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Men in Collective Action on SGBV in Kenya: A Case Study

Empowerment of Women and Girls

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As revealed by the 2008/9 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, a staggering 45 per cent of women aged 15–49 have experienced either physical or sexual violence - mostly committed by their husbands or partners. Some of the causes behind the high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) include traditional gender norms that support male superiority and entitlement, social norms that tolerate or justify violence against women, and weak community sanctions against perpetrators. It is critical to understand the national context of Kenya, particularly its electoral history and the varying levels of violence associated with it. Accusations that the government manipulated the election process in the 2007 election plunged the country into mayhem, with Kenya spiralling into an unprecedented political, economic and humanitarian crisis. This compounded the already high incidence of SGBV in the country. While the political crisis and violence were resolved at the end of February 2008, the level of SGBV experienced revealed some of the deeper problems the country is facing in addressing gendered inequity, including oppressive notions of masculinity. The imbrications of SGBV within broader contestations and violence have made both women's and men's organisations begin to reassess the roles of men within the response to SGBV.

This case study examines the ways in which collective action and the involvement of men may influence the prospects of effectively changing community perceptions and values regarding SGBV, and how it may strengthen the overall response to the problem. The broader aim is to help improve information access and to inform strategies of relevant actors (including activists and policymakers) addressing this issue, with meaningful male engagement, and to facilitate the forging and strengthening of strategic alliances for gender justice and ending SGBV. Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) joined together to engage with multiple actors for collective learning in this study. In order to achieve the objectives of the case study, the team designed a qualitative study of local perspectives and responses to the issue of the roles of men in collective action on SGBV. Based on a movement and influence mapping workshop, held in Nairobi 3–5 July 2013, a set of five questions for investigation were identified:

1. What factors have influenced men's involvement in addressing SGBV issues?
2. What SGBV strategies has the men's involvement movement focused on and why?
3. What successes has men's involvement to address SGBV recorded?
4. What challenges face the engagement of men in SGBV and (how) are these addressed?
5. What is the future of the men's movement in the fight against SGBV?

Eighteen respondents were consulted in the study from 12 civil society actors and three different branches of the Kenyan police service. Two-thirds of the respondents were male ($n=12$) and one-third of the sample ($n=6$) were female. All respondents were employed in, or representatives of, their organisations and participated with full informed consent. The findings of the study are summarised briefly, by five themes corresponding to each of the five research questions, below.

The factors that have *influenced* men's involvement and the men's movement in SGBV issues have ranged from socioeconomic and cultural to legal and personal factors or relational issues. A major factor cited was men's own realisation that the problem not only 'involves' but also 'affects' men. Alongside this is an increasing awareness regarding SGBV as a development issue which men can do a lot to address. Several groups emerged in this context seeking to make men allies in the fight against SGBV with impetus said to have come from realisations that involving men can lead to better results. It was reported that men can change much faster and more enduringly if engaged by fellow men, although some respondents also mentioned a sense of 'backlash' caused by the neglect of men and boys in both women's empowerment programmes and development strategies of the 1980s and 1990s. Recent legal changes and the

accompanying need for more 'tactical' gender justice work were also mentioned as influences on men's involvement in SGBV issues. Several respondents noted that the Kenyan legal system has improved, presenting opportunities for men to support progressive agendas on gender and power issues involving SGBV. The poor preparation of the Kenyan judiciary and police for new legislations on gender equality and SGBV issues was said to have triggered capacity building efforts with men in key national sectors, such as the police. Participants highlighted the response to HIV as an important variable in men's involvement in addressing SGBV. This was also viewed critically, given that early strategies for involving men in HIV prevention had often neglected highly at-risk and hard-to-reach men, such as gang members, men and boys in the informal settlements, as well as gay, bisexual or other men having sex with men (MSM). There is ample evidence in the data collected that some men joined the fight against SGBV due to personal experiences with SGBV, either as direct or indirect victims.

The problem of SGBV reportedly takes a variety of forms in different parts of the country and, consequently, organisations involving men in the response have focused on different *strategies*. Strategies range from one-on-one mentoring of men to group sessions, open forums, group therapies and couple counselling to inter-gender dialogues and multisectoral actions, involving communities, the media, medical, psychosocial, security and legal institutions, etc. A common strategy has been to involve and interest men in SGBV work through education and sensitisation. As a strategy, this was generally associated with increased awareness about SGBV among potential perpetrators, survivors/victims and the Kenyan public in general. Capacity building of organisations, opinion leaders and key personnel in various institutions was said to be another key strategy that the men's movement employs in its work, which was said to have reinforced the ability of individuals and groups to engage more actively and humanely on SGBV. Mobilisation of broad-based support for survivors in SGBV cases and advocacy events is also a strategy commonly employed by the organisations. The evidence we collected suggests that the mobilisation strategy has been used effectively in cases of rape and in the development of SGBV-related legislations in the country. Interview data consistently suggested that the use of media campaigns, radio and TV shows and other artistic productions, as well as popular theatre, has supported community education, sensitisation and improved access to SGBV information in a range of ways and places.

Various *successes* have been recorded in the prevention of and response to SGBV over the past years. Organisations in the field of SGBV acknowledge progress with regards to positive change in men's attitudes and male engagement, increased collaboration between various stakeholders involved in tackling SGBV, and strengthened national policies and legislations. Several respondents argued that: the establishment and presence of male groups and organisations can be seen as a success in itself; the idea of gender issues as women's issues has been 'demystified'; a broader mainstreaming and integration of male involvement has begun; and women's organisations interviewed acknowledged that the empowerment of both women and men can lead to an increase in the reporting of SGBV cases, including reporting by men. Reportedly, even male survivors of SGBV are increasingly finding the courage to come out and report. This was considered to be a crucial success, given the relative 'invisibility' of male survivors. Most respondents referred to the growing collaboration between various stakeholders involved in the SGBV response as a significant achievement, and the involvement of men in the SGBV discourse was said to have strengthened the policy formulation on gender, such as in the HIV Act (2005), the enactment of the Sexual Offence Act (SOA) and the ongoing Marriage Bill (tabled in 2013). The engagement of religious and cultural leaders was cited as a major step in ensuring that cultural factors propagating SGBV are mitigated. Building the capacity of the police and their inclusion in community mobilisation and awareness activities was also cited as a success, although the high turnover and rotation of officers across postings and roles was said

to make this strategy challenging at times.

Nevertheless, involving men carries *challenges*, such as poor public awareness of SGBV or of gender as having much to do with men, not to mention insufficient budget allocations or political commitment to work on gender with men. The social norm that intimate partner violence is broadly accepted in much of Kenya was said to be a major obstacle, as was the reported stigma and discrimination arising from being violated. Another challenge was identified as a lack of integration of the police, health and legal systems. The atmosphere towards men's engagement was said to remain hostile overall and respondents described what was termed as 'bad blood' between the Kenyan government and civil society. Men's organisations were said to find it difficult to get resources, as the government has reportedly not yet embraced male involvement. Interviews also revealed that the 'donor syndrome' is seen as another challenge, with funding typically only available for short periods of time – of six months to a year – along with high expectations for instant or rapid results. This was also said to heighten competition between men's organisations. Overall, it was felt that there is insufficient collaboration and solidarity between organisations in this field. Many organisations also cited challenges with working with the police, arguing that many police officers lack awareness of the standard procedures for handling SGBV cases. Another major challenge was identified as a lack of harmonised indicators and systems for reporting to monitor SGBV efforts. Gaps in research were seen as a major challenge and others included: a lack of male-friendly services; media misreporting; the difficulty in implementing sexual education in schools; and the exclusion of men in many approaches, as well as a lack of engagement with perpetrators for rehabilitation.

The final question sought to understand *predictions and priorities for the future* on men's engagement in addressing SGBV. Respondents prioritised: a need for more innovative thinking in gender justice movements; options for building on men's expanding involvement and priorities for movement building; new approaches to policy, advocacy and engagement with government actors; new solutions for overcoming resource mobilisation challenges; and better strategies for research and documentation. Directions for development and new approaches included: mobilising men for the increasing involvement and contributions of men and boys in the prevention and response to SGBV; addressing some obstacles in broader systems and the culture by 'shifting gear' and for approaches to become more innovative, more strategic, and less cautious around 'culture'; working more strategically with policymakers (including with 'champions') and agitating collectively for policy reforms; continued work with the police service, for capacity building and for reforms; engaging more strategically and substantively with the education sector and schooling system to reach younger men and boys better; and building stronger partnerships across organisations, movements and sectors.

Given the challenges of a general lack of funding for work with men and boys on gender equality, and the related issue of competition and disunity among organisations and various actors, forging alliances and collaborative strategies around a more effective SGBV response were suggested for particular attention in the future. Directions for meeting research and documentation needs were also suggested, such as: better partnering between actors to strengthen the evidence base and documentation for learning about the impacts of the work; building capacity for documenting learning in less formal ways and pooling resources; and coalition building as a strategy for developing research accompanying interventions and mobilising resources together. Our more specific recommendations are summarised below.

Recommendations for mobilising men and strengthening their engagement on SGBV include that those men already active in the response are well placed and should be helped to mobilise more men to take an active stand for gender equality and against SGBV. This mobilisation should take more account of psychological and political dimensions of such work, and that men

should build on their existing dialogue with other movements such as women's groups or anti-violence groups to elaborate and clearly communicate their basic values and aims.

Recommendations for addressing structural and cultural obstacles include that a broader response should include a range of programmes. Capacity building efforts for the police service should be stepped up to restore public trust and build stronger institutional commitment. Primary and secondary schools should be targeted for change, with (a) better integration and delivery through curricula and teacher training processes, and (b) strategies for mobilising institutional change agents to strengthen the institutional response to SGBV. In order to improve public awareness and understanding on SGBV at the community level, men's organisations should engage certain cultural and traditional leaders in efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV, being careful to identify leaders open to the issue and to avoid reinforcing supremacist ideologies.

Recommendations for resourcing the response to SGBV are premised on the conclusion that policymakers must rethink and update their approaches to addressing issues of gender and SGBV. Policy objectives should be developed, and concomitant resources mobilised, to address the needs of men and boys, alongside women and girls, taking into consideration the damaging impacts of oppressive masculinities on all. Advocacy work by CSOs and other actors should be supported by the government and other development partners, to better inform policymaking and institutional solutions. Community organisations and local groups should be empowered and supported to act as a bridge between the community and local government.

Recommendations for coalition-building propose that more innovative and unifying narratives should be developed for building partnerships among various stakeholders across sectors and movements. Collective actors should be helped to come together to establish common objectives and agendas to mobilise resources for collaborative programming. Women's organisations should be reassured that their efforts and resources will not be compromised by involving men. Programmers, activists, researchers and policymakers should come together to carefully examine men's roles (alongside women's) within processes of policy change.

Recommended priority issues for research are to generate better evidence on: incidence and evolving forms of SGBV; approaches to reaching men and boys for gender equality at scale, and on associated outcomes; 'which men' to engage most effectively in what capacities and roles; as well as best practice approaches for specific groups of men, such as reaching men in informal settlements, working with young HIV-positive people who face SGBV, etc.

Recommended approaches to knowledge generation are that efforts should be invested in building stronger partnerships between actors who involve men and research institutions to learn from action, and that collaborative research should be developed specifically to accompany interventions in coalitions and mobilising resources together.

Recommendations for knowledge-sharing include that: capacity should be strengthened for documenting learning in less formal ways and pooling knowledge resources, using websites and social media to share promising approaches; dissemination of documented promising models should be targeted to organisations that have the capacity to scale them up; the decentralisation process in Kenya should be utilised strategically for sharing promising approaches in different regions; and that organisations should be supported to engage in international means of sharing resources with actors involved in similar work in other countries.