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Good Practice on Human Rights/Human Rights Based Approach.

Presentation by Lucas WADENYA,

Team Leader-STIPA

KENYA

Preamble/Context

The term gender refers to the social differences in the way males and females are expected to behave or act within a given cultural setting. Gender roles are created by society, not nature and may change over time in response to new circumstances and ideas. These roles are actually interchangeable, for example both men and women are physically able to cook. Since people create gender roles, people can also change them.

The gender roles are as old as the human kind and in the African societies are associated with power relations and inequalities between men and women. Most of Kenyan communities, including those in the western region where STIPA operates from have cultural systems and practices that are patriarchal in nature leading to skewed power relations, marginalization and that sometimes lead to abusing the rights of women.

Many programmes have been designed and implemented by the governments and non-governmental organisations to address gender issues including inequalities had put more focus on women. The major terms that had been used in gender programming include Women In Development (WID) and Women And Development (WAD). As more emphasis was put on women empowerment at the expense of men, some men began to feel inferior, inadequate (i.e. in marriage may men feel inadequate when their wives earn more than them or when they are attending meetings), threatened and abandoned in development process.

The current Kenyan Constitution has embedded a one-third rule for women in all leadership positions. Affirmative action for the girl-child to be recognized through lowering of entry points to schools, colleges and universities, get easy access employment opportunities and vertical promotions. In essence the women's movement has been more developed and empowered enough to take up related rights-based issues. Men have been forgotten and have thus resigned and leaving responsibilities to the women and the girl child; **yet gender is both men and women.**

Also because of the overemphasis on women in gender question, Kenya has seen a lot of power struggles between the men and women, some of which have turned to be fatal. Almost no day passes without an incident being reported in the media from the different parts of the country. What is perplexing is that the men have been reluctant to report such cases to the authorities due to stigma associated with it. Where the issue has come into the public limelight, the women claim that they are disciplining the men who have abdicated their responsibilities and resorted to leisure and alcohol. The situation has gotten out of hand and FIDA has been forced to condemn it.

STIPA's Involvement in Human Rights, Gender and Men Empowerment

Since its inception in 1997, STIPA has been a gender advocate both at consultancy levels and also as implementers. Like the others, STIPA at the beginning put much focus on women and the girl child at the expense of men and the boy child. The boys and men were therefore not involved in social groupings and the development processes. The result has been negative as men abscond from their family roles increasing cases of alcoholism, gender based violence, marginalisation and related rights abuses. In the course of its work, STIPA realized that the men are left out of the equation. We took it up and focused on the man to be the focal point for the discussion of gender issues as partners of women.

According to a baseline survey conducted by the organisation within Kisumu County in 2005 before the launch of Men Empowerment program, the major findings revealed that the role and participation of men in the development process was a paltry 20% leaving a wider gap in resolving gender issues.

- The role and participation of men in economic productivity at the household level was low.
- Women bore the bigger burden and had very little decision making power which is a human rights abuse.
- The men were feeling inadequate as their wives earned more.
- The affirmative action in education and workplaces favoured women making men vulnerable.
- There were many cases of violence against women.

The result confirmed our hypothesis that men involvement and participation was minimal in gender discourse which was a recipe for chaos.

Due to entrenched patriarchy in many societies any desire for change must ensure the involvement and participation of the male folk. It is this realization that led to the emergence of a holistic approach that also targets **the man** as an integral partner in development. The result was termed Men Empowerment project that encouraged equal participation of both men and women as partners in development.

Men Empowerment project has seen remarkable achievements as a result of its interventions as highlighted below:

- More men becoming responsible for their families' welfare.
- Harmony and respect of human rights within the households and the community through perceptions and attitude change process thus creating spaces for participatory development.
- Reduced cases of human rights abuses such as domestic violence.
- Increased enrolment rates of girls in schools as more parents understand the need for gender equity.

- Reduced cases of HIV/AIDS prevalence from 32% to 14% due to increased uptake of Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT), Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) and Antiretroviral Therapy (ART).
- Economic livelihoods of individual families has increased as more men are engaging in meaningful activities thereby bettering the livelihoods.

STIPA's Strategies and Instruments applied in Men Empowerment

STIPA has been applying the **Rights Based Approach** that aims at creating space for participation by all, reducing marginalization and empowering the voiceless. The project has been working with young children-boys and girls, youth in and out of institutions of learning, men and women considering the core elements of the approach.

Trainings:

Different trainings covering various topics relating to gender and development such as Participatory Integrated Community Development (PICD), Stepping Stones, Journey of Life, Family Life Orientation, Gender and Governance and Gender Based Violence with more emphasis on perceptions and attitude changes targeting different groups such as children, youth, men and women have been implemented. During such trainings the various aspects of RBA such as inclusivity and participation of all have been adhered to. Such trainings have not only empowered the groups by broadening their knowledge and skills but also exposing them to the realities of the modern development processes including the desire to observe the rights.

Focus Group Discussions:

Different groups have been involved in discussions that are focused on their special interests and dynamics. These have been very successful taking into accounting the peculiarity of different groups and giving them the privacy and freedom to talk about the difficult topics that may otherwise be overlooked or avoided within mixed groups. The process borrows deeply from the *Stepping Stones* approach that allows for personal introspection and coming up with solutions to the prevailing problems. This process allows the groups and individuals involved to reflect on their lives and decide to change attitudes without being forced.

Exposure Visits:

Community members normally learn better when they visit other areas and share with different groups. Through these they not only learn how others live but also adopt new skills and technologies. For example when they visit a place where a mixed group of men and women are working together and implementing a successful project, they get motivated and return to replicate the same within their communities.

Perceptions and Attitude Change Process for Children and Youth:

Working with children and other young people in the institutions such as schools, churches and colleges has also been a strategy. Within this various activities such as topical debate forums, music, drama and essay writing contests has been implemented. In such forums use of video

technology and related instruments had been employed to provoke discussions on the different audience.

Advocacy:

Various forms of sensitization and advocacy targeting different groups with different relevant messages had been employed. Among these had been the use of electronic media in the form of radio discussions-where a given topic is introduced to the listeners through the local dialect by a panel of specialists and then the listeners are allowed to call in and contribute. This has been very successful since the coverage of the listeners is much wider and brings in different perspectives to those tuning in. Also the use of printed materials with relevant messages to advocate for a certain issue has come in handy.

Conclusion

Although a lot has been achieved, more still remains to be done if the human rights are to be fully enshrined in everybody's heart since the cultures, perceptions and attitudes are slow to change. Men Empowerment is therefore a process in the right direction if gender equity and human rights is to be attained by all.