



## Supporting transformational change in Kenya to reduce gender-based violence and other harmful practices

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***A jointly funded Kenyan-Finnish capacity development programme aims to strengthen government prevention and response mechanisms across three counties. Designed to improve capacity and coordination across multiple sectors, NIRAS is supporting transformational change – helping duty bearers to better serve the most vulnerable groups and communities at risk of gender-based violence.***

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Gender-based violence in Kenya remains a long-standing problem, persisting for years and intensifying during crises like the Covid pandemic that force victims to stay at home where, sometimes, their abusers and perpetrators also live.

Often, this kind of violence includes female genital mutilation and domestic abuse, but these are only some forms of gender-based violence common in Kenya and the world at large. Its scope covers a much broader spectrum of physical or nonphysical violent acts, all rooted in gender norms and an imbalance in power. To significantly reduce gender-based violence in this East African nation, systemic changes have to be made. This programme seeks to be transformational by identifying the root causes of GBV and enabling duty bearers to meet their obligations, thus supporting rights holders to claim their rights.

Implemented through the State Department of Gender and Affirmative Action and County Governments in the counties of Bungoma, Samburu and Kilifi, the project “Strengthening Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence” – or

Kenya-Finland Bilateral Programme on GBV Kenya – is a capacity development programme designed to enhance existing systems for GBV prevention and response.

A project jointly funded by the Government of Kenya and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland, GBV Kenya is laying the groundwork for new learning and innovations to strengthen the delivery of quality support services to the people and locations with the greatest risk and vulnerability to GBV.



**1400+**

Duty bearers given training, coaching and supportive supervision

**2,525**



Elders/Cultural Leaders supported to develop & implement roadmaps to combat GBV, support increased reporting, and promote access to services



**472**

Champions supported to model & promote transformational change



## Breaking the cycle of gender-based violence in Kenya: goals and expected outcomes of the project

Strengthening prevention and response to GBV in Kenya requires knowledge and skills to identify, address, monitor and prevent GBV. This includes strengthening capacity and systems for coordination and using data to inform multi-sectoral efforts along with evidence to scale the most effective programming interventions.

Headed by Team Leader Michelle Eil, the GBV Kenya project team is working to see these commitments are achieved by the time the programme ends in September 2024. For the team, carrying out these commitments requires the creation of a coordinated GBV first-response system and building the capacity of trained service providers as well as county- and national-level leaders. It also necessitates mobilising, inspiring and supporting collective leadership and complimentary efforts to address the root causes of GBV, and empower more champions (including women, girls, men and boys) for violence-free homes, schools and communities. In the programme's first year, Michelle shares four interlinked innovations she and her team are navigating. These are:

- Developing a model for coordination;
- Adopting a systems-strengthening approach to capacity development;
- Prioritising locations and groups with the highest risk;
- Mobilising and inspiring more champions for collective leadership.

As they take the next steps, the GBV Kenya project team will use the findings in these four innovations to inform the way they propel the programme forward.





## Mobilising communities, raising awareness and strengthening response efforts in Kenya are key to ending gender-based violence

Among other findings, adopting a systems-strengthening approach requires a review of the established forms of support across Kenya's sectors.

Michelle and her team found that while there are extensive government-approved tools available, such as the Guidelines on Gender-responsive Budgeting and the GBV Training Resource Pack, the challenge of maximising these resources also exists.

"Right now, in Kenya, we're seeing a tremendous fragmentation within each sector and across the sectors," Michelle says. "Workers don't have the same level of core competencies and skills, and because of that, there's a major challenge in terms of accountability since there are different views of the roles and responsibilities each GBV professional has."

NIRAS is currently engaging with the Kenya School of Government (KSG) to explore ways to scale the training of the workforce, as well as updating and refining materials for training so that key persons become more adept at addressing GBV cases.

The need to develop the capacity of the GBV workforce in Kenya is apparent, and closing this gap is possible through insights resulting from the team's review, including:

- Providing updated materials to frontline workers and supervisors;
- Creating systems for support and accountability geared towards supervisors;
- Maximising enrolment of GBV response and prevention workforce in KSG-accredited courses by aligning capacity-building initiatives among development partners and civil society groups;
- Going beyond accredited trainings, such as peer-to-peer exchange and online coaching.

## A more coordinated (and creative) way of disseminating information

Systems-strengthening is vital, but part of its implementation necessitates a model for coordination. One of the fundamental issues the programme seeks to tackle in this regard is that of "alignment and information-sharing across coordination platforms".

Michelle explains that while "there are 47 county gender sector working groups...there is no interconnection and there are no mechanisms" with which these working groups can easily communicate with one another.

"Using the calendar, we are starting to advance conversations about how we can connect agendas, messaging, issues and expertise that's on one platform to another, trying to build more rapport and networks across," she said.

The calendar of GBV Risk/Vulnerability and Prevention Opportunities is a tool for mapping out notable activities in the different counties. Looking through this tool, the team was able to pinpoint crucial dates that tend to increase incidents of gender-based violence in Bungoma alone. These include seasonal factors, cultural practices and elections, Michelle reveals.



“The simple development of the calendar aligns our efforts on a national level and with the donor partner group.” she says.

Another approach the programme is taking in determining the level of GBV risk was to reach out to stakeholders and devise a ward classification system. Represented in three colours — red indicating great risk, yellow medium risk and green little or no risk — the system allowed the County Gender Sector Working Groups to identify sub-counties that were most susceptible to GBV, with higher-risk wards serving as key indicators. In Bungoma, for example, no wards were categorised green.

According to Michelle, stakeholders verified the data and conclusions stakeholders had drawn, and the findings are now being used to inform targeted interventions.

Tapping into the influence of cultural elders

As for inspiring champions, the programme is enlisting the help of cultural leaders and elders. In certain counties, a cultural leader or elder can significantly change the mindsets of community members.

Take the case of Samburu County. There, “elders are respected and are the right people to transmit messages that will be accepted by the community – especially boys and men,” Michelle reports. Yet at the same time and in the same county, awareness of the Kisima Declaration – where elders have declared to end female genital mutilation – is still low and girls and women who have not undergone the process are still stigmatised to a large extent.

Because of this, the team is taking active measures to amplify the voices of champions. Currently, recommended efforts include broadcasting the views of through accessible platforms like the radio, as well as empowering them to engage with community members to show that any change in traditional rites must not affect how girls and women live and are treated in the community.

## Community-focused solutions: prioritising insights from dialogue with GBV survivors and cultural elders

Beyond the technical approach, a core part of reducing gender-based violence in Kenya is engaging with constituents – namely, survivors and cultural elders. In July 2022, a total of 89 survivors – 62 females and 27 males – gathered to discuss pressing GBV issues and needs with the Gender Directors for the county and state, as well as the NIRAS project team. These were to:

- Transform support groups into service providers and an avenue for GBV survivors to heal and connect;
- Engage different social levels, such as community and family, in increasing awareness, and building better warning systems;
- Improve quality services, strengthening victim and witness protection, and broadening opportunities to assist survivors;
- Reinforce and foster a culture of accountability;
- Focus on asset building.

In the discussion, survivors said they view support groups as key to their healing, a safe space where they can “seek encouragement and learn from those who have already recovered,” the team reports. But apart from that, survivors, particularly in Kilifi County, also deem GBV support groups as an avenue where “their voices can be heard and their cases handled expeditiously.”

Being members of a support group can substantially build survivors’ capacity to cope, raise awareness and empower others to do the same. However, more than capacity building, the team learned from discussions there is also an urgent need for asset building.

A report by the team notes that at present, “support groups are struggling to respond to the critical social welfare needs of survivors in the aftermath of an incident,” making necessities like items for hygiene and medical care scarce upon survivors’ displacement.

“Establishing a system for in-kind support within the groups would help them address the critical needs of survivors who are often displaced...and do not have access to their personal belongings,” the report adds.





## On female genital mutilation and child marriage: a dialogue with cultural elders in Samburu

Last year, the Gender, Culture, Youth and Sports Department for Samburu County organised events resulting in discussions concerning female genital mutilation, child marriage and child beading, a Samburu practice where the community supports men, who can be relatives, raping girls as young as six years old.

Engaging with cultural elders ties in with the team's key innovation of mobilising champions and is also instrumental in identifying critical issues in each county and then formulating recommendations resulting from the dialogue. Several observations were:

- How impactful videos explaining female genital mutilation can be so boys and men better understand the procedure girls and women undergo;
- How community events showcasing traditions in gathering and food are safe for open discussion.

A dialogue with Bungoma County elders was also held in October last year, and the team summarised recommendations following the discussion in key points similar to the observations in Samburu:

- Promoting education for both girls and boys as well as parents to give their children guidance and support as a "protective strategy";
- Reinforcing the role of champions in continuously speaking out about the harms of GBV through various platforms;
- Developing anti-GBV educational and mentoring strategies targeted at boys and men of all ages.

## Working towards a world without gender-based violence

The ultimate goal of the GBV Kenya project – aside from greater awareness, improved quality services and a well-coordinated first-response system – is to apply its results to larger contexts.

"Within this programme, there's an expectation that the solutions we bring forward can be applied and scaled in other locations," Michelle says.

By sharing best practices, prevention and even eradication of gender-based violence can occur not only in Kenya but also in the most vulnerable regions of the world. And with the experts' efforts and commitment to building a sustainable world, a future rid of violence is just along the horizon.

