

USING A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD, SOCIAL JUSTICE, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN KENYA

Summary

This good practice offers reflections on how to support strong human rights and women's rights movements. It defines the term "movement building" and highlights key lessons in strengthening movement building in the Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education (AHERE) project in Kenya.

Intended audience(s)

This good practice intends to target different people that implement and/or organise human rights education with the aim to advance gender equality. These people include:

1. Civil society organisations, including staff directly implementing human rights education programs, monitoring evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) officers, education specialists, gender and human rights specialists.
2. Human rights defenders and/or activists, including gender champions that organise human rights education as well as advance gender equality
3. Human rights and gender networks and coalitions, including technical working groups that collectively implement human rights education and advance gender equality
4. Facilitators and trainers of trainees that organize human rights education and advance gender equality trainings for human rights educators.



Context and Problem

Kenya's social, cultural, economic and political landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for enhancing the participation of women in decision-making processes. Despite legislative guarantees for gender equality and affirmative action, women remain significantly underrepresented in decision making spaces in administrative, political and public life.

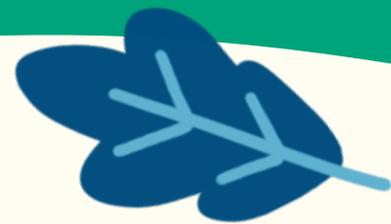
Several factors contribute to this persistent gender gap. Cultural norms and traditional patriarchal attitudes continue to marginalize women, viewing them as secondary to men in both the household and the public sphere. These societal expectations restrict women's opportunities for education and professional advancement, further limiting their potential to participate in decision making and leadership roles. Economic barriers, hostile environment within the decision-making structures and institutional barriers also play a major role in hindering women participation.

Many civil society organizations, including women's organizations, in Kenya have been working to remedy the situation. Yet despite their persistent efforts, many organizations faced challenges in yielding significant results since the majority work in silos, making it difficult to challenge the status quo and hold decision makers accountable. The baseline study conducted for the Advancing Equality program in Kenya in 2019 highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing collaboration between civil society organizations and strengthening their knowledge and skills in engaging duty bearers through collective action. This need for coordination presented an opportunity for civil society organizations in both counties to further leverage their strengths and resources, enhancing their collaborative efforts in realizing women's right to participate in decision-making. Consequently, Advancing Equality prioritized movement building and the strengthening of the gender equality movement in Bomet and Nakuru as central strategies in its programming.

Defining movement building

Movement building is the "ongoing work of creating and sustaining a network of individuals and organizations" (Human Rights Watch) committed to a shared human rights agenda. This is achieved, as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) puts it, through "strategic, long-term process of creating broad-based social change through collective action." FRIDA Young Feminist Fund emphasizes that fostering connections and solidarity among diverse groups is crucial, ultimately aiming to "shift power relations to create a more just and equitable society". It's not merely about assembling a group, but also about providing them with the necessary tools and resources to sustain long-term action.

Just like a building needs a strong foundation, a movement requires ongoing efforts to maintain its momentum and impact. Sustaining and strengthening movement building refers to the ongoing effort to support and enhance the capacity, resilience, and impact of a movement. This involves investing in strategies and initiatives that empower grassroots organizations, community leaders, and human rights defenders to collaborate effectively, mobilize resources, and advocate for systemic change.



Description of good practice

The Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education (AHERE) project in Kenya intentionally sought to support a strong movement of women's rights and human rights organizations in Bomet and Nakuru capable of meaningfully engaging duty bearers and members of the public to influence the participation of women in decision making. AEHRE's efforts to strengthen movement building and enhance women's participation in decision-making involved several key strategies, such as:

1 Shared vision & collective action

A shared vision ensures that everyone involved is aligned and motivated towards the same objectives, making it easier to coordinate actions and resources. As a result of the gradual and strategic efforts in movement building in Nakuru and Bomet counties, intermediaries, duty bearers, community members and other women and human rights organizations agreed to work on a common goal: enhancing the participation of women in decision making spaces particularly Chief Barazas and public participation forums. This collective action resulted in the drafting of policy guidelines in enhancing women participation in Bomet and Nakuru Counties.

2 Strategic alliances & sustainability

Uniting diverse groups with different strengths and resources enhances a movement's effectiveness, allowing alliances to tackle barriers to gender equality more effectively and sustainably than isolated efforts. The Advancing Equality project spearheaded the formation of two Women in Leadership and Decision-Making Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in both Nakuru and Bomet, creating a coordinated network of government officials, civil society organizations, community leaders, and activists who address barriers of women's participation collaboratively. These TWGs are part of the larger Gender Technical Working Groups mandated by the Kenyan National Government in every county; however, until the project, they had never received the necessary momentum to launch. Furthermore, as a result of Advancing Equality's ongoing organizing and mobilization efforts, the Bomet County Government has initiated a platform for civil society organizations within the county to jointly address shared concerns, marking the establishment of Bomet County's first active network of civil society. This development significantly strengthens the local infrastructure for promoting gender equality, making efforts more coordinated, long-lasting, and inclusive.

3 Grassroots mobilization

The Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education (AHERE) project was very strategic in the recruitment of intermediary organizations, ensuring that local women organizations and groups working at the grassroots level were trained and their capacities strengthened. This strategy has ensured that the movement is rooted in the experiences and needs of those directly affected by gender equality issues, fostering authentic and sustainable advocacy. This explains why, even after the wrap up of the activities, the intermediaries have continued engaging and advocating for women's participation.

4 Capacity building

Through consistent capacity-building efforts, the project empowered intermediaries within and beyond the women's rights movement to effectively advocate for change. In addition to the main capacity-building activities of AEHRE, such as training on gender and human rights, intermediaries were provided with opportunities to share their work, challenges, achievements, and celebrate successes. These collective gatherings facilitate strategic discussions on overcoming challenges, fostering a supportive network that enhances the resilience of the movement. Additionally, participants engaged in training on self-care and community-care, promoting sustainability within the movement by preventing burnout and prioritizing individuals' wellbeing.

5 Advocacy and campaigning

Advocacy and campaigning are important strategies for movement building because they generate momentum and create pressure for systemic changes. The Advancing Equality project empowered intermediaries, women's organizations, community members, and duty bearers to coordinate advocacy efforts aimed at influencing decision-makers, institutions, and the public to enhance the participation of women and girls in decision-making spaces. Through tactical advocacy methods like media engagement, sensitization campaigns, and lobbying, the intermediaries in AEHRE amplified their shared vision and message to reach a broader audience. As a result, tangible outcomes were achieved. For instance, Chiefs in Nakuru and Bomet were sensitized to the importance of gender-inclusive decision-making, leading to the development and implementation of policies promoting women's participation in Chief's Barazas. Many Barazas also underwent structural reforms to become more inclusive spaces, and women are now more prone to attend.

6 Inclusivity and intersectionality

Within social movements, power dynamics sometimes prioritize certain voices over others. This can perpetuate a cycle where the most marginalized remain underrepresented, even within a space that espouses ideals of equality and justice. AEHRE aimed to challenge these dynamics by creating open dialogues and facilitating collaboration between historically "separated" organizations such as grassroots women's group, national non-governmental organizations, and underfunded LGBTQI+ organizations. This effort not only broke down silos but also challenged biases held by intermediaries unfamiliar with the unique challenges and priorities of other advocacy groups. Additionally, AEHRE prioritized providing safe spaces for all individuals to participate meaningfully within its activities aimed at strengthening movements, ensuring that marginalized voices were not only heard but also valued.

7 Wellness, self-care, and community care

Recognizing the demanding nature of advocacy work and the potential for burnout among human rights defenders and educators, AEHRE took proactive measures to ensure that individuals involved in the movement remained energized and engaged in their advocacy efforts over the long term. AEHRE encouraged collaboration and camaraderie by prioritizing fun and engaging training activities, fostering moments of connection and solidarity, and implementing regular check-ins with intermediaries. As a result, they felt empowered and supported in their advocacy work, leading to greater cohesion and effectiveness within the movement.

8 Monitoring and evaluation

By regularly assessing progress and outcomes, movements can identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing their impact. The Advancing Equality project provided opportunities for intermediaries, duty bearers and community members to meet and evaluate the progress of their efforts regularly, share insights, exchange feedback, and collectively strategize on how to address emerging issues or obstacles. The feedback gathered during these monitoring and evaluation activities guided the movement's engagements, ensuring that they remain responsive to the evolving needs and priorities of the women and communities they serve.



How does the practice respond to the criteria for good practice?

Appropriateness

Movement building is inherently appropriate because it addresses the root causes of systemic issues by directly involving a wide range of stakeholders selected from the grassroots and with lived experiences of deprivation of rights. The AEHRE project worked with organizations that support widows, single mothers, people with disabilities, gender diverse groups, sex workers among other marginalized groups of women and men who are left out in decision making spaces. The project recognized the unique challenges of the two communities and went further to leverage on their knowledge and networks. This contextual relevance ensures that the strategies and languages employed are culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs and realities of the communities involved. Working with grassroots groups breaks down barriers to participation and strengthen their ability to claim and advocate for gender equality. Further movement building maximizes on power of numbers and unified voice and priorities.

Participation

Movement building targets the collective participation of individuals who identify as human rights defenders, women organizations, human rights organizations and governments officers working with an aim of achieving gender equality. It actively involves diverse groups, including marginalized and underrepresented communities, in the process of advocating for their rights. This inclusive approach ensures that a wide range of voices and perspectives are represented, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among participants. By identifying the strengths of individual organisations and their role in the movement, movements are able to tap into the other networks built by its members, and eventually expanding and growing.

Effectiveness

Movement building is seen as a powerful tool for driving social change and empowering communities to advocate for their rights. Through collective action, alliance building and amplifying voices, movements both in Nakuru and Bomet have now made significant progress in increasing the participation of women in local decision-making structures and gender equality. The collective advocacy efforts of the movement in organizing strategic communication, coalition-building and direct action can pressure duty bearers to raise awareness, shift norms and bring about systemic change. Notably, the effectiveness of movement building lies in its ability to inspire hope, resilience and create momentum for transformation. By uniting individuals, communities and institutions towards a more just, equitable and inclusive world. Movement building plays a crucial role in positive social impact and societal advancement. Movement building within the AEHRE project led to significant changes, such as increased participation of women in Chief Barazas and leadership roles within the structure and development of policy guidelines that protect human rights.

Adaptability

AEHRE's movement strengthening strategies demonstrate adaptability by evolving in response to changing circumstances and challenges, showcasing their flexibility. The strategies presented in this good practice are dynamic and can be modified to address emerging needs and opportunities. Whether facing emerging threats, political transitions or social issues, efforts to strengthen movements must show resilience and innovation by adjusting their approaches while staying true to their core values. This adaptability includes various forms of engagement, such as using digital tools, organizing decentralized actions and forming alliances across different sectors.

Innovation

Traditionally, human rights defenders, civil society organisations were used to working in the gender equality sector without focusing on their well-being. As first responders, they were used to responding to the needs of the community without putting much focus on their own individual needs and the needs of those they work with. Through collaboration and building this network, the implementing partners (WEL) and the trained organisations saw the need to have a social platform where members are free and feel safe to share challenges, check in on each other, and solve conflicts. This started through phone calls and text messages, eventually, a WhatsApp group that included all the trained representatives from the 3 training cycles and the members of the policy dialogue cycle. This social media group has created a safe space for members to have social check-ins, carry out debriefs, be there for each other during difficult times, encourage each other, share experiences and learn from each other's experiences. This has strengthened the movement because we realised when members are not doing okay, the movement is affected since they are not able to undertake their roles effectively. Having the element of self and community care was an innovative way to build and strengthen trust among members of the movement and ensures that members have each other's back and unifying them.

Lessons learned from this practice

1. Movements are more effective when they identify what role each member plays in the movement and tapping into the strengths of the individual organisation in the community.
2. Registering movements legally locks out other informal and small organizations from joining the movement. It is easier for movements to instead look for other likeminded people or groups, identify every member's strength, and organize the movement by forming agendas and working on them.
3. Self and community care are significant in a movement because they will help to identify any good dynamics and gaps and innovatively come up with ways to address them. It also helps to always remind the movement the goal and vision as well as motivate them.
4. Grassroots engagement is crucial since local involvement ensures that the movement is grounded in the real issues and needs of the people. Grassroots mobilization helps build trust and legitimacy, making the movement more resilient, inclusive and representative.
5. The organizations within AEHRE strategically used technology and media to coordinate actions, mobilize supporters and most importantly check in on each other and ensure community care is prioritized. This has helped keep the movement vibrant.

Conclusion

In summary, the role of movement building is crucial in promoting gender equality. By uniting people, amplifying voices and fostering alliance, movements empower marginalized individuals to challenge discriminatory norms and fight for their rights. Through organizing strategic advocacy and coalition-building, these movements address various forms of oppression faced by women and gender minorities, such as underrepresentation in leadership and decision making, poverty, gender based violence and lack of access to education, healthcare and decision making and leadership structures. As movements expand and develop, they act as a mechanism for breaking down systemic barriers, promoting inclusivity and creating a fairer society where everyone can thrive regardless of gender or background.

Sustaining and strengthening movements that advance gender equality requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses various strategies. These can include fostering shared vision and collective action, building strategic alliances, mobilizing grassroots support, capacity-building, advocacy and campaigning, promoting inclusivity and intersectionality, prioritizing wellness and self-care, and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation processes. Collectively prioritizing and investing time and resources in these strategies works to enhance the resilience, effectiveness, and impact of a movement, driving meaningful progress towards the realization of women's rights and the advancement of gender equality.

