



Funding programmes to engage men and boys in GBV prevention: a donor perspective

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First, I would like to thank UNFPA for arranging this rich symposium. It's been very informative and inspiring to hear all the contributions.

We have been discussing on the one hand, about approaches to engage with men and boys to prevent GBV and on the other hand of programmes that address men as victims or survivors of sexual violence.

When I first saw today's programme, I was not quite sure whether we can put these two work streams in one day and under the title of working on gender transformation with men and boys. But actually, it is very clear and was expressed by many speakers: Sexual violence against men and boys and against members of the LGBTIQ+ community is rooted in patriarchal norms of masculinity and heteronormativity. And the questioning of norms of masculinity is the aim of engaging with men and boys to prevent GBV.

Let's first talk about the engaging men and boys work stream. When in the 2000s, I was first asked to look at Swiss funded GBV projects in the Great Lakes region, it was quite clear to me already then that if one of the most significant consequences for survivors of conflict related sexual violence was stigma and exclusion from their community, we could not expect to successfully support the survivors if we didn't work with their families and communities on gender norms and on trauma. Hence, we initiated the community-based psychosocial programme, that Dr Aziza Aziz-Suleyman presented today. The programme is now 10 years old. Ten years in humanitarian action is a very long time – and yet, it is not. Most conflicts we work on are protracted.

All programmes working with men and boys on gender transformation we heard of today have presented promising results including reduced violence in their communities or families and more gender equality. Although all of them have a different approach, there are some elements that for us as a donor are important to look out for when deciding on funding a project. We will ask questions such as:

- Is the activity closely linked to the engagement with women and is the women's perspective on which it is based anchored in the particular location where the programme wants to be active; in other words, how well is the project adapted to its specific context
- Does the project have a clear theory of change – what is the goal of the work and how will the change be documented
- Are the facilitators well trained and have they had sufficient time and space to reflect on their own biases, on their own internalized gender norms and on their own traumatic experiences related to these norms;

- Does the project foresee enough time for the men or boys to change, through focused sessions and through a longer term engagement in community action – change is a process and it takes time
- But maybe most importantly: does the project acknowledge the experience of the men, their own struggle and vulnerabilities, and does the project help them understand how their personal experience as men affects the life of women.

This last point seems quite obvious, but it is not obvious when looking at proposals that claim they can achieve behaviour changes in 3 sessions or projects that out of fear to deviate from their focus on women and girls, resort to passing messages on what behavior is expected from men. Such projects with short and superficial sessions then regularly report that the culture was too strong for change to happen, or that the men were not motivated to participate.

We work in contexts that can be described as traumatic situations. Not everybody is traumatized but everybody has experienced traumatic events. The resulting vulnerabilities – together with gender norms – deeply affect individual and collective relationships between men and women. Violence against women is understood by the SDC-funded psychosocial programme in the Great Lakes region as being at the core of the fragmentation of conflict-affected communities; and as a consequence - collectively addressing GBV is considered to be an essential part of any conflict transformation work.

When we adopt a community based approach to working on GBV prevention and response where women and men, boys and girls are included in different types of individual and collective reflection processes, we have a better chance that both - women AND men survivors of violence will seek help and support.

And this brings me to the second work stream we discussed today, the support for male survivors of sexual violence. SDC has an inclusive approach to GBV and hence, we advocate for services also for male survivors of sexual violence. We support the Women's Refugee Commission and the All Survivors Project at global level; we were happy to support the production of the guidelines of the GBV AoR which was presented today - and we are funding the Regional Emergency GBV Advisor in Nairobi to work on the issue of men in GBV prevention and response.

Although we have supported these efforts for a while, we still see very little programming for male survivors. This is of course not surprising, there is such immense underfunding of services for women that most of the time, there are not sufficient resources available for separate services for men and boys. We clearly need more funding, as services such as for example safe spaces must be separate for men and women and the methods to address men and boys are in many ways also different from how we work with women and girls.

But we also need approaches of working on GBV that helps to reach more people, that makes more of the available funds and encourages more survivors of all genders to break the silence and seek support. And this brings me back to my starting point: When we talk in the community about masculinity and femininity, about the relationship between the genders, when we engage in sincere and context conform community dialogue, with women and girls and with men and boys, we contribute to reducing GBV and –we contribute to building networks of solidarity that provide support and generate healing for survivors of all genders.

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