using public spaces, including temples, and their employment opportunities are dictated by their place

in the social hierarchy. Dalits are not allowed to collect water from the same places as higher caste people or to marry those above them in the caste system. Dalits also face an elevated risk of violence, including beatings by people of higher castes.

Livelihood activities for women

Lack of access to and control of productive resources is a major factor in women's poverty. Women work primarily in unpaid subsistence agriculture, household chores and childrearing, jobs that do not provide an income. The few women who work in the formal sector often experience wage discrimination and abuse. If they earn an income, they may be forced to give it to their husbands. If they are self-employed, they are often at the mercy of moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates or force women to sell their products back to them at a fraction of their worth.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), in partnership with the Society of Local Volunteers' Efforts (SOLVE), works in some of the most marginalised communities of Nepal to increase women's socio-economic status. The central strategy of this programme is to develop microenterprises and savings and credit programmes as catalysts for women's empowerment. The programme

trains women in the skills needed to run profit-making businesses and supports them to form groups and gain access to and control over financial resources. At root, it strengthens their capacity to make decisions on their own behalf and fulfil their potential.

Confidence to participate

The patriarchal nature of Nepalese society means that it is not uncommon for women to be isolated in their homes when they are not involved in specific outdoor domestic tasks. The first step of the programme therefore entailed working with women to build their confidence to leave their homes and participate in women's groups. SOLVE staff began by making home visits to carry out informal discussions, through which the women learned about their rights, picked up basic literacy and numeracy skills and were encouraged to use their talents. The discussions gradually led to small groups being formed, with around 20 women in each. Meeting on a regular basis, the groups offered women solidarity and mutual support.

Engaging men in equality discussions

SOLVE staff also spent time talking to the women's male relatives and in-laws in

¹⁶ http://wikigender.org/index.php/Gender_Equality_in_Nepal



order to raise awareness about women's rights and the safeguards within the formal legal system that protect women against violence and exploitation. They also explained how increasing women's power in the household can lead to an overall increase in the wealth of the family. This has led to women being better supported by their families with household chores, and being encouraged by them to participate in group activities and, as a second step, to engage in income-generating activities.

Increasing women's financial capacity

As the women in the groups became more confident in their abilities, SOLVE began to offer training and support to help them increase their resources for engaging in business. They provided training in business development, enhanced their agricultural skills, and helped them make business plans. The programme also provided women with training in leadership, group visioning and management, and, through exchange visits, opportunities to see how other communities were working. The programme organised market exposure visits and buyer-seller meetings to create awareness of how markets function, how to access

them, how to obtain accurate market information and how to negotiate prices.

The women started pooling their money into a group savings programme to increase their collective financial capital. As the savings grew, they realised that their collective efforts could create a common lending fund. Each group was also given an endowment fund from which they could draw larger credits for group businesses. The businesses established were mainly agricultural, based on cash crops and livestock, but also included services such as tailoring and painting.

As the businesses have grown, and both the supply of products and the demand for capital has increased, SOLVE has helped organise them into cooperatives. Run by the women themselves, the cooperatives harness government services to provide training, marketing and financial support to the growing businesses. They manage collection centres to help women bulk their products and fetch better prices for them while reducing their marketing and transport costs. The cooperatives have access to low-interest wholesale loans from financial institutions, which they pass onto their members. They also provide financial security to members, as they are registered with the government and have formal systems

in place to manage savings and loans. The cooperatives have provided many dalit women with their first opportunity to access government services and financial institutions.

Increased capacity leads to social change

As they build their capacity to increase and control their income, women's status in their communities is rising. Women who used to earn a meagre US \$50-200 a year have increased their income levels many times over. They are able to take control of their lives and make decisions about their activities.

Beyond that, women's new economic status is catalysing other kinds of change. Community organisations are incorporating women's ideas and opinions in their decisions. With more money and a greater control of resources, many women are choosing to send their daughters to school. And, by empowering the women to operate confidently in the business arena, the programme is enabling them to make connections with buyers of different castes.

Lessons learned

Change can be slow in countries where discrimination against women is strong. It is important to be intentional about raising awareness of women's rights,



equality between the castes, the laws that protect women and dalits and the root causes of women's oppression. For gender equality to become a reality, both women and men have to change their traditional beliefs about the roles of women and dalits in society. Linking women's empowerment to microfinance is a way to sensitise people to women's rights while at the same time giving women a tool to demonstrate their capacity to lead.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that women have been oppressed, they are more than capable of running their own businesses and gaining economic independence. Supporting women to take the initiative to increase and control their financial capital is one way of enhancing their wellbeing and that of their families. In countries where women are marginalised by both caste and gender, it is important to begin by empowering women to participate in the programme. Financial capital increases women's bargaining power in the household, and boosts their ability to feed their children and send them to school. The increased power it gives also helps raise self-esteem, which in turn encourages women to participate in decision-making at both household and community level.

Adapted from Bread for the World
"Gender Mainstreaming in Practice"

Previous page and from left to right

A problem shared is a problem halved: women in Nepal discuss economic and social empowerment

Contacts and further reading

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Lutheran World Federation Nepal
www.lwfnepal.org/dep.html

PHILIPPINES

THE BIG PICTURE

WOMEN TAKE THEIR PLACE IN THE SOCIAL FRAME

**Project title**

Gender mainstreaming in the slums of Manila

ACT member

Bread for the World

Implementing partner

Zone One Tondo Organisation (ZOTO)

Funders

Bread for the World

Location

Tondo District, Manila, Philippines

For ZOTO, an organisation working in the slums of Manila, understanding the need to analyse programmes, organisations and procedures has opened the door to new ways of serving the poor. As women make up a majority of the poor, ZOTO realised that it is important to understand the uniqueness of their needs and how various interventions can affect women and men differently.

ZOTO has also worked to create equality within the organisation. By ensuring gender equality at leadership and decision-making level, and educating employees on the importance of gender justice, it has encouraged staff to become leaders in promoting women's rights.

Looking beyond theory

In theory, the Philippines enjoys high levels of gender equality. Women, like men, are allowed to own property, take out bank loans and control resources. Violence against women is considered a crime, and the age of consent for boys and girls is 18. Women enjoy freedom of movement and freedom of dress and, in general, girls receive higher levels of education than boys. The World Economic Forum ranked the Philippines eighth out of 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report.

In practice, however, women experience greater vulnerability, discrimination and poverty than men. Despite being allowed to own property, fewer women than men actually do so. This limits women's collateral and therefore their viability for bank loans. Violence against women continues: women may be afraid of the consequences of reporting it, unaware of how to do so, or doubtful that their reports will result in justice. Although more girls enrol in higher education than boys, men are more likely to be employed and tend to earn higher wages than women.

Gender, poverty and the slums of Manila

The slums in Tondo district in Manila are inhabited by some of the country's poorest people – around 80% of whom are women. Every year, some 120,000 families arrive from rural areas and set up their huts at the edge of the city, along arterial roads, on the harbour or under bridges. This is illegal occupation, and the families live in constant fear of eviction. As there are limited childcare facilities, women often work in the slums to look after their children. Most work

Gender and development (GAD)

GAD is an approach that focuses on intervening to address unequal gender relations which prevent inequitable development and which often lock women out of full participation. GAD seeks to have both women and men participate, make decisions and share benefits. This approach often aims at meeting practical needs as well as promoting strategic interests.

UNESCO

in the informal sector as, for example, washerwomen or food sellers, and earn irregular incomes. Violence against women is common in the slums. Since there is little medical care for the population in the poor districts, many women die during pregnancy.

In 1970 the inhabitants of a slum area in the port of Tondo founded the grassroots group Zono One Tondo Organisation (ZOTO). At that time, the inhabitants banded together to defend themselves against the threat of demolition of their settlements. Today, ZOTO is made up of 212 local organisations in 14 resettlement areas and includes 14,100 people.

From human rights to women's rights

When ZOTO first began, it focused on general community work such as championing human rights and disregarded gender equality, not only in its work but also in its organisational structure, policies and procedures. ZOTO's decision-making bodies were dominated by men, despite the large proportion of women in its grassroots membership. Gender justice and women's rights played no role in its work; programme staff did not use a gender lens to evaluate issues, trends or potential solutions; the organisational budget did not dedicate resources specifically to women and gender; and organisational strategies and plans were blind to the uniqueness of women's strengths and challenges.

For a long time, gender relations were simply viewed as a private matter.

This changed towards the end of the 1980s under pressure from female ZOTO members, who set up an independent women's department to combat

domestic violence and deal with gender-specific issues. Once ZOTO recognised the connection between gender inequality and poverty, it made rapid and decisive changes to its principles, programmes and operations.

From gender blindness to gendered vision

It had taken seventeen years for ZOTO to go from being gender-blind to using a gender mainstreaming strategy. The springboard was the formation of the women's department, which raised questions about the lack of equality in the organisation and its programmes. The women's department focused primarily on women's empowerment and participation in public decision-making. By networking with other women's organisations, the department broadened its understanding of issues and interventions, and became part of the international debate on women in development.

After three years of raising awareness of the need for specific gender programming and ensuring that all programmes, policies and structures were analysed as to how they might affect men and women differently, the ZOTO regional executive committee agreed to introduce a gender equality programme and set up a gender committee. This was the beginning of ZOTO's gender mainstreaming strategy.

From understanding to action

Over the next few years, a special programme was implemented to focus on the strengthening of women's positions in ZOTO and the communities it served. Two women were hired as coordinators to oversee the programme and facilitate workshops on gender-

A gender audit is a self-assessment tool for identifying staff perceptions of how gender issues are addressed in programming and internal organisational systems and activities. It is also a process for creating ongoing gender action planning, and identifying challenges and opportunities for increasing gender skills and organisational equality.

InterAction

sensitive planning. This work culminated in the development of gender-sensitive indicators, which included increasing women's participation in decision-making bodies of ZOTO, increasing the proportion of men participating in gender education programmes, allocating at least 5% of ZOTO's overall budget to gender equality programmes and integrating gender in all areas of work.

After implementing gender programmes and ensuring that there was gender equality within the organisation, ZOTO decided to conduct a gender audit to assess management willingness to promote gender equality, staff understanding of gender, and collective perceptions of the importance of promoting equality. The audit also evaluated the effectiveness of existing systems and structures designed to promote equality. As a result of this gender audit, ZOTO now pursues an active gender equality policy within the organisation as well as a 'gender and development' approach in its external work on the issues of sex trafficking, domestic violence, child abuse, teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS. The gender audit led to changes in internal management, including a balancing of gender in the composition of leadership roles (60% women and 40% men) and in decision-making processes at all levels of the organisation.

Gender in community programmes

In 2006, ZOTO celebrated the adoption of a special gender equality and promotion plan, whereby it conducts gender analysis in communities and ensures that activities are planned in gender-sensitive ways. In 2008, its main programmes included a campaign against domestic violence, a health programme, a children's rights programme and a microcredit programme.

The domestic violence programme earmarks 10% of ZOTO's budget to support female survivors of abuse. The health programme focuses on disease prevention, family planning and helping women access the services they need. The children's rights programme deals with reproductive health and gender justice, challenging the traditional

understanding of gender roles. The microcredit programme, developed during the gender audit, is geared specifically to women and headed by a woman, and has a quota for credit grants to make it easier for women to generate income.

Lessons learned

Changing gender and power relations is a long-term process that has to be developed step by step in multiple spheres. In the process of implementing the project, ZOTO has learned that it can do this by giving people in poor neighbourhoods access to social services, education, policy-shaping powers, equal rights and the possibility of playing a role in the economy, while simultaneously championing gender equality. It has also learned that an intentional gender analysis is needed to understand issues and develop interventions that truly address the unique concerns of men, women, boys and girls.

Conclusion

Gender equality is now considered a crosscutting issue, and gender mainstreaming has become a principle strategy in ZOTO's operations, from its organisational structures to its programming. By using gender as a focal point, ZOTO is now better able to understand the concerns and address the needs not only of heterosexual women, but also of gay men, lesbians, the young and the elderly. ZOTO's understanding of poverty and how expressions of poverty are different for men and women help it to nuance its interventions to meet the particular needs of different groups.

Contacts and further reading

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Global gender gap report

<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-2011/>

Gender audit handbook

www.interaction.org/sites/default/files/Gender%20Audit%20Handbook%202010%20Copy.pdf



Images right

A programme team campaigns with women from local communities against domestic violence. By promoting reproductive healthcare and children rights and enabling income generation, programme coordinators are prioritising gender-sensitive planning workshops as a key part of the process

SENEGAL

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE GIRLS

ADOLESCENTS CHALLENGE GENDER NORMS

Project title

Gender and adolescent health in peri-urban neighbourhoods of Dakar

ACT member

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC)

Implementing partner

Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Sénégal (EELS)

Funders

CRWRC
EELS
Communities

Location

Cap Vert and Yeumbeul, Senegal



Cultural norms and traditions play an important role in defining women's sexuality. In peri-urban neighbourhoods around Dakar, Senegal, these norms and traditions increase the risks to girls' reproductive health. In response, the youth in these neighbourhoods are forming peer groups and driving cultural change in their communities. By raising awareness in the community and gaining support from community members, especially fathers, young people are advocating for girls' rights and supporting each other to make healthy choices in their lives.

Increased HIV and AIDS risk in peri-urban neighbourhoods

The low-income, high-density areas outside Dakar are situated at the interface between rural and urban landscapes. Muslims and Christians of diverse ethnic origins call these neighbourhoods home. Many have migrated from rural areas and work in low-paying jobs that fail to lift them out of poverty. They tend to maintain traditional practices when it comes to marriage, family life, the treatment of women and attitudes to community. Also living in these neighbourhoods are a few educated men and women who remain loyal to their communities and wish to participate in their development.

HIV is not an isolated issue

According to a survey conducted by the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) in 1997, people living in these peri-urban neighbourhoods are at a higher risk of being infected by HIV than in other parts of the country. For women, the risks and consequences of HIV are twice as serious as for men. Women fear being divorced or losing family support, which can lead to greater impoverishment. A widespread perception that HIV is a woman's illness leads to prevention efforts targeting women, rather than

men, despite the fact that women are infected by men. Patriarchal attitudes keep women submissive and fearful of claiming their rights, and women are repeatedly prevented from making decisions that affect their wellbeing, whether by being forced into marriages with older men (as second and third wives), being forced to marry early (before the age of 18) or being denied an education. Women must even seek permission from their husbands before being tested for HIV infection.

The effects of HIV are compounded by other socio-economic issues, especially for women and girls. The problem is embedded in a context in which 66% of the population live below the poverty line, where the majority of adult women have no literacy skills and where many women under the age of 18 work in their own or a relative's home as unpaid domestic labour with no hope of attending school. The causes and effects of HIV are directly linked to the adolescent fertility rate and maternal mortality ratio, which are in the bottom 8% of the UNDP Human Development Index.

Stigma and lack of information

Issues related to HIV are rarely discussed in families or community forums. The stigma associated

with HIV creates a culture of silence and misconception. While HIV is a frequent topic on the airwaves, very few programmes deal honestly with real concerns and taboos. HIV campaigns rarely address the reproductive health realities of adults and young people, and instead make admonishments concerning acceptable behaviour within the cultural context.

Peers as agents of change

For the past 12 years, CRWRC has been working with the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Senegal (EELS) to decrease the threats to the reproductive health of adolescent girls in peri-urban communities around Dakar. Their programme focuses on increasing knowledge, changing attitudes and encouraging positive behaviour among girls, their families and their communities with regard to relationships and sexuality. It selects youth leaders from those who have participated in the project for at least a year, who then act as educators, role models and advocates for fostering change in their neighbourhoods.

Increasing knowledge to change behaviour

Youth leaders have two primary roles in the project. The first role is to support and educate adolescent girls. The youth

“We have seen how the girls in the programme groups have become self-confident and able to share their knowledge with the rest of the community. And we have seen that the community is recognising the efforts of these young people. All of this gives us reason to hope for the future.”

Khiatou Dieng Community Member



leaders establish learning circles made up of girls aged 12 to 15 or 16 to 18 years old who live in the same community, are out of school and have few literacy skills. Participants meet twice a week and work through a series of 42 sessions, covering topics such as male and female biology, gender relations, family and spousal relations, decision-making, early pregnancy, early marriage, female genital mutilation and sexually transmitted infections including HIV.

The training aims to empower the girls to exert more control over their bodies and health. It teaches them about communicating effectively with their parents, peers and community leaders. They learn to assess their options and make positive choices. The training also focuses on increasing the girls' self-esteem and their willingness to take responsibility for their actions.

Equally important are the bonds developed between participants. The girls develop strong relationships where they are able to learn from and support one another. Most girls become sexually active during adolescence; through their relationships with one another, they learn how to resist sexual submission and coercion, and protect themselves against the consequences of unwanted sexual relations.

Advocacy

The second role of the youth leader is to teach the girls in the learning circles how to advocate for themselves and for girls in general. They learn the basic principles of community activism, organising action groups, making decisions and taking responsibility for change. The learning circles then organise community events as a first step towards using their new-found skills. The groups organise street theatre, community forums and discussions with local leaders and key adults. While young women are the driving force of the programme, both boys and girls who are interested in advocacy are invited to join.

The youth leaders receive training throughout their involvement in the programme. Sometimes this is carried out by EELS staff, and sometimes it is given by other youth with experience in the programme. This training gives youth leaders marketable skills, including basic literacy and numeracy, as well as information on sexuality, relationships and how to advocate for change.

Adult involvement

The reproductive health of adolescent girls concerns not only the girls themselves, but also their mothers and grandmothers, who are often unprepared for the task of raising girls to deal with

the reality of urban poverty. Their discomfort with adolescent sexuality is a major obstacle to providing girls with the information and services to which they are entitled. This project enabled parents wishing to support their daughters to set up informal neighbourhood councils. Over time, these councils have found members in other concerned adults and community leaders, both men and women. The parent groups work to change social norms and attitudes, including those relating to forced early marriage. Neighbourhood councils have frequently become involved in incidents where young girls were harassed and seduced by older men. They have successfully interceded on behalf of girls whose parents have decided to marry them at an early age, especially when the girl has protested and asked for support. The parent groups have also successfully advocated for vocational learning opportunities for adolescent girls.

Overcoming challenges

Although the programme has enjoyed numerous successes, the challenges remain. Cultural barriers continue to undermine the participation of girls in the programmes. Household chores are seen by some as more important than group meetings or learning



opportunities, so girls are often not allowed to participate in advocacy activities. With the help of strong community leaders who champion the work, however, acceptance and support for the programme continues to grow. In addition, as the programme has increasingly become community-led, the notion of changing traditional beliefs and culture is becoming more accepted and viewed less as an idea imposed by the global north. In fact parents, and especially fathers, are becoming some of the programme's strongest defenders by speaking out against early and forced marriage.

Lessons learned

The programme has taught EELS that scientific arguments about viruses and infection rarely make an impression on people: they merely change the discussion from one of individual risk to proving how risk equates to consequence. The organisation has found that the most useful way of raising levels of knowledge is to equip adolescents to identify and challenge local myths, false beliefs, rumours and the stories that people use to deny their personal risk head on and to increase their ability to identify and reject risky behaviour.

Since participants often lack literacy skills, it is important to use a variety of learning techniques. Using techniques that allow participants to feel successful helps build their confidence and comfort level in talking about sexuality with their friends and families.

Conclusion

As of 2011, over 2,500 participants and their families have received training, support and encouragement to reduce threats to girls' reproductive health. As the number of participants has increased, the programme has shifted from being centre-based to community-driven, allowing it to develop in a way that has empowered the community and especially the adolescent youth.

Young people are a force for change in Senegal – change agents as opposed to objects of change led by adults. They are having a huge impact on their communities, as more unmarried youth are practising and campaigning for sexual abstinence and adolescent girls feel more empowered and supported to deal with unwanted sexual advances. Young people are supporting each other, speaking up for each other and working together in inspiring ways to create a culture of equality.

Previous page and above

Senegalese women share their knowledge of gender relations, sexuality and equality in a bid to empower girls to exert more control over their bodies and health

Contacts and further reading

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CRWRC Senegal
www.crcna.org/pages/
crwrc_wamt_senegal.cfm

Book Training for Transformation
A Handbook for Community
Workers

SIERRA LEONE

RELATIVE VALUES

FAMILY ROLE MODELS INSPIRE COMMUNITIES TO PRACTICE GENDER EQUALITY

Project title

Gender model families

ACT member

Christian Aid (CA)

Implementing partners

The Rehabilitation and Development Agency (RADA)

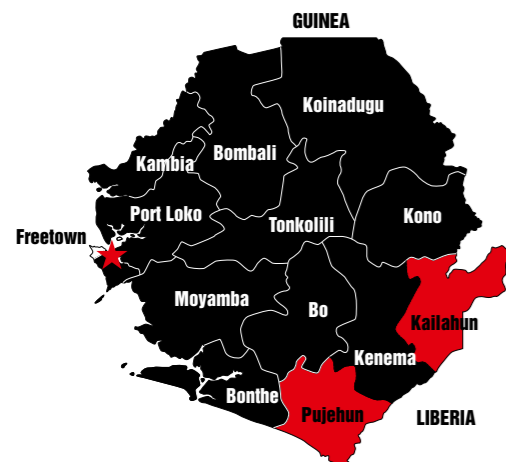
The Social Enterprise and Development Foundation (SEND)

Funders

Christian Aid

Location

Pujehun and Kailahun, Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, traditional attitudes to gender roles are a major factor in limiting women's ability to make decisions that affect their lives. The lack of freedom women experience is often a violation of their human rights.

One way of countering traditional cultures and beliefs is through the use of role models. In this project, role models demonstrate and teach gender equality by practicing it in the household. They also demonstrate how families can ensure women's human rights are respected and how greater equality can positively affect the wellbeing of a household.

A poor country with great wealth

Sierra Leone is a country with a rich history, culture and resources. It is among one of the top ten diamond-trading nations in the world, has the world's largest natural harbour and is a major producer of gold, titanium and other minerals. However, despite this natural wealth, Sierra Leone is consistently at the bottom of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) development index. It continues to recover from a brutal 11-year civil war and a colonial legacy. It also struggles with corruption and high international debt.

Gender inequality is another major issue hampering Sierra Leone's development. Although the country's constitution enshrines equality, traditional (or customary) law often supersedes the formal legal system. Women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives, and many people are unaware what constitute women's rights and what behaviours violate them. Despite new programmes that provide free healthcare for pregnant women and children, many are still refused access. Women have never been given full access to land even though they make up the majority of agricultural labourers. As a result of this traditionally and culturally accepted inequality, women are unable to reach their full potential – economically, socially or personally.

Using role models

An innovative approach to promoting gender equality in communities, while also challenging cultural norms and traditions, is being implemented by two agencies in Sierra Leone, RADA and SEND. The approach, called positive

deviance, uses gender model families (GMF) as community role models to lead by example. The goal is to create communities where women are able to enjoy greater equality by contributing to the decision-making.

The families who participate in the programme as gender role models often already demonstrate positive gender roles and deviate from the roles traditionally ascribed to men and women. The families are encouraged to continue their relationship practices, while receiving training and support to improve their ability to achieve gender equality in the household. Examples of gender equality being practiced by the families and encouraged through the project include equal distribution of domestic chores, respect between men and women, shared decision-making and equal support for female and male children to attend school.

GMF as a project

RADA uses gender model families as a project in and of itself. In this approach, families receive training on how to build on their knowledge of why gender equality in the household is important and how to practice equality. Village chiefs and traditional authorities are invited to attend meetings to ensure that they understand the process and are in favour of the programme being implemented in their areas. The gender model families are then required to work with other families in their community to encourage more families to model gender equality through respect, shared decision-making and equal opportunity for male and female children. The GMFs demonstrate an alternative way to live and give practical support to help other families change their behaviours.

Positive deviance is an approach to behavioural and social change based on the observation that in any community, there are people whose uncommon but successful behaviours or strategies enable them to find better solutions to a problem than their peers, despite facing similar challenges and having no extra resources or knowledge than their peers.

The PD Initiative

“The good thing about the GMF is it’s not about talk that comes out of your mouth, it’s about actions and that makes it different because it’s about setting an example.”

Female in GMF Programme

GMF as a project component

SEND integrates gender model families into other programming. In this example, GMF was integrated with SEND’s livelihoods security project, health education and conflict resolution education. The overall intention was to increase food security and household income levels and, at the same time, encourage men and women to share these resources equally. The GMF programme also enabled women to carry out economic activities – giving them power, voice and time to get involved in community credit and savings activities. In GMFs, women were able to negotiate safer sex and received information about conflict resolution to help reduce violence in the household. By their leading through example, other households adopted practices of gender equality and became GMFs themselves.

Positive responses

Through the two programmes, 84 gender model families received training and support. All of the families reported that there was more sharing of decision-making and resources, that male and female adults and children were sharing domestic chores and that there was an increase in school attendance among female children. The families also reported having more cordial relationships, which led to fewer conflicts and a reduction in gender-based violence.

Changing culture is a challenge

Both organisations experienced difficulties when challenging traditional roles and attitudes towards gender. In some instances, men felt disempowered by having women included in decision-making, as this affected their self-worth

and notions of masculinity. Other men found it difficult to change their behaviour, viewing it as culturally appropriate rather than problematic; this included gender-based violence. Additionally, some village chiefs resisted the changes resulting from the programme. One of the roles of a chief is to help settle marital disputes, for which they receive payment. The GMF programme tries to reduce marital conflict and help the couple settle disputes on its own. In order to address the resistance to change, RADA and SEND staff worked to create a dialogue with community members, particularly the men and the chiefs. Through this dialogue, men were able to voice their concerns, which helped them feel included in the GMF process. The dialogue also offered the chiefs an opportunity to comment on and make suggestions about the project, thereby creating buy-in and ensuring their cooperation.

Lessons learned

Core elements of the programme – including women in decision-making and speaking out against gender-based violence – made some men feel disempowered and created resistance to the change the programme was trying to achieve. In an effort to engage men in a way that made them feel part of the project, RADA and SEND learned to scale up their effort to ensure men’s voices were heard and organise male-focused initiatives that included men in the process.

Another significant lesson that was learned through the project was the importance of engaging traditional chiefs through continual dialogue. The chiefs carry significant power in their

communities and, with it, an ability to undermine projects: their support is crucial if a project is to engage community members.

Conclusion

Implementing a programme that uses role models is an effective way to challenge traditional cultures and beliefs, especially in areas where customs and traditions are seen as more important than formal laws. Households that are already working towards equality and mutual respect in their unique contexts are empowered by the programme to be agents of change. By implementing the programme in conjunction with other interventions, positive results can be seen for both men and women. This can serve as a strong motivator for other families that want to improve their lives.

Contact and further reading
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www.positivedeviance.org/



The Kiawen gender model family



The Sandy gender model family



The Massaquoi gender model family

ACT Alliance is a global coalition of 125 churches and related organisations united by a single vision: justice for the world's poor. Every day, the coalition's 33,000 staff and volunteers work together in 140 countries to deliver emergency relief, implement development programmes, and support people's fight for their rights.

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