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Gender-Based Violence: Organisations for International Cooperation must take Responsibility

Responding to gender-based violence in community settings

How youth participation and solution-focused approaches empower young people in addressing gender-based violence in Tanzania

By Abubakar Mutoka Balibanga

The nature and severity of acts of gender-based violence (GBV) is alarming in Tanzania like in many other countries in the world. With 70% of its population below 35 years old, efforts to address GBV in Tanzania must focus on young people. terre des hommes schweiz uses youth participation, solution-focused and psychosocial approaches in the country to empower young people from excluded and vulnerable groups to engage in actions to prevent and respond to GBV in local communities. What can we learn from their approaches?



A girl peer educator sharing knowledge at street joint in a village in Kigoma. Photo: © Nehemia Thomas

A sad reality, the statistics are alarming

Forty percent of women in Tanzania have experienced physical violence from the age of 15 onwards, 22% of whom are young girls aged from 15-19. Eleven percent of young girls aged from 15-19 experience sexual violence. Young women who have been abused by a partner are ten times more likely to be HIV positive than those who have not been abused. The statistics about GBV are alarming, confirming that violence is a daily reality for women and girls in Tanzania, and that addressing it must be a key developmental goal.

GBV is highly intertwined by a culture of silence, prejudice, and myths about femininity that portrays women and girls as objects that are owned by men, tools for reproduction, and second-order creatures that should submit wholeheartedly to men. In Tanzania, many cultural norms still dictate that women are inferior to men; like children they can't make sound decisions, they must be controlled...by men! Norms also depict boys as superior to girls, so they should be given all opportunities: education, inheritance, land, jobs, leadership, status, respect, etc.! In a relationship, the woman is expected to literally serve the man.

Focus on vulnerable groups of women and girls

Experts in the field of GBV agree that “GBV disproportionately affects women and girls from excluded or vulnerable populations” (UNFPA et. al. 2013: Breaking the silence on violence against indigenous girls, adolescents and young women). Consequently, effective programming must pay special attention to these groups of women while considerations are taken to (inter-)cultural and gender perspectives. The definition of excluded and vulnerable groups in this field is diverse, but in most developing countries a special focus needs to be put on reaching out to young people since they constitute a much larger section of the population. In Tanzania 70.6% of the population are under the age of 35, more than half of these are adolescents, and only about 30% are above the age of 35.

Due to various biological, social, cultural and political factors, young people form an extremely exposed and vulnerable group. Cultural norms and harmful practices against girls expose them to extreme acts of gender-based violence. For instance, in many traditional communities an adolescent girl is no longer a child when she drops out or finishes primary school and cannot go to secondary school; when she gets pregnant, or is married or “taken” by a man; or when she completes her initiation rite or undergoes female genital mutilation (FGM) practice. This is enforced by the Law of Marriage Act (2002) which recognizes that a “14 years girl can be married with parental/guardian's consent”, even though the Constitution of the country states that a child is a person below 18. In reality, these girls are biologically children, but socially and culturally adults, a situation that exposes them to some of the worst forms of GBV.

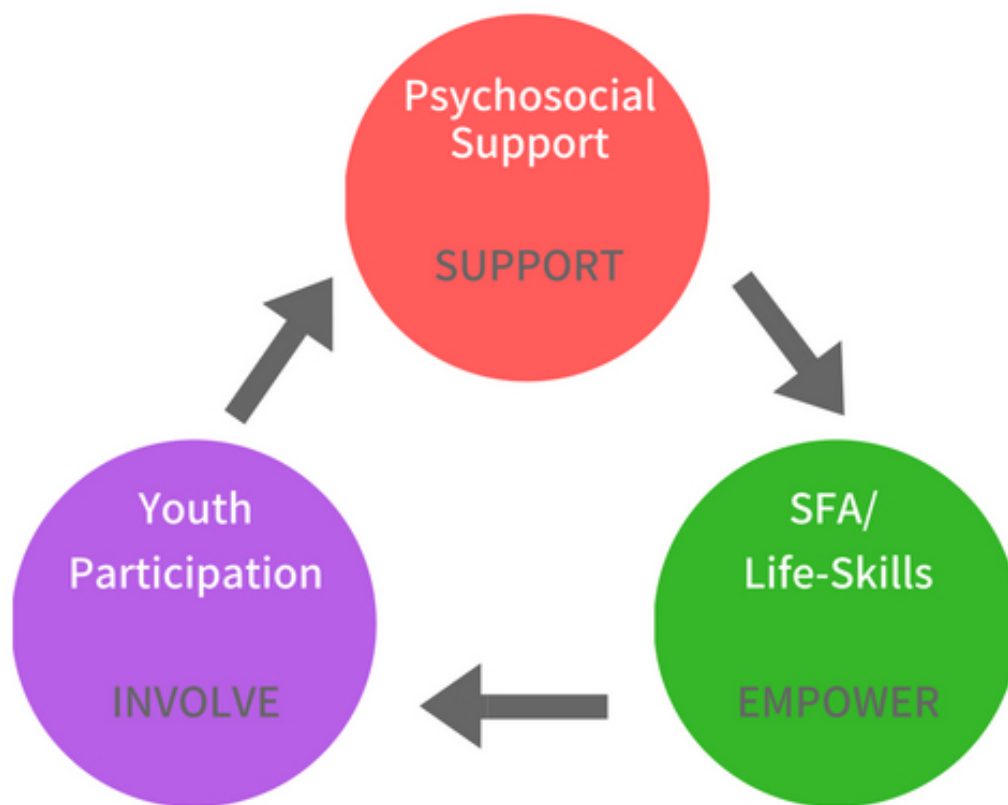
Another excluded and vulnerable group are out of school youth. This is a very diverse group and may include adolescents living in a relationship, single teen mothers, adolescents engaged in domestic or sex work, idle youth confined to the streets and struggling with addictions and a large number of others engaged in street-bound informal jobs. The Tanzania Youth Policy 2007 recognizes that these specific groups of young people need special attention, protection and focus (The United Republic of Tanzania. (2016): National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children in Tanzania 2017/18 – 2021/2022).

GBV is a way to disempowerment

GBV increases women and girls' vulnerability, disempowers them to participate socially, economically and politically, and leaves the survivors with long lasting traumas. Evidence shows that GBV affects every aspect of well-being, including personal agency and self-actualization, educational achievement, livelihood, employment prospects and physical and emotional welfare. Effective GBV programs must address factors that limit women's power and abilities; they must turn the patterns of discriminatory cultures upside down (Gennari, F; et. al. (2014): Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)).

Approaches to empowerment

Projects that address GBV must counter this disempowerment with empowerment. In order to achieve this, we need approaches that enable the youth to understand power dynamics at relational and societal levels that underlie violence, to explore and strengthen their personal values and identities, experience personal strengths and activism, and build movement and voice to respond to the cycles of violence. *terre des hommes schweiz* partner projects develop these competences through three major pillars illustrated below:



Graph: A youth empowerment model. Based on terre des hommes schweiz partners' work in Tanzania

Youth participation ensures that “Young people actively influence the development of their environment due to their participation and co-determination in social processes; and that [they] assume responsibility for their projects and their environment” (terre des hommes schweiz. Concept Youth Participation: Strategic Priority with regard to Content of terre des hommes schweiz. 2013). Participatory processes are key to promoting self-confidence, competences and building a positive identity.

Solution-focused approach (SFA) and life-skills education help young people to discover and build on their strengths, rather than their problems, in achieving what they dream for. Through SFA and life-skills young people are provided with the tools they need to confront life with positivity and hope. Strength-based and life-skills based working awakens the power within young people and ultimately inspires them “to take positive actions in their lives and communities”. The effect of this is the rise of personal and collective activism, whereby young people actively take action in their private lives and in collaboration with others in their communities in response to injustice (The GBV Prevention Network/Raising Voices. (2012): Get Moving! Facilitator's Guide. Kampala. 2nd Ed.).

Psychosocial support helps in breaking the lifelong cycle of violence to which young people are exposed. From childhood to adulthood, we pass through stages of being exposed or *at risk*, to being *survivor* to (possibly) becoming *perpetrator* later in life. Excluded and vulnerable youth have experienced violence in their lives in various ways and most are silent survivors (UNFPA. 2010: Building Survivor Centered Response Services: Participant Manual. Pakistan). terre des hommes schweiz supports partner organizations to address this situation and help them to get their power back and use it positively, by helping the youth to explore and develop personal values and identities, build confidence and hope, restore energy and personal agency. Beside information, the youth also receive counseling and services that enable them to make their own decisions (The United Republic of Tanzania. (2016): National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children in Tanzania 2017/18 – 2021/2022).

Approaches applied to projects

terre des hommes schweiz country strategy in Tanzania recognizes that:

- GBV is epidemic that needs massive response by reaching out to all layers of the ecological model (Violence Prevention Alliance/WHO: The ecological framework);
- Programs must harness the power of vulnerable youth to respond to violence and make impact in their communities.

Projects supported by terre des hommes schweiz in Tanzania recognize and reach out to a diverse group of youth and community stakeholders with diverse needs. The youth learn to recognize situations (when, where, with whom) where someone is trying to use power over them (control), and to experience positive power within themselves and with others to respond appropriately when in violent situations.

Empowerment projects help young people and communities to experience a different, positive and dignifying model of relationships: Husband – Wife relationship; Parent – Child relationship; Teacher – Student relationship; Leader – Citizen relationship; and other interpersonal relationships.

*It is less about WHAT you Do with them...
It is more about HOW you Do it with them!*

Partners implement approaches by focusing their interventions on **3 levels**:

1) Participatory Processes: This implies that projects

- are founded on a peer-to-peer approach;
- build strong, inclusive and gender-sensitive peer group processes;
- address power dynamics within and across groups;
- offer a model of positive/respectful adult-youth partnership;
- support youth-led community activism on GBV

2) Solution-Focused mindset and facilitation: This implies that *terre des hommes schweiz* partners in Tanzania:

- consider strengths and resources of the people (strength-based model);
- amplify what works, what they really want;
- recognize that the youth are experts of their situations/problems;
- concentrate on the DOING level, what **can** the youth/community DO? *terre des hommes schweiz* partner projects support what the youth/community are already doing well'
- cooperate with the people/youth at eye-level.

3) Life-Skills Based Curricula: This implies that projects

- offer a modularized delivery, tailor-made contents;
- build (life-)skills for individual behavior outcomes;
- adopt a rights-based approach;
- highlight power issues and inequality, and build skills for self and community advocacy.



Creating space for quality participatory processes. Photo: © Nehemia Thomas

Some results of empowerment

From survivor to activist

"Violence at home was the reason of my downfall in life and at school. It caused me to fall pregnant and miss out on my education. I felt confused and desperate. I couldn't talk to anyone about this before. In fact, I have never understood why it all happened to our mother, to me and to us!"

"I am very happy and really grateful to be member of this peer club. Not only I have learned to deal with my situation better, but also I know where I can go for help. I feel more energized and want to stand on my feet, to fight against gender based violence in the community, for my future and the future of other youth." Testimony from a peer club member (F,17) at Ilagala village, Kig

Early project results indicate that empowered youth gain confidence, assertiveness, belief in oneself; they speak out and sensitize peers, and are daring in nurturing a dream for their lives. Every liberated woman in the world who stood up to challenge violence in her life and community boasts of those qualities; yet patriarchal societies define them as 'masculine'. Empowered, young people become change agents! The Cycle changes from **Survivor/Perpetrator** to **Activist**. To achieve this, *terre des hommes schweiz* partner projects in Tanzania empower young people and communities with information, help them regain hope and re-build their self-esteem and self-effectiveness (power within), and then build movement (through peer groups) for local advocacy.

Conclusion

Preventing & Responding to GBV really demands:

- That projects empower and support women and girls, men and boys to experience positive "power" within themselves, with others and through actions to challenge and transform situations around them;
- That in very youthful populations, a special focus needs to be put on excluded and at risk groups of young people;
- That interventions challenge oppressive norms and practices by modeling positive, benefit-based and respectful relationships.

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Abubakar Mutoka Balibanga, *Terre des Hommes Schweiz*, Tanzania. Abubakar was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1973. He moved to Tanzania in 1997 where he graduated in Social Work. Between 2005 and 2011 he worked as tutor, then as academic officer at Newman Institute of Social Work/Tanzania before majoring in Counselling Psychology in Uganda. Since 2013, he has worked in the field managing projects on gender, children and youth in Tanzania. He has gained experience in Gender Based Violence using SASA!-Approach being a trainer, program officer and research assistant. He has further experience in youth empowerment projects through Life Skills education, Solution Focused Approach (SFA) and Youth Participation. Since 2017, He is working with terre des hommes schweiz in Tanzania to support, mentor and build capacity to grantees in implementing SFA, psychosocial support and youth participation approaches in their GBV and Sexual and Reproductive Health projects. Email

Kontakt

Deutschschweiz

Medicus Mundi Schweiz
Murbacherstrasse 34
CH-4056 Basel
Tel. +41 61 383 18 10
info@medicusmundi.ch

Suisse romande

Medicus Mundi Suisse
Rue de Varembeé 1
CH-1202 Genève
Tél. +41 22 920 08 08
contact@medicusmundi.ch

Bank details

Basler Kantonalbank, Aeschen, 4002 Basel
Medicus Mundi Schweiz, 4056 Basel
IBAN: CH40 0077 0016 0516 9903 5
BIC: BKBBCHBBXXX