

DEFYING THE ODDS



Lessons learnt from Men for Gender Equality Now

“I decided to become
a women’s rights
defender.”



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ABBREVIATIONS

- AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO: Community Based Organisation
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMA: Catholic Men’s Association
CSW: Commission on the Status of Women
FEMNET: African Women’s Development and Communication Network
GBV: Gender-based violence
HIV: Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
KAMA: Kenya Anglican Men’s Association
MEGEN: Men for Gender Equality Now
MEW: Men for the Equality of Men and Women
MTC: Men’s Traveling Conference
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
PFA: Platform For Action
RRT: Rapid Response Team
SGBV: Sexual and Gender based violence
STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN: United Nations
USIU: United States International University
WHO: World Health Organisation
VAW: Violence Against Women

In 2001, the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) took the first steps towards creating an African network of male activists against gender-based violence. In a regional consultative meeting which was organized by FEMNET that year, Kenyan men came together to form a local initiative “Men for Gender Equality Now” (MEGEN). This Project was facilitated and supported by FEMNET from 2004 to 2008 when the project became independent.

The Project has worked on training and community mobilization, influencing ordinary Kenyans to challenge unequal power relations between men and women. While looking at gender and power more broadly, the project has focused specifically at preventing and reducing gender-based violence, challenging perceptions that violence is something unchangeable and prescribed by culture and traditions. It has primarily focused on men, encouraging them to transform their relationship with women, and denounce violent behaviour. In order to practically intervene to stop violence, MEGEN has also set up a survivor support program, dubbed “Rapid Response”, through which survivors of gender-based violence are assisted to access justice, treatment and other forms of support.

At the time of developing this booklet, the members of the MEGEN Project has registered an autonomous organization, called MEGEN Kenya, which will spearhead the implementation of the Project in Kenya. Recognizing the many ground-breaking initiatives done through the Project, FEMNET decided to document some of the work over the five years in this booklet, and in a set of digital stories by activists (see: www.megenkenya.org).

The aim of publicly sharing these experiences is to inspire other organizations to learn from our work with men to promote gender equality. Ultimately the aim is to create a more gender-equal and violence-free world – and to contribute to the body of knowledge on how men and women can work together to achieve social and gender justice.

In this publication, MEGEN activists share their personal experiences as individuals and as Changemakers. While writing their stories, the activists were asked to reflect on their own change processes: what sparked their activism around gender and violence? And how has the MEGEN platform been helpful in this process? The publication also includes short briefs on the work of the project, highlighting the challenges, successes and lessons learnt in different program areas. In the process of developing this booklet, many people have been of great help; the dedicated MEGEN activists who shared some of their life experiences in their own writing, the then MEGEN Project Coordinator Kennedy Odhiambo Otina and other FEMNET staff members and MEGEN teams. We are also very grateful to UNIFEM for providing the financial resources that made it possible for us to produce this booklet and the digital stories, and to our other long-standing partners in the MEGEN Project: Heinrich Böll Foundation and CIDA-Gesp. Last but not least, I would like to appreciate Åsa Eriksson who worked tirelessly with the different teams to ensure that the task was successfully completed. We are proud over what has been achieved during the 5 years with the MEGEN Project and we hope that what we learnt can inspire others.

PREFACE

Norah Matovu-Winyi,
Executive Director
FEMNET

MEN: THE KEY TO CHANGE

The setting was Beijing China, the time, July 1995. The NGO Forum had just ended and we had moved to Beijing City, the venue of the Fourth United Nations World Conference of Women. The end of the NGO Forum was an anti-climax of two decades of struggle for equal rights for women. The goal of equality, development and peace, pursued since the First World Conference of Women in Mexico City in 1975, seemed as elusive as ever. The NGO Forum had tackled hundreds of sub-themes and issues relating to the situation of women relative to men. The general agreement was that while some aspects of women’s lives had changed for the better, there were many obstacles to the achievement of the goal of gender equality. Sadly, some areas of women’s lives had even worsened and new issues had emerged.

Moving to the more structured and formal UN Conference afforded those of us attending the two events the time to reflect and ponder on this conclusion. I also found myself reflecting on where I personally needed to go from there. I was the chairperson of FEMNET then, and in that capacity I had participated in the planning and organisation of national, sub-regional, regional and international preparatory meetings to the NGO Forum and the UN Conference. The issues, dynamics, and conflicts that come with those processes had weighed heavily on me. But soon after the Beijing Conference, I was going to hand over the FEMNET chair. It was in this context that I decided to develop a personal Platform for Action. I was committing to a mission in which every day I would take some action to promote the equality of females and males, alone or in partnership with others. While I appreciated the value of synergy that comes from working with others, I was convinced that even one person can make a difference – and I was determined to make that difference.

By September 1996 when I handed over the FEMNET chair, I had already decided that my campaign for gender equality was going to be with men. In the course of reflection, I had looked back at my own life to dig up the factors that made me the person I am. It started with growing up in a gender equal home, where my six sisters and I enjoyed equal treatment with our three brothers in many ways. Although our mother was strong and enlightened, it was dad who made the greater difference. He came out fighting for the rights of women, fighting together with only a handful of others against harmful cultural practices like female genital cutting, forced marriages and also advancing the education of women. I reasoned that if every girl child had a father like mine, then equality would be an achievable goal and not the illusion it still is for many. I was then working in Malawi on a consultancy exploring the issues of violence against women. This research project showed clearly that most violence is perpetrated by men against women and girls. I realized then that violence is a power issue: It is perpetrated by those who have power over others. I also realized that if all men and boys were to decide never to be violent, condone, justify or legitimize violence, then gender-based violence would end.

I worked for two years in Malawi developing a programme to fight gender-based violence and learnt important lessons. Then in 1998, an interesting thing emerged from the news. In a number of countries, men had started on their own accord movements of men to mobilize other men to fight violence against women. In South Africa, Bishop Tutu had organized what was dubbed a million men march to challenge men to stop violence against women. In Kenya, Zambia, Namibia and other countries, men’s groups were emerging with the same objective. In Malawi we were working with the police, judiciary, community and religious leaders, most of them men, to develop strategies for awareness creation and other action to stop gender-based violence. All this encouraged me that there was an opportunity to create a critical mass of African men who will join women in the fight against gender-based violence. Using the FEMNET mandate and spirit of networking to create synergy, I requested FEMNET to allow me to launch a programme to tackle the issue of gender-based violence as part of my contribution to the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action. I developed the concept of a regional Network of Men Against Gender-Based Violence, under which we brought together men from Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia in 2001. The Kenya affiliate, Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), was formed through this regional initiative.

In the three years we worked as FEMNET at the regional level, we learnt many lessons, one of which is that the male efforts of creating organizations to fight gender-based violence were new and fragile. Many of them depended on the support of women’s organizations, while others were only active during the annual Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. We therefore stepped back a little to strengthen one of the network members in order to gain experience to effectively support the regional movement. Our concentration on MEGEN Kenya in the last five years has given FEMNET the opportunity to develop a model for supporting national men’s groups to fight gender-based violence.

The most important lesson learnt from the regional programme and from MEGEN is that there are many men even in the most traditional and patriarchal societies that believe in and support gender equality. These men need to be reached, encouraged, empowered and mobilized to become part of the movement of men who are committed to the fight against gender-based violence. As MEGEN, we have found these men in the families, communities and institutions where we have taken our campaign to reach out to the survivors of violence and to create efforts to prevent violence before it occurs. Another important lesson we learnt is about the intersections between sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Our programme is now making efforts to reach out to people living with HIV/AIDS and link our SGBV prevention and protection messages to those of HIV/AIDS prevention, protection, care and support.

In four years MEGEN has come a long way. We now have both female and male members working to fight sexual and gender based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS individually and collectively.

INTRO

Njoki Wainaina,
Founder MEGEN

ABOUT FEMNET

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) is a regional membership based network, uniting African women's organisations all over the continent. It was set up in 1988, to share experiences, information and strategies among African women's NGOs through advocacy, training and communication so as to advance African women's development, equality and other human rights.

FEMNET aims to provide a channel through which women's rights NGOs can reach one another and share experiences, information and strategies so as to improve their work on African women's development, equality and other human rights.

The Secretariat of FEMNET is located in Nairobi, Kenya.

ABOUT MEGEN

Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN) was initially set up as a project within FEMNET. It is now registered as an independent organization, with more than 200 active members, working in 7 districts and 15 constituencies around Kenya. In 2009, MEGEN is moving to its own offices, and becoming fully independent from FEMNET. MEGEN works primarily with preventing and reducing gender-based violence, but also offers services to survivors of violence. It has a special mandate to reach out to men.

VISION

"A violence free society where females and males are valued equally."

MISSION

"Transforming the Kenyan Society to embrace gender equality"

GOAL

"The creation of a critical mass of Kenyan men and women who believe in gender equality and are able to influence communities, organizations, and the public to embrace gender equality."

1 CHANGING MEN

How does change happen? What can spark men to start challenging the gender roles they have been socialized into performing? And is it possible for men who have always had negative attitudes towards women, even using violence to control women, to change and become activists for gender equality?

In this section, MEGEN members share their personal stories of violence, power, transformation and change - but also of disempowerment when being shut out of the support and care structures for family members surviving violence. The coordinator of the project between 2004-2008 furthermore summarizes some of the challenges, successes and lessons learnt from working with transforming the attitudes of Kenyan men towards gender-based violence.

A portrait of a middle-aged Black man with a short beard and mustache, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a brown leather jacket over a blue and white checkered shirt. The background is a solid teal color.

STILL AT LARGE

When my 11-year old daughter came home early from school that Friday afternoon, she found three men had broken into our home. Twenty minutes later, they had stolen my electronics, my money and my daughter's innocence.

That evening, my wife told me how two of the burglars had harassed our daughter until the third man saved her from imminent defilement. Two hours later, my wife and some of the neighbours, all women, took her to a clinic, counseled her, and did "everything that needed to be done". In other words, there was nothing I, as a man, a father, could do for my own daughter.

As a man – I felt so powerless and alone. Although the burglars had left my daughter, as my wife put it, "intact", I still felt as if my whole family had been defiled.

I moved my family to another area, and my daughter to another school.

Finally, a week later, I reported the matter to the police.

The police officer listed the things stolen and then asked me:

"So, mzee, what was the value of the stolen items?"

He droned on:

"Was any body at home at the time?"

"Was anything else taken away?"

When I answered "Yes, my daughters innocence!" the officer looked up at me for the first time.

Other officers joined into the conversation.

"So, mzee, how can we assist you if you do not have a suspect?"

"Why has it taken you such a long time to come and report?"

"Why have you and not her mother come to report?"

I insisted I was reporting only as a matter of record.

"OK, mzee, come back when you have a suspect," they told me.

Of course, I never found the three suspects. And my family barely survived the period after the incident – blaming each other and feeling guilty and powerless.

The delicate matter of being a father of an abused child weighed heavily on my shoulders. Six months later, our marriage broke up.

The experience turned me into a lone child rights activist. My lone activism landed me in trouble several times. So when a friend of mine invited me to a new group of men fighting for human rights, I reluctantly went along. Afterwards, I had a candid man-to-man talk with one of the members. He challenged me on what I was doing as a man and as a father to ensure that our daughters were not at the mercy of some man wielding his manhood.

I joined Men for Gender Equality Now and found a platform for my activism, with like-minded men and women. As a member of the Rapid Response team (see pages 39-41), I do bring in suspects – just as the police dared me to do six years ago. Even if the three men that abused my daughter are still at large, I find meaning as I walk side by side with other children whose innocence has been stolen. Together, we walk into a police station and make sure their cases are taken seriously. I find satisfaction as they face their perpetrators in court and convict them.

I keep on doing this work, because no child, no woman, no man, should have to go through the difficult process of seeking justice – alone.

Thuku wa Njuguna

NEVER VIOLENT AGAIN!

Being dumped by a girlfriend was something Kennedy Odhiambo Otina used to really fear. As a child, he had witnessed the break-up of his parents' marriage, and he did not want a similar experience. His resolution was to control his girlfriends through violence.

"To me, women were just a big betrayal. If a girl wanted to dump you, you needed to bang some sense into her head and then quit the relationship up-front", he recalls.

Having several girlfriends at a time just in case one becomes defiant, down-talking women to kill their self esteem, and ensuring to regularly having a new 'catch' to brag with to the peers, was the order of the day among his friends in Mathare North, a working class area of Nairobi.

For Kennedy Otina, the pregnancy of his then girlfriend Maureen, became a turning point.

"When we had been seeing each other for six months, she became pregnant. I gave her conditions: if you give birth to a baby boy, you might have a place in my family. But if you give birth to a girl – you can go away and marry elsewhere. It was a very, very bad scenario, looking at it through the eyes of the person I am now," he says.

Nine months later, Maureen gave birth to a daughter. Receiving the news, Kennedy Otina got confused. On the one hand he was disappointed - it was not the boy he had wanted. But on the other hand – there was a child involved who needed to be cared for. Still convinced he would not play a major role in his daughter's life, he gathered the courage to go and pay Maureen and the child a courtesy call.

"When I first saw my daughter, reality dawned upon me. I realized that I was discriminating her: how can I not participate in buying even a napkin for her up-keep?"

As the weeks went by, Kennedy Otina grew more and more attached to his daughter, whom he named Cindy.

And in the same period, something else happened which sparked his journey towards becoming a non-violent and gender sensitive man. He was invited to a seminar organized by the Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN) project. Through interacting with MEGEN, he learnt about gender equality and gender-based violence, and for the first time opened his eyes to the stark reality of how women are discriminated in society.

"I looked at myself and thought: If I am discriminating my daughter this much – who on earth will give her the respect she deserves? I realized I needed to change myself and change the man next door, who might touch the world of my daughter, in order to protect her. So I decided to join the MEGEN team."

A major step in becoming a transformed man was to change his relationship with Maureen. Winning her trust was a challenge at first.

"I promised her: I will never be violent to you again. When we differ on anything, we must instead talk a lot. If you need time alone to think things through, let me know. I will support you in the process."

The relationship survived the transformation and grew stronger, as the power relations shifted. In 2005, Kennedy Otina and Maureen got married, and Maureen also joined MEGEN as a member. Now they are trying to be examples to their families and friends, on how to live in a peaceful relationship, treating their daughters and sons equally.

Kennedy Otina worked as the coordinator of MEGEN between 2004-2008, and he devotes his time to assisting other men and women through the process of change.

"The work motivates me every day, since I see how the team inspires people to do away with the archaic ways of looking at men and women, and instead become sensitive and passionate activists for gender equality."

THE EMERGENCE OF A MEN’S MOVEMENT

Lessons learnt from the formative years of FEMNET’s men’s project

The idea of working with men was conceived in FEMNET after a group of men was cited in the International Women’s Day activities in Kenya in the 1990’s. Staff members became curious to find out what interest those men had in women’s issues — and

this prompted a follow-up to establish whether there were organized groups of men who were working to further the rights of women in Kenya.

The need for the involvement of men was precipitated by a series of global processes in which FEMNET was representing the voice of African women. One of them was the 48th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which discussed the role of boys and men in achieving gender equality. A plan of action was adopted by the member states and FEMNET was at the fore in pushing for the implementation of the plan in Africa.

During this period, there was scanty information on men’s groups working to defend women’s rights. The few organizations that were engaging men in Kenya were revolving around the church and academic institutions. They included the Husband Support Group, which was convened by Professor Katama Mkangi and Samson Munywoki of the United States International University (USIU), and Men for the Equality of Men and Women

(MEW) that was headed by Reverend Timothy Njoya.

In 2001, FEMNET organised a regional consultative meeting in Nairobi on the role of men in ending gender-based violence, in which both MEW and the Husband Support Group participated.

After the meeting, the Kenyan participants developed an action plan that spelled out activities including mobilisation of more men to join the initiative. The first strategy was to reach out to men in their own backyards, and it initially targeted faith based organizations that had a mobilized constituency of men, including the Presbyterian “Men’s Fellowship”, the Kenya Anglican Men’s Association (KAMA) and Catholic Men’s Association (CMA).

The political groups were more difficult to reach. Around this period, Kenya went through a change from a single party state to multi-party democracy. The failure of the opposition to capture power ensured continuous vicious struggle for power among men — and politicians had very little space for women’s rights issues at the time.

The men’s project, which later on took the name Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), was mainly coming up to guard the gains made by women in the women’s rights field, through engaging male supporters for women’s human rights and gender equality. But in the initial years, the project faced many challenges. The emergence of men as advocates for gender equality was received with a lot of suspicion. Within some feminist circles, we were viewed

as competitors for the limited funds available for women’s rights — and not as a supporting initiative. Some argued that men were coming to take over with the aim of wiping out the feminist movement.

In the men’s fraternity, working with men to end gender violence was seen as a gag to the independence of men: “Who are these men who are betraying their fellows?” Some of the members were referred to as “Men who are sat on by women” in their communities.

Media wrote articles about the initiative, and some of the main headlines read: “A group of battered men from the region meet in Nairobi” and “Battered men emerge from their cocoon”.

But as time went by, women’s rights organisations started to better understand our work, and most now see the initiative as a compliment and not a competitor. We are working together in a number of networks, which seek to end gender-based violence.

The media fraternity has also become friendlier and is working closely with our team to highlight cases of GBV. There is also increased positive reporting on men as role models, which assist other men who are in the process of change.

Our experience has been that men with the right information on equality between men and women stand a good chance of helping other men to change. If you allow men to vent out their fears about gender equality, you can help them understand the issues. However, caution has to be taken when approaching men. Men don’t accept wholesale condemnation — but are more receptive to people who strike dialogue with them. Gender-based violence has been practised for generations and proper

understanding of the root causes forms the basis for communication. Men can use men-only forums, meetings and one-on-one interaction to talk to others about violence against women in order to influence change.

*Kennedy Odhiambo Otina,
MEGEN coordinator 2004-2008*

LESSONS LEARNT

FROM SETTING UP THE MEGEN PROJECT:

- Training on GBV and HIV/AIDS is key in ensuring that gender activists are grounded with knowledge about facts and myths on gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS
- Men are sensitive to blame and prejudice, and therefore proactive communication and positive role-modeling is important when targeting men
- Dialogue is the best way of helping men understand GBV and HIV/AIDS
- Men who are in the process of transformation trust fellow men to discuss issues like GBV and HIV/AIDS — therefore it is easier for men to work with men.

THE STUBBORN MAN



Change is a continuous process. Those opposed to it eventually succumb to its overwhelming wave.

I got to realize the value of embracing change after my encounter with a team of MEGEN activists in June 2004, during a workshop at Amagoro in Teso District of Kenya. This encounter exposed me to a truth that took me some time to embrace: that men and women are the same! Upon hearing this shocking revelation from the activists of MEGEN, who were casually dressed and who I regarded as inferior, I got infuriated.

I cannot believe it myself how stubborn I was at that time. I angrily stood up and banged the table and said a big “No”. I felt insulted and this drew the attention of everyone in the meeting. Overwhelmed by emotions, I dubbed the facilitators ‘henpecked’, ‘aliens’, and I don’t remember what else, who had been sent to rob men of their heritage: authority over women. I could not stomach such insults, and I stormed out of the meeting when I could not be further entertained.

Later on, the MEGEN activists approached me again, and further explained what MEGEN was all about. After a lengthy and probing question-and-answer session, I began to see the light in what they were saying. Albeit, this alone did not work. It took me time to be convicted out of the ardent belief I had always had about women as subjects of men’s violence, who were responsible for domestic chores. It had never crossed my mind that this status, which was engrained in our culture, could come to an end.

Eventually I got convinced. I came to believe in the changing power of knowledge. The exposure revealed to me that there was no divide between men and women, who were equal partners capable of working compatibly, respecting each others dignity. Since then, I confess I was BORN AGAIN from the traditional thinker to the modern changed man. This I would proudly say changed me from the ‘Stubborn Wycliffe’ to the ‘Enlightened Wycliffe’.

Soon, I began to experience the impacts of the rebirth both in my personal life and in the community. I felt relieved from the burdens that culture had bestowed upon me. I had been raised learning that women were inferior to men. I thought that wife battering was a way of expressing love to women and this was a moral obligation of any ‘normal’ man. This was how I had defined the Iteso culture. But after being exposed to MEGEN, I realized that violence, belittling and exploitation of women were criminal acts.

The first witness to my change was my wife who had been subject to all these injustices.

She openly confronted me and could sometimes ask me what I had eaten that had changed the violent man I was. In my community, I became a subject of discussion. People were wondering aloud what had become of the violent man I used to be. I took the advantage of this opportunity to enlighten them on the evils that women had long been subjected to, and the need to treat women with respect and dignity.

The encounter with MEGEN and my subsequent transformation was also witnessed in my work as an Area administrator. Other chiefs, who recognized the sudden transformation, invited me to address their ‘Barazas’ (public meetings). I used this opportunity to talk to the members of the public.

However, the gospel did not spread without challenges. First, I was practically hushed down by a mob of angry men who dubbed me as ‘a mad-man and a cultural killer’. Others would rubbish everything I said and even walk away from our forums, literally cursing me. But with determination and endurance, I managed to win a few converts. Together with them, we began to spearhead the campaign “We Can End All Violence Against Women”. So far in my area, we have recruited up to 70 “change makers”. These are men and women who have taken a stand against gender-based violence and undertaken to convince at least 10 other people each to do the same – and stop violence.

The future of MEGEN is pregnant with HOPE. Thanks to those who have been of use in this journey to making change a practical reality. I look forward to that moment when all men and women will get to know this truth, for it shall set them free. I confess I am a living testimony of what change can do.

Wycliffe Epiin

MEGEN TRAINING PROGRAM

Training and sensitization of local communities on gender equality, gender-based violence and the role of men is one of the most important strategies of MEGEN Kenya. The MEGEN Gender Training Program was set up in 2004. Initially, it benefited immensely from the Gender training experience of FEMNET. FEMNET started including men in gender training in 1990. It was out of that experience that FEMNET boasts of having trained some of the region's leading male gender trainers, including the present MEGEN Gender Training Team. The MEGEN Gender Training Team is heavily male dominated because of MEGEN's special mandate to reach men.

The training content, methodologies and materials have been developed, tested and refined through stringent evaluation over the years. They are regularly up-dated with new information, ideas and knowledge. The trainers use case studies, videos, digital stories, frameworks of analysis and personal experience in the training sessions.

Some of the key training methods which MEGEN uses are community sensitization workshops, which are primarily held in communities where the organization has a membership base already; inter-gender dialogue sessions, where women and men confront each other with issues of gender relations, discrimination, masculinities and femininities; and Training of Trainers (ToT). The training content is tailor made according to the different target groups, and the varied challenges in different communities. MEGEN trainers have for example done separate training workshops with members of the police force in different areas. The guiding principle is that gender is about females and males and their social relationship in given situations.

Since training is an expensive undertaking, the selection criteria for trainers are very stringent. Besides formal education, trainers have to be assessed for their commitment, conviction, experience and knowledge of the issues. During the ToT, they are subjected to rigorous practice and assessed both by facilitators and their peers. After training, they are inducted as qualified trainers through practice and partnering with more seasoned trainers.

TRAINING: LESSONS LEARNT



NJOKI WAINAINA

One of the founders of MEGEN, and former chairperson of FEMNET. Been working as a trainer, as well as trainer-of-trainers, for decades.

"I have run countless gender seminars and workshops involving people of very diverse backgrounds, levels of education, exposure and influence in many countries. No one event has been similar to another and every experience has been as rewarding and exciting as if it was the first.

The Gender dialogue forums, where women and men confront each other with issues of gender relations,

discrimination, masculinities and femininities are my favourite sessions. The different perspectives females and males have on issues, the differences in their pre-occupations, the abilities to articulate issues and the different patterns of leadership that emerge are some of the things that are very valuable in helping us understand gender relations.

The most rewarding experience as a long time trainer is to co-train with those you trained and benefit from their creativity, new perspectives, new sources of information and different ways of doing things."

KENNEDY ODHIAMBO OTINA

Joined MEGEN in 2003. Worked as MEGEN Coordinator between 2004 and 2008. Has doubled as a trainer.

BEST PRACTICE:

- Focus on the positive dimension and avoid putting blame on men and women
- Ask people to share: what are their fears, beliefs, and value systems around gender and SGBV? From there: jointly analyse what are myths and what is real
- Read up on the local context, and use the local language when you train. Ensure to clarify any terms or concepts you use.
- Make sure you get people engaged in dialogue – otherwise you are not reaching anywhere!

“In every community there is one woman who is a teacher, a police woman, or even a woman doctor. I like to use a successful local person like that as an example, and together with the group analyse the factors behind her success: How did this woman end up being a teacher/doctor/police woman? What can you say about her family? How does this woman now support her family?

I normally base my training on that person and do the gender analysis from there. I ask men if they are allowing their daughters to go to school, or if they are in the process of dis-empowering them. If their daughters are not in school, I ask how they expect the daughters to assist them in the future.

It is important not to become too academic, but to keep things within the local context.”



PHILIP OTIENO

Joined MEGEN in 2003. Been working as a trainer since 2006.

BEST PRACTICE:

- Be patient and sensitive in developing discussions with men and boys on issues of gender. Many are shy or resistant to talk openly at first. It helps to start discussing general topics and issues of immediate concern to them, before moving on to talk about more sensitive issues.
- Bring together people of the same age group and background to discuss issues they hold passionate. I remember a community seminar that we had in Teso in Western Kenya with around 30 local Chiefs. Whenever one of them brought a controversy, the others were able to address it and shed some light on the matter way before I as a facilitator clarified.
- Tackle aspects that deal with the power that men and boys have as well as aspects relating to problems they face. Men generally need coping skills to adjust to new roles of caring and nurturing, and the skills to bring about collective change of traditional practices and customs that promote SGBV.
- It is usually better to build on existing experience and relationships with particular groups rather than targeting groups with whom you have no relationship. To this end there is need to get access to different groups and build a relationship with them. It is also important to meet their urgent and felt needs as well as work on their vulnerability, responsibility and influence in relation to SGBV and HIV/AIDS prevention.

A man with a mustache, wearing a red baseball cap and a red polo shirt, is speaking directly to the camera. He has a yellow ribbon pinned to his shirt. The background shows a crowd of people and buildings in an outdoor setting.

THE BOILING POT

Moses G. Mbugu

Growing up in our days was very difficult and children were made to undertake all kinds of chores like fetching water, gardening, cleaning the house and compound, and all that your mother could allocate to you. Poverty was real and lack of proper sanitation resulted in all the people in the neighbourhood being eaten by jiggers, bedbugs and lice. We had to be clean shaven to avoid lice breeding in our hairs. It was in our round, mud walled and thatched hut, that one day after school, at the age of 10 years, I kept my books and went straight to the garden where my mother was busy harvesting sweet potatoes for our meal. My mother sent me back to the house to find out if a pot where "githeri" (maize and beans) was being cooked had enough water.

At my age, and being a first born boy, I had not mastered cooking. I only saw my mother dip the "muiko" (cooking stick) into the pot, remove it, then watch if water was dripping off the stick.

I dipped the muiko into this boiling clay pot, and used all my strength, as I had no idea how deep I should go. But Alas! To my surprise, the cooking stick broke the pot and the water and food spread all over. You can imagine how the smoke filled the house. I was lost in the smoke, and tracing my way out of the room, emerged out crying loudly and calling for my mother to rescue me.

My mother ran as fast as her tired legs could carry her. She did not know what had happened, but to her greatest surprise, she discovered the mess I had made. There was no pot, food, or fire and the house was full of ash dust all over. I never saw my mother so bitter and angry before. She turned around, held me with both of her very strong hands and started beating me with anger in her face. Thank goodness, that like a lightening, my father just appeared from nowhere, and rescued me.

When my father listened to the story leading to my beating, he turned his anger to my mother and mercilessly knocked her down and beat her. I was forced to help rescue my mother with the assistance of neighbours who responded to her screams. I still remember up to today the warning to my mother. My father said "my son is a man and I should never hear he was cooking in this kitchen". You can imagine how I felt like being on the top of the world. I had a great defender. My father, my hero.

It was unfortunate that my father was detained by the colonial government during the emergency in 1952, when Kenya was struggling for its independence. My mother took the advantage of ensuring that I performed all household work, caring for my siblings, as we were then a family of nine. I accompanied her to pick coffee for cash in order to support our family. She always reminded me of her broken boiling pot, warning me never to repeat the mistake.

With time, I became an expert cook even for my ageing grandmother. My mother and younger siblings became very happy with me.

When I got married in the late 60's, the society expected me to behave in accordance with our culture. I let my wife perform all duties and I supervised as a man. Cultural norms were instilled in me by my age mates. It was like I knew nothing

about all that my mother had taught me. I became a stubborn man, though my mother continued to remind me about the boiling pot.

I grew as a humble and practising Christian, torn between Christian norms and cultural practices. I grew in an extended family, and a neighbourhood where violence, and male dominance was the order of the day.

I was invited to be trained as a gender trainer in 1990 because at that time, I was working for a national organization in Kenya which was involved in development for men, women, youth and children. I became personally challenged on

gender equality and gender-based violence. **I discovered that cultural norms were designed by men to suit them and could be changed.**

I decided to change and this met with a lot of opposition from my age mates and men in my neighbourhood. I kept talking about the broken boiling pot to those people I trained on gender issues.

The greatest change in me occurred when I attended a Regional Gender Training Workshop, organized by FEMNET at Safari Park Hotel in Nairobi in 2003. I was already a member of MEGEN and a trained trainer. A print media covering the workshop published a news item saying: “Battered men meet today to strategize how to revenge”. This provoked me as the head line implied that the workshop participants were those men who were being battered by their wives. The news item was wrong, and I pledged to continue more than ever before to extend information on gender-based violence to as many people as possible. I have fortunately witnessed testimonies of many men and women who have changed due to my facilitation in the numerous workshops I have been invited to.

My experience of the boiling pot helped me build a strong foundation on which I am, with confidence, able to facilitate Gender training in our country and beyond.

The boiling pot boils on.

LESSONS LEARNT ON DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION MATERIAL

Communication for behaviour- and attitude change has always been a central component of the work of MEGEN. Through tools like posters, branding of buses, stickers, t-shirts and brochures, MEGEN has tried to communicate

non-judgemental messages, which can provoke thinking and reflection among the target audiences – be it grass-roots men, women, youth or policy makers.

The former MEGEN coordinator, Kennedy Odhiambo Otina, stresses that it has all along been important for the organisation to avoid campaign messages which portray men in very negative ways. As he puts it: “If we want to reach out to men and influence change, we cannot portray men as beasts, since no man identifies himself as such.” Instead he proposes asking questions, to allow people to reflect and begin the journey to change.

“One of our posters said: Would you beat your own mother? So why beat your son’s mother? This makes men think: most men would not beat their mother, and would never want to see their mother beaten by any one,

including their father. But still they might be mistreating their wife or girlfriend. We wanted to make them reflect on how their own sons and daughters react when their mother is beaten,” he says.

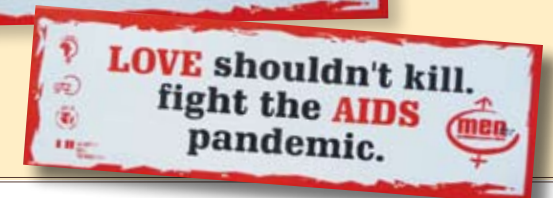
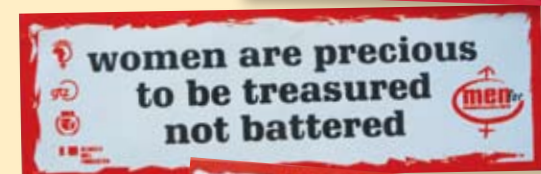
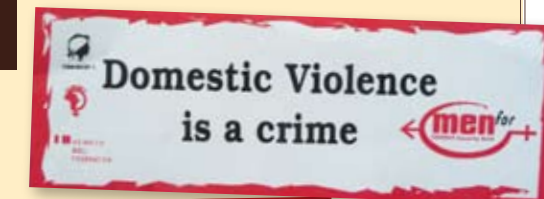
MEGEN has also attempted to use innovative places and means of communication for reaching people, he adds.

“In 2007, we ran a campaign in a national supermarket chain. We found that when people are waiting to pay for their goods, they have a lot of time to read and listen to the messages. Another means we use is to brand buses with messages on SGBV. This means that our campaign is visible in the public space all over the city.”

BEST PRACTICE

✿ Ask questions which allow people to reflect on the topic.

✿ Avoid portraying men in very negative ways





I NEVER BELIEVED IN EQUALITY

My name is Peter G. Gichanga. I am 44 years old, a father of four: one boy and three girls. I am the third born in a family of eight, five boys and three girls. Our first sister was born sixth. As the first five boys, we used to do all the house chores on a duty rooster. I hated this, to a point of even hating women – since I thought this was their duty. Hence, I developed a negative attitude towards women. I had internalised that women were there to be seen, not to be heard.

When I married in 1986, my first born was a son, followed by – imagine – three girls in a row. I have occasionally walked out of meetings headed by a woman, never voted for a woman candidate, and always had problems where women issues were concerned.

But one day, in September 2004, a group of men from Men for Gender Equality Now, MEGEN, organised a workshop in my village to sensitize people on gender equality, and the impact of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. When I attended the first seminar, I vividly recall that as we sat and introduced ourselves, my peers and I engaged and challenged the facilitators on their standpoints over gender equality.

The session was met with hostility all through, though the team remained in control. I went home with many unanswered questions, and I remember being invited to their next meeting. Little did I know, that this was the beginning to a treasured journey to change.

The Men's Travelling Conference (see pages 47-49) was the next activity that gave me an opportunity to be part of a movement that preached a message that was a taboo to me all along. I was equally challenged as the recipients of the messages communicated in our posters, stickers, skits and discussions. But on return, after ten days travel, I joined the Rapid Response Team, and got a hands on experience on the impact of gender-based violence and abuse. I was transformed from some one opposed to gender equality to a women's rights defender.

Peter G. Gichanga

2 SPEAKING OUT!

{ By addressing issues of gender-based violence, MEGEN is contributing to breaking the silence on issues which for long have been taboo: defilement, incest, early marriage, rape, wife battering — and HIV/AIDS.

In this section, MEGEN members share how being part of the organisation has helped them to move on, in spite of experiences of violence in their past - and how they now use activism to influence change in the lives of others. The sub-section also includes texts on the psycho-social aspects of MEGEN's survivor support programs, as well as on its work to fight stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS and prevent the spread of the pandemic through challenging prevalent masculinity norms.

BEGINNING TO HEAL

I was defiled by 3 of my cousins when I was 7. I don't remember how it started but several instances are crystal clear.

No one else was home except me and my younger sister (aged four at the time). I was wearing a long white t-shirt and no underwear. The cousin told my sister to get out (I think she suspected something because she peeped at us through the wall) and he did it. He was 17. It was awkward at school. I would see him and pretend nothing was going on. Then in the evening, you know. He always bought me sweets.

The other two were brothers, about 19 and 20. I should probably mention I grew up in a large homestead. Dad and all his brothers had built their houses and brought up their families in one large compound.

I remember going to the river to herd cows, and goats with my grandfather.

When the boys got circumcised, they became "men". They moved out of their parents' houses into one room cubed structures called "kubu", which usually had a bed, two chairs and a stool. They had a radio which played very loud music, thanks to their makeshift sound systems of huge clay pots with speakers fitted at the mouth.

The brothers had a "kubu" each, and that's where it always happened. Of course with the loud music playing in the background; I think that is why I don't like blaring music.

Once, the 20 year old asked me what I was doing with his younger brother and I told him. He asked me not to tell any one, and threatened to cut my dad with an Axe if I did.

As I said, I don't remember how it started but I remember how it ended.

The 17 year old used to live with us. As usual, I was to meet him at the back of the house at around 7pm when it was already dark. He wasn't finished when Mum returned unexpectedly and started calling me. At first I kept quiet, but she persisted so I answered and ran to the front of the house. I am not sure how she suspected, but she interrogated me. Of

course I lied. She then led me to the back of the house with a torch, and lying on the ground were my red knickers. I was caught. She didn't say anything, only that she'd tell dad.

Of course living in a compound with so many people, there are no secrets, so within days every body knew what had happened. I remember the accusing eyes and hushed whispers when I appeared. I was so ashamed.

Only dad asked me what happened. He told me to tell him if it ever happened again. Every body assumed it was the first time, I didn't correct them. I also didn't tell them about the brothers. I forgot about it until high school when some one asked me if I was a virgin. Of course I lied yes, but the memories came flooding back. So did the anger, guilt and shame.

I blamed myself, I felt I had encouraged them in some way. It was all my fault, I reasoned. Or maybe there was something about me.

As far as I can remember, nothing was done to the culprit – every body treated him as before. I am the one who got accusing eyes and pointing fingers and terrible jokes from my other cousins.

Sometimes I would convince myself I enjoyed it (I remember the pain). Other times, I would get so angry. I was a child and small for my age, how could they? Over the years, I have fought the temptation to question them. Let the sleeping dogs lie, I think.

I joined MEGEN in 2004 as an artist. My sister told me about MTC and I thought it would be fun to travel around Kenya. In fact, I had no idea what the organization was all about, this I learnt later, during the training and meetings.

The more I learnt about violence, its consequences and how to deal with it, the burden of guilt, weight of blame and shame slowly lifted from my shoulders. I began to heal.

I realized I was the victim, they violated and wronged me. I forgave myself.

I forgave my parents. For years I thought maybe they didn't love me enough. I understood at that time, they believed keeping it in the family was the way to go.

I am glad I am part of a group of people who are actively and deliberately breaking our culture of silence.

I am a mother now. My cousin took my 2 year old daughter the other day, stripped her and indecently touched her. I was so angry. In fact Mum was still proposing keeping quiet about it but I would not allow that. I confronted him and threatened to kill him. I also told several other people so that he knows others know and should something like that happen again, he would be the first suspect.

A counsellor advised me that we shouldn't question my daughter again so that she can forget. It made me understand why Mum kept quiet when it happened to me.

I forgave those who stole my innocence, not for them, but for me. The anger I felt towards them was turning me into a cynical, hard heartened, hard to please, angry woman. It was slowly killing me, so I let it go, and with that I felt a sense of peace and calm.

I have also learnt that my sexuality is my responsibility, regardless of what has happened in the past, now it's my choice and I am in control.

I am struggling to forgive the one who assaulted my daughter. I think the wound and pain is too fresh, let me give it time.

Anonymous

BREAKING THE SILENCE ON GENDER VIOLENCE

In Kenya, every second woman experience gender-based violence in her life time. But despite the magnitude of the problem, it is still considered taboo to talk about it.

Working with survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence, and doing outreach work and campaigns against violence,

MEGEN contributes to breaking the silence on intimate partner violence, rape, defilement, incest, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and other forms of violence.

For survivors of violence who contact MEGEN’s Rapid Response Team for assistance, this in itself is a first step towards speaking out. Survivors are assisted to access counseling, either through the MEGEN members who are trained counsellors, or through networking partners, such as the Nairobi Women’s Hospital. Through the programme, their choice to speak out is professionally managed to optimize

healing. A survivor is assured of confidentiality, that his or her testimony will not be used without consent – and that it will only be used in his or her interest in the process of working on the case. During the period immediately after the incident, besides the physical injury, survivors often suffer from sleeping disorders and nightmares, which are known as flashbacks. The survivor is prone to low self

esteem, self-blame, insecurity, stress, anxiety, fear, humiliation and anger towards oneself or the opposite sex. This battery of conflicting emotions disorganizes the person and makes breaking the silence a difficult task, requiring a solid support structure.

“The survivor of SGBV may also be reluctant to break the silence because they lack confidence in the system,” says Thuku wa Njuguna, member of the Rapid Response team and a trained counsellor. He continues:

“Speaking out without a trusted support system may end up being bad for the survivor as it may open them up to ridicule and humiliation by people around them, thus increasing their suffering.”

The initial speaking out is the most difficult and is

done to the person the survivor trusts and believes can do something about it. This confidence should be maintained to ensure the survivor does not lock up or withhold crucial information that may hold the key to their healing and/or pursuance of legal redress or medical care.

“As difficult as it is, breaking the silence is the first step towards healing,”

Thuku wa Njuguna adds. It also helps other survivors to open up, and understand that they are not alone in what they have gone through. But most importantly, it re-asserts their human worth when they realize that they can do something about the injustice done to them.”

The magnitude of the problem with SGBV also means that the activists in MEGEN, like any other Kenyans, have experiences of gender-based violence, either being affected personally, witnessing a family member or friend suffering, or having been perpetrating violence but gone through a process of transformation, putting an end to previous violent behaviour.

While the organization does not have specific support groups, where members having experienced violence in different ways can share their experiences and how they gained strength to heal, some members feel that the safe space which local community structures, or specialized teams within MEGEN provide, partly fills a similar role.

“Being a member of MEGEN gives you an opportunity

to share and to know that you are not alone. Things might have happened in a certain way in the past, but one cannot

remain in that position. There are people who can help you move on. People have also found a space in MEGEN, where they can experience the change that they want to see happening in the world,” says Kennedy Odhiambo Otina, MEGEN coordinator between 2004 and 2008.

Within the organisation, members who have chosen to live differently from what society expects from them, or are on their journey to change, can also dialogue and seek advice from others on how to challenge the dominant masculinities, and expectations of how to behave to be a “real man” – in many interpretations of current cultures linked to being violent and devaluing women. In such an environment, meeting with other MEGEN members provides a chance to relax and be part of a team with similar ways of viewing the world.

“Some of our members have found a lot of encouragement and motivation from people around them. They might have felt alone in their thinking for a long time, and now they are coming together for a common purpose,” Kennedy Otina says.

Compiled by Raymond Mwega and Åsa Eriksson



SHATTERED DREAMS

It was in the year 2003 – a community seminar was held at our village. Banners were all over “Real men don’t abuse women”, “Domestic Violence is a crime” and “Men walking the talk”. I wondered so what kinds of men there are in the world: real men and fake ones? So I decided to attend.

On the said day, I was among the first to arrive. As the session got on, issues of violence came up. We were divided into different age groups, and into males and females, and were asked to relate different forms of violence in our past. I felt my heart sink when I recalled how my dreams of happy future after school and a good career were all shattered by gender-based violence.

After the dialogue session was over, I was just weeping, having known and realized that I had been lured and defiled at the age of 14 years, by some one I called a friend. As if that was not enough, I had become pregnant.

When my mother discovered I was pregnant, she thoroughly beat me, and chased me away from home.

With no one to turn to, and no place to stay, I opted to seek refuge at my friend’s place, the one who had lured and defiled me. He took me in. This was a case of walking into a lion’s den again. I stayed locked up in his house for two weeks without anybody knowing my whereabouts. Since my friend was responsible for my pregnancy, he made up his mind to marry me.

The marriage was not very good. My husband turned to heavy drinking and started beating me. Within three years, I already had three kids. That was too much for me at such a young age, and I was very stressed. I blamed the failure of our marriage on myself. Dejected and rejected, I packed in tears and went back to my parents’ home.

Recalling these events during the community seminar made me very sad. I wept heavily, having known that I had been defiled and entered early marriage against my will. One of the lady facilitators took time to talk to me after the seminar and showed me how I would bring that feeling out of me. I went for counseling sessions with her and later on she introduced me to the Men for Gender Equality Now group, which had organized the seminar. I became a member.

MEGEN has really helped me, both psychologically and spiritually. I am now able to cope with my past, and I am able to get along with my mother.

We solved the problem that had for long been in our hearts.

Now, I am living with my sons and we are very close. I have received training on gender-based violence, and I relate to them the forms of violence they can experience if they don’t take care.

I feel especially good holding sessions in high schools, talking to the young girls and boys on different forms of sexual harassment. I relate my own experience, which shows what violence can lead to.

Lucy Wambaa



THE SILENT KILLER

Remember the fairy-tales, Snow White, Rapunzel, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella... Well, I used to live in my own fairytale until tragedy fell.

I am 29 years old, last born in a family of three, two girls and a boy. We were brought up in a Christian home. Life was good and we had a lot of fun. We used to dine like kings and queens, everything was provided for – be it a necessity or a luxury.

Things were going well until a single day in 1985, when my mum decided to go to look for work, because she was bored just staying at home. When she came back, she found my dad furious. He questioned her about where she had been, and why she was not looking after us, because that was her work. She started to explain that she had gone to town to look for a job to keep her occupied while we were at school. But before she even finished her explanation, she was silenced with kicks and blows, and she was told that everything was provided for – what else does she want? The fight went on for hours as we watched in dead silence.

The following day, my dad went to work and that was the only chance my mum had of fleeing. She packed our things and we immediately shifted to another place. We never saw our dad again.

After moving, life became living hell for all of us. My mum had a job, but the money was not enough to sustain us. We had a hard time adjusting to the new life style – just the other day I was Cinderella, what happened to my fairy Godmother? In the end we coped, but it came with consequences.

My mother struggled with paying for my Secondary School education. She was very stressed, trying to make ends meet, and so the unexpected happened - she started to drink heavily. Immediately after I cleared school in 1998, I got a job as a sales promoter. It did not pay much, but my mother relaxed a little, since I shared the household costs. Because I did not have enough money to go to College, I started acting in 1999, and traveled a lot with it.

It was in between late February and early March 2003 that my mum started falling ill. One day she had a headache, and we used a neighbour's car to take her to a nearby mission hospital, where she was given painkillers. She felt better for a while, but after two weeks the head aches which turned to migraines started. We then took her to another hospital where she was tested for every disease, including malaria. As we waited for the laboratory results, me and my sister started discussing what could be wrong with her, since she didn't want to be taken to hospital in first place. We were talking in low tones because we didn't want our mum to hear us. I told my sister that the possibility of mum being HIV positive was high, since she had all the signs, including loss of appetite, and boils.

As we were called in by the doctor to be given her results, we left my mum outside on a sofa sleeping. When the doctor told us that she was HIV positive, we just looked calmly at each other and sat quietly as we were told what to do with her, and how to handle her and ourselves.

We followed the doctor's advice, but after one week my mother's condition deteriorated. She convulsed one morning and we took her to Kenyatta National Hospital where she was admitted for a week. During that time, the whole family came

to visit her, which made her smile, and helped reduce the stigma. But we did not tell them the truth about why she was sick. We were too ashamed.

When my mother died on 10th June 2003, I didn't cry. I just asked the nurse at the hospital for my mother's belongings and I took them home, still numb and shocked.

We buried her in Lang'ata on 14th June 2003 as she wished. I continued acting, but one day when I was sitting at home, I thought of why I didn't disclose my mother's disease to any one, and I cried, that was the day that I cried. So I decided to call a family meeting and tell them what happened. Every one was shocked, but they understood.

In October 2004, a friend called me and told me that a NGO where she was volunteering was doing a community outreach in the outskirts of Nairobi, using art to educate people on issues of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. She asked me to help them in part-acting as somebody's mum in a skit.

And that is the day I joined Men for Gender Equality Now. We went around educating people on gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS and its consequences through acting. After being trained on GBV and HIV/AIDS, I can now confidently talk about my mother's death and help my family members who have HIV to live positively.

Reflecting back on what my family has gone through, I realize that gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS relate to each other - or one contributes to the other. Had it not been for my father beating up my mother, she would never have been so stressed, and taking up drinking. No one would have taken advantage of her being a single mother.

I am still volunteering my services to the community through seminars, pre-tests and workshops. We have been travelling to different parts of the country, forming discussion groups where we urge people to open up and talk about GBV and HIV/AIDS. This has helped me to heal the wound from the past.

I am now happily married, trying to ensure that my children grow up in the beautiful world of fairy tales.

Nungeri Keng'ethe

HIV/AIDS AND THE LINK TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MEGEN started addressing issues of HIV/AIDS in its training and campaigning work in 2003. In partnership with the regional men's network, MEGEN and FEMNET organized a Men's

Traveling Conference (MTC, see page 46-48) that year, going by bus from Kenya to Malawi and making frequent stops en route to encourage men to speak out, and sensitize other men and boys about the role they can play to stop both pandemics. It looked particularly at challenging negative masculinity norms, where men saw having more than one partner as the way to go.

"In order to fight HIV/AIDS we embarked on three steps: Speaking openly to men about the dangers of having multiple partners without protection, addressing the issue of safe sex and encouraging men to protect themselves, and setting up a good referral system through partner organizations, encouraging people to test

and ensuring that there is a good psycho-social support system in place for those who test positive," says Kennedy Odhiambo Otina, MEGEN coordinator 2004-2008.

Apart from encouraging these safe practices among men, MEGEN also needed to highlight how gender-based violence, and the norms that leads to violence, contribute to HIV/AIDS. The link was obvious: a global research study revealed that in Tanzania and South Africa, women

who have experienced violence run up to three times higher risk of contracting HIV¹ compared to women who did not experience violence. Both pandemics also share a common root cause: the unequal power relations between men and women.

Since 2004, MEGEN includes a session on HIV/AIDS and the link to GBV in all its training events. Facilitators point out how different forms of violence, such as rape, defilement, and wife inheritance

puts primarily the survivor, but also the perpetrator, at risk of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS. All the work of MEGEN also looks critically at the negative masculinity

BEST PRACTICE

To clarify the link between SGBV and HIV/AIDS in all training sessions on gender and violence, partner with organizations working specifically on HIV/AIDS in outreach work, link the two pandemics in campaigns and challenge negative masculinity norms as a prevention strategy.

norms which fuel both GBV and the spread of HIV/AIDS. In many societies, men are socialized to believe that sex is their right regardless of what the partner wants and that it is normal to indulge in risk taking behaviour, such as unprotected sex with many different partners, Kennedy Otina explains. This leads to men infecting their wives and other partners as well as themselves. In its work, MEGEN tries to encourage alternative masculinities, which enable positive and mutually respectful relationships between men and women.

“The positive roles which men can play in this regard is first of all to protect themselves, and secondly to encourage peers to protect themselves, through reducing the number of sexual partners and encourage them to use condoms correctly and consistently,” says Kennedy Otina.

Discrimination against the girl child, the lack of economic opportunities for women, socio-cultural norms dis-empowering women, and cultural practices such as early marriage and female genital cutting, which make women and girls more vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS, are also discussed in MEGEN trainings.

“In some areas people practice widow cleansing, where the widow is ‘cleansed’ through sex after the death of her husband by some one hired as ‘cleanser’, who is often an outcast in the society. When we train in those areas, we highlight, challenge and create a debate about the practice, and the risks involved. Through our interventions, we have seen the level of awareness and vigilance increase tremendously,” says Kennedy Otina.

In order to strengthen the work on the link between violence and HIV/AIDS, MEGEN often partners with other organizations – such as the Movement of Men Against

Aids in Kenya (MMAAK). Both organizations use expertise from each other in trainings, take part in joint activities and assist one another with meeting spaces.

At constituency levels, local MEGEN groups work closely with organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS. In Kabete, on the outskirts of Nairobi, the local MEGEN Constituency group partners with a community-based organisation called Star of Hope HIV/AIDS Support Group, which has twenty members who are living positively with HIV/AIDS, and who offer support, counseling and home-based care to others living with the virus. The two groups hold joint training sessions on GBV and HIV/AIDS in schools, churches, police stations and government institution, sharing from their different areas of expertise, and at the same time learning from each other.

“MEGEN has members who are trained on gender-based violence as well as HIV/AIDS, and we offer training seminars on the topics. But our seminars used to be mainly theoretically based,” says Mary Njenga, secretary of the constituency group.

After partnering with the Star of Hope HIV/AIDS Support Group, the trainings are more practical since members of the group share their experiences and give practical examples from their own lives.

“This way, the presentations have a much greater impact on participants. It has been very useful for fighting stigma and discrimination. Learning from a person who has gone through the same experience [learning to live with HIV/AIDS] gives a lot of encouragement to those who are affected and infected in our society,” she adds.

1 The Global Coalition on Women and Aids, Issue Brief no 2

3 PROGRAM SHOWCASE

MEGEN activists have been slapped, threatened with arrest and even shot at in the course of campaigning for gender justice - using innovative strategies such as ambush theatre and rescuing survivors of violence.

In this section, three of the MEGEN programs are looked into more in-depth: the survivor support program, dubbed “Rapid Response”; the Artist program, which uses community theatre to address issues of gender inequality, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS; and the annual community outreach program dubbed the Men’s Traveling Conference (MTC).

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE: RAPID RESPONSE

“As men gender activists, we could not just read about cases of GBV without acting to assist survivors”

It is 21h00 on a Saturday night, and the Machako’s corner is dark and dusty as we pull the car over by a nearly deserted petrol station. The lone silhouette of the rapid responder Thuku wa Njuguna is easily recognized from a distance, wearing the trademark red MEGEN t-shirt and cap. This evening, he got stranded waiting for public transport after returning from a two-day rescue mission outside Machakos. As he steps into the car, he sighs with relief and takes a sip of water.

“We are now getting somewhere with the case,” he says. As the car starts moving towards Nairobi, he summarizes the details of the incest case he was called to respond to – a case which has remained unresolved since 2001, although the perpetrator was well known. “Bring in the suspect first,” the policemen in charge had said sneeringly, according to the father of the survivor. But after Thuku wa Njuguna’s intervention, the

situation finally changed. His interactions with high rank police officers the previous days resulted in strong commitment, and a contingent of several police officers and a vehicle from the District Officer being made available for the arrest. An expert was also engaged to help in communicating to the mentally challenged survivor in writing the statement.

As we drive back to Nairobi, Thuku wa Njuguna’s phone keeps on ringing, and it is obvious that the Rapid Response work is not yet over for today. Before retiring for the day, he stops to see one of the callers, a MEGEN member near Athi River town, who seeks advice on how to assist a woman who was lured to his area for a job opportunity which never was, and has been stranded. And in Nairobi city centre, around 10pm, he meets up with another colleague who has tried to prevent a young woman in distress from abandoning her child, and needs to hand over the case to Thuku wa Njuguna, for follow-up with the Children’s office.

BEST PRACTICE

MEGEN has set up a survivor support program involving both men and women as volunteers, who walk survivors through the whole process of seeking justice, and accessing medical support and shelter when needed. Good networks with other service providers to enable referrals has been key to the success of the program.

Accompanying Thuku wa Njuguna for a few hours this evening provides a small glance into the life of one of the very active rapid responders, at a time when the program moves into its fourth year of operation. Kennedy Odhiambo Otina, who was one of the people initiating the program, recalls how this team of hard-working and dedicated volunteers was first set up in 2005. “The idea of establishing a Rapid Response Team came at a time when there was an increase in reporting around cases of violence against women. We read about a case of a woman who was badly beaten by her spouse, and taken to Nairobi Women’s Hospital, where women’s groups came to show her support. Then 2 days later – we received news of a man who had hacked his wife to death. We started questioning ourselves as a men’s movement committed to ending gender-based violence: where are we when this violence is happening – why is it only women’s groups showing support?” he says. Shortly after this discussion, MEGEN set up the small Rapid Response team, consisting of a majority of men activists, and a few women, who started following the example of women’s rights organizations: issuing press statements and visiting survivors at hospitals to show solidarity. But soon it became clear that this alone was not having the impact Kennedy Otina and his colleagues wished for. “The more we got involved in the cases, the more we realized we needed to focus also on how to ensure perpetrators are held accountable, for the cases to be brought to court,” he recalls. The next step that the newly set up team embarked on was to attend court sessions in solidarity with survivors.

There, they witnessed most cases being lost. “There was not enough evidence, many survivors were intimidated to withdraw, and often the police and doctors did not show up to testify in court,” Kennedy Otina says. This is how the Rapid Response Team started looking more holistically at its own role in supporting survivors, walking them through the whole process of seeking redress, getting the treatment, care, legal support and shelter which they are entitled to. “At that time, the police was the biggest stumbling block. It was not easy for people seeking support to get their attention since violence against women was considered a private matter. We were told they were often bribed by perpetrators, and there were a lot of sketchy investigations,” says Kennedy Otina. Police officers who did not perform according to expectations were initially not very happy to meet the Rapid Responders, since their presence put pressure on them to perform. To build a better relationship, the Team engaged senior police officers, to discuss how the rapid responders could assist the police in their work of ensuring justice to survivors of gender-based violence, within the spirit of community policing. “We started cooperating better and better. We have also observed an improvement in dispensation of justice for survivors in the police stations which we have worked closely with,” Kennedy Otina explains. In sensitive cases, involving wealthy or influential people, MEGEN encourages members to come and attend court proceedings, wearing the organizations signature red t-shirts, in order to put authorities on alert that some body is watching the case.

“We continue talking to the officials, the registrars, the magistrates when possible, the prosecutors... we have been working on building a cordial relationship, but also to ensure that they know we are keenly monitoring the proceedings,” he continues.

The Rapid Response Team also works closely with the media, the current chairperson of the Team, Peter G. Gichanga, explains.

“Our relationship with the media is very positive. When we go to respond to a case as the Rapid Response Team alone, we just assist that particular survivor and her or his family. But when media puts a story on air, people also learn about us, and afterwards other survivors call the media stations to ask for our phone numbers. Also – if anybody is trying to obstruct justice in a particular case, when it goes on air, they become more reluctant to interfere. It has really helped us in public interest cases,” he says.

But it is not only MEGEN calling on the media to come and report – often, reporters also call Peter G. Gichanga and his team members for support.

“Many journalists have realized that reporting only does not help the survivor. So they call on us as well, to come and rescue the person they have reported on, and help her or him access medical assistance and shelter through our networks.”

Networking with organizations providing services to survivors of violence is an important aspect of the Rapid Response Team’s work. The team is working with organizations like the Coalition on Violence Against Women, COVAW, Nairobi Women’s Hospital (for medical support) and Women’s Rights Awareness Program, WRAP, and GOAL Kenya (for shelter).

“When we are called to rescue a survivor of violence, there is often constant communication between the different organizations and institutions to see who can assist with what. This makes our work much easier,” says George Ngugi, activist in MEGEN’s Rapid Response Team. In spite of the many successes, the Rapid Response work also faces many challenges. Although some courts and senior police officers are supportive, others are still resistant, and do not take cases of GBV with the seriousness that the law requires. The frustrations and the severity of the cases that the team is working on also result in activists experiencing burn-out syndrome.

“We are doing debriefing work with them, but it has so far been sporadic,” Kennedy Otina confesses.

Rapid Response is also a costly program, since walking survivors through the whole process of seeking justice and accessing care and support is a long journey. It is time consuming for the team members, who are working on a voluntary basis.

“Presently, we want to emphasize empowering members who are active in the local constituencies to follow up on any cases reported, before they call on Rapid Response team members from other areas to travel there and respond. This will help cut costs and also empower more of our members,” Kennedy Otina says.

BULLETS DON'T STOP NGUGI

While providing support to survivors of violence, George Ngugi Kariuki has been shot at, threatened and stranded in far off places without money in his pocket.

He still vows to continue this work, since it gives him a sense of meaning and pride pursuing justice for those who cannot easily do so for themselves.

Try calling George Ngugi's number any time, at a randomly chosen day, and he will most likely answer: "I am escorting a survivor to the Nairobi Women's Hospital (Gender Violence Recovery Centre), can you call me later?" or "I am on my way to court to follow up on a child abuse case, can we meet in the afternoon?"

His diary is full of entries revealing the magnitude of survivors he has assisted – accompanying them to hospital, the police, children's offices or other government departments and to court. The diary notes include accounts of sentences for perpetrators in cases he has followed up on, within the spirit of community policing: life imprisonment, 14 years in jail, 40 years in jail. Apart from being demanding, the work is also at times dangerous, like the day when George Ngugi and other members of the Rapid Response Team were attending a funeral of a young girl who had been defiled and murdered. While coming out of the cemetery, there was a lot of commotion and anger in the community, and a police man in civilian clothes, not knowing who the Rapid Responders were, aimed his gun at Ngugi, and fired a shot.

"The bullet passed just next to my head and hit a tree. I collected the bullet and gave it to a journalist who was there, and the incident was aired on TV. We were later on assisted by police reinforcement who helped us safely move away from there."

As all Rapid Response members, George Ngugi does this work on a voluntary basis. His activism was sparked by a tragic event some years ago, when the daughter of one of his work mates was found dead in a field – having been defiled, sodomized and murdered. Ngugi describes how he first got in touch with the MEGEN team when the child was being buried:

"When we attended the funeral, I met with a group of women and men wearing red t-shirts with a message saying 'Men Fight Domestic Violence!'. I got interested to know more about the group, and I talked with their coordinator. I told her I wanted to join the group as a volunteer – although I never thought they would take me in. At that time, I was a bar manager and some one who could not be respected by the people in my area because of my bad behaviours. I used to harass work mates sexually, and I used abusive language to people older than me."

But the MEGEN team asked George Ngugi to come and attend their meetings, and after 2 weeks, he was invited to a full day seminar.

"At that time, I was a desperate person. Some time back, I had wanted to hang myself with a rope, because I was a nobody to myself and to my friends. In the seminar, I started learning some of the topics which showed me how to change my life and become the person I am now. I was like the Prodigal Son who reads his story in the Bible."

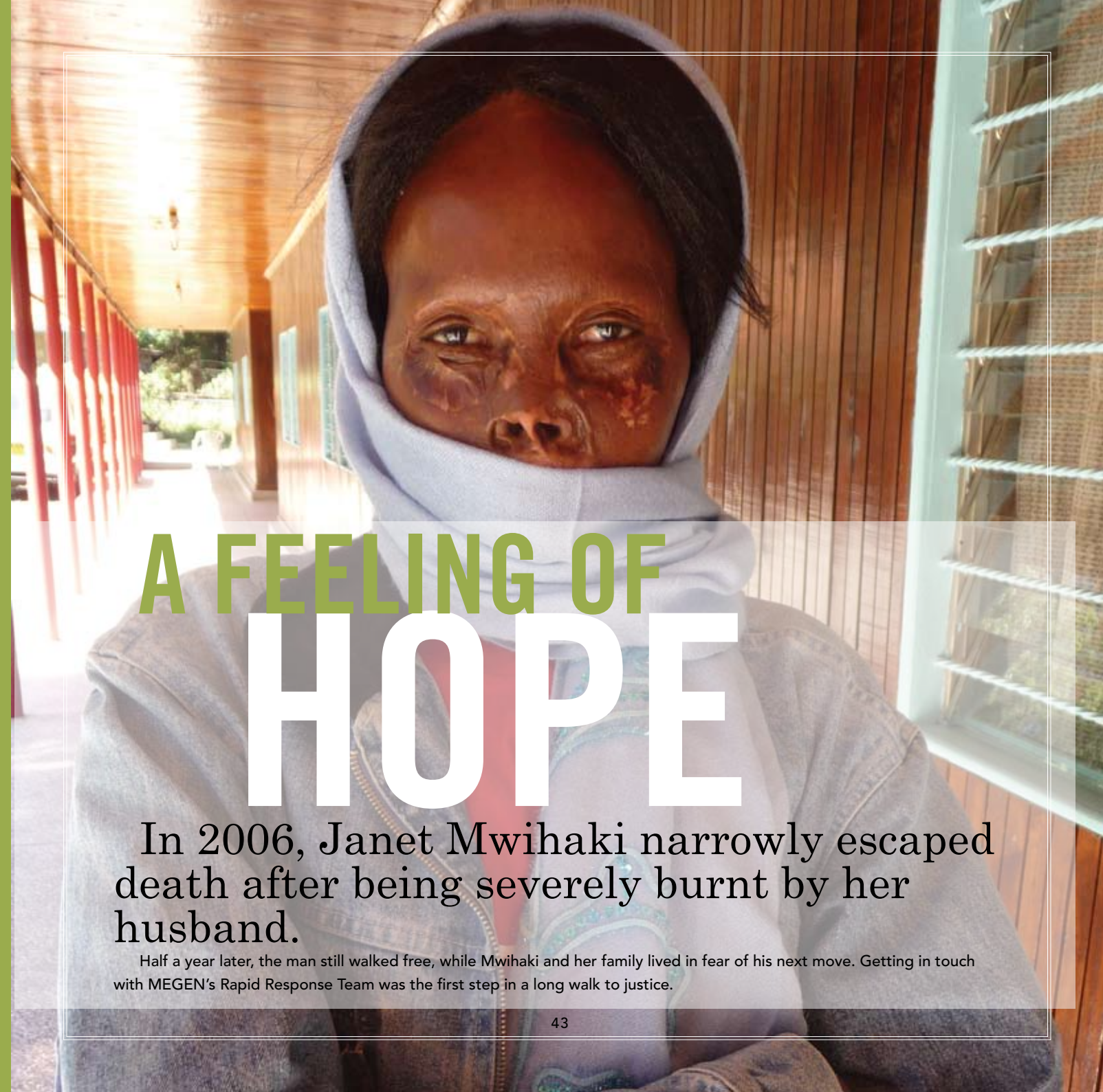
In the seminar, George Ngugi shared his story, where he came from, and how he had ended up following a path in life which he now wanted to move away from.

"Before meeting with the group, I had been married to a sugar mummy who destroyed my life for about 6 years, through sexual abuse. At that time, I had only just completed my Primary education, and I was new to life. I always praise almighty God who made me move away from her. Later on, I started my new life where I got married to my loved wife, and we were blessed with 2 children. In the seminar, the group encouraged me and supported me in my future, in changing my life."

George Ngugi joined MEGEN's Rapid Response Team in 2004, working in greater Nairobi and country-wide to assist survivors of violence. He has vowed to assist any one who calls him for help, even if it means walking for hours, at times when he finds himself without enough money in his pocket to use public transport.

"I am very proud of the work we do as MEGEN, helping people affected by violence and educating people on how they can change their attitudes."

Story compiled by George Ngugi and Åsa Eriksson



A FEELING OF HOPE

In 2006, Janet Mwihiaki narrowly escaped death after being severely burnt by her husband.

Half a year later, the man still walked free, while Mwihiaki and her family lived in fear of his next move. Getting in touch with MEGEN's Rapid Response Team was the first step in a long walk to justice.

Janet Mwihaki is a 31-year old mother of three, who grew up in the village of Ndeiya in Kenya's Central Province. She relocated to Nairobi with her mother and younger siblings in 1993, when the parents separated. Although the family struggled financially, relying on the money Janet, her mother and one sister could make from their small potato vending business, they still managed to get by and put the younger siblings through school.

Mwihaki's difficulties started in 1999. The previous year, she had gotten married to a man she came to know while working as a waitress in the Railways area in Nairobi. She left home, and moved in together with him in the Nairobi estate Kasarani. For some time, the relationship was fine, but within one year it changed.

"He started beating me and insulting me", she recalls.

She stayed on, hoping that the relationship would improve, and within a few years, they had three children together, all boys. But the husband's violence and jealousy did not stop. He was turning violent towards the children, and interrogated them on who had visited Mwihaki while he was away.

"What finally made me leave was when he started requesting me to bring him some young girls. I refused, and decided to go back home," she says.

She returned to her mother's house in 2004, together with the children, and took up the business of selling potatoes again. Although she would some times come across the husband in town, they did not talk to each other, and he left her in peace. But in 2006, he started sending emissaries to her home, trying to persuade her to return. She refused – which made him mad.

"He started way-laying me on my way to work. In April 2006, he accosted me at the railway station. Realizing that we were alone, he stabbed me in the back and ran away."

A passer-by helped her home, so that her family could bring her to hospital. She reported the case to the police, but was told she had to establish the whereabouts of the man before the police could act. Since she did not know where he was living at the time, the police took no action.

Four months later, when she had taken up work afresh, he stroke again.

"It was at eight in the evening, I had been buying the stock for selling the following morning and was returning from the retailer, when he jumped on me. He poured petrol over me, and set it alight," she says.

This time, a Good Samaritan came to her rescue, bringing her to Kenyatta National Hospital. But she had suffered severe burns, seriously affecting her hands and face, and spent the next 119 days in hospital, before being in a stable enough condition to return home. By that time, the man was still walking freely, while the family was living in share fear of his next move.

"Her mother had for a long time been looking for somebody to assist the family to get protection, but help never came through. Then on the 1st of January 2007, the mother shared their predicament at a reunion of family members. There, somebody happened to know me, and the mother gave me a call," Peter Gichanga, team leader for MEGEN's Rapid Response Team says.

He agreed to come to the family's house the same evening, where he also met with Janet Mwihaki.

"When we met and started talking, I felt as if help finally had come. It was a feeling of hope," she recalls.

The same evening, Gichanga and the mother visited the District Officer, to ask for security measures to be put in place for the family. And the following morning, they went together to the central police station.

"There, we spoke to the OCPD (Officer Commanding Police Division), who assured me that as soon as we were able to locate the perpetrator, he would instruct the nearest police station to arrest him," he says.

On the third day, an informer who the Rapid Response Team had engaged spotted the man, and after alerting the police, he was immediately arrested. The following day, Mwihaki went to record her statement, and on January 5th, she met the ex-husband again, this time in court.

"I remember feeling fear, it was not a good sight to see him. But the Rapid Response Team was there with me. All along since the arrest, they have been of great help," she says.

The Rapid Responders have been assisting through being present in all the court proceedings, in contacts with the police, and in negotiating with the Gender-based Violence Recovery Centre in the public Kenyatta Hospital to assist Mwihaki with medical treatment, such as grafting of the hands and face.

Two and a half years after the incident, the case is still on. In the first instance, the man was found to have a case to answer to, but he asked for a retry, for which the verdict will fall within short. In the meantime, Mwihaki is being readmitted again to the hospital, for another re-grafting of the hands. If this is successful, she hopes to get well enough to take up the potato vending again. Her hospital bill from the time of the attack, which now amounts to Ksh220 000 (USD 2800), is however still a cause of great stress - which she hopes to negotiate to waiver.

"People who are going through the same thing as me should not keep quiet but dare to seek help. By approaching an organization offering such help, they can benefit as I have done," she says.

MEN’S TRAVELING CONFERENCE

The Men’s Traveling Conference (MTC) is an annual outreach event during the 16 days of activism on Gender Violence. During this period, MEGEN activists and partners travel by bus around the country, to engage grass-roots men and women in discussion around GBV and gender equality, in the places where they are at.



On December 1st 2008, thousands of people gathered in Mathare North to flag off the MTC.



This year 114 people from Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and Uganda – gender activists, counsellors, police officers and magistrates joined the campaign.



During the 5 day trip they raised awareness on violence and the roles man can play to prevent it.



Meeting people where they are at – be it market places or by a ferry terminus is an important feature of the MTC.



This way, people who normally do not benefit from conferences get a chance to learn about SGBV in an informal way – in a familiar environment.



Performing skits on SGBV, HIV/AIDS and gender relations is one of the key strategies used.



The teams engage men and women in dialogue on gender relations and violence.



MEGEN also gives advice on how to assist survivors of SGBV, and refer cases to its Rapid Response team.



Liaising with media is important for increasing impact of the campaign. This year, 4 journalists joined MTC.



In all stops along the route, the MTC teams met with senior police officers, sharing strategies for ensuring justice for survivors.



Courtesy calls are also done to administration officers – since they are in a position to influence others, if they take a stand against gender violence.



One prominent person visited this year was Mama Sarah Obama in Kogelo!



Activists also did fact-finding on gender and violence to enable follow-up activities during the year.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH THEATRE: The Artist Program

When MEGEN's team of artists performs skits or songs on themes relating to gender-based violence, people often react strongly. Artists have been slapped by on-lookers, arrested by a local chief, and received nasty comments from people being enraged with characters.

For Michael Mboya, chair of the artists' team, strong reactions is a positive sign.

"It tells me people were really there with me in the skit."

Drama, songs and skits are powerful tools for communicating messages on gender-based violence, power relations between men and women, and HIV/AIDS. MEGEN initially used to hire artists from other groups to perform skits during trainings or community mobilization work. But in 2004, it formed its own team of artists.

"There was a realization that the voluntary resource base of members was being under used: Why hire artists from the outside when people in the organization could

also be trained to act? The organisation also specifically recruited members who were already artists," says Michael Mboya.

Mboya was one of the artists recruited to join the organisation that year.

When learning about the work of MEGEN – uniting men to fight GBV – it did not take long for him to become convinced and join the group.

"I reflected back to the community where I come

from – most of the people there are experiencing the same kind of situations which MEGEN was talking about, on gender-based violence and inequality. By joining MEGEN as an artist, I saw that I could help fighting the ills in my community and at the same time help myself," he recalls.

The Artists team is presently involved in community seminars, it plays a key role during the annual Men's Traveling Conference, and does short community outreach

activities, dubbed pre-tests, using ambush theatre to spark debate on gender-based violence in the areas where MEGEN has local constituency groups.

"During outreach work, the artists draw people

BEST PRACTICE

MEGEN works with a team of artists in community seminars and outreach work, who act out thought-provoking skits on Gender equality, violence and HIV/AIDS in ways which are familiar to the audience, using local languages and songs.

together through commonly known songs and chants, which make people interested. In a seminar setting, the skits help people understand the topics discussed. The trainers also base their sessions on what people saw in the play: was it right for the man and the woman to act in such a way? It provides a reference point,” Michael Mboya says.

Comedy is one of the art forms the team uses, making people laugh at familiar stereotypes of men and women. In other seminars, the audience is pulled onto the floor, and encouraged to take part in acting out the play.

At times, people become so involved in the performances that they cannot separate the artist from the real person, the drama from reality.

“I remember one instance when one of our artists was slapped by a community member, when she was acting as a woman harassing a man. The man did not understand that we were just acting, and became angry with her. Luckily, other community members understood and intervened,” Michael Mboya recalls.

He is also used to community members looking at him strangely, after he has played a violent man in a skit, since they think the character is a reflection of his life.

“During the pre-launch of the We Can End All Violence Against Women campaign in Mathare, some people became so angry that they did not want to greet me afterwards. I played a violent man, and they thought: that is who I am, that is my life.”

Michael Mboya believes drama is the most powerful tool of encouraging people to reflect on their own lives, and if they are preventing, condoning or perpetrating acts of violence. It also allows MEGEN to educate people in an entertaining form about their rights, what the laws says,

and on alternative ways of being a man or a woman, or solving conflicts.

“When you see the artists act something which reflects what a person is doing in his or her own life, it challenges people. Those scenes which you watched keep returning to you afterwards. It sticks in your mind in a deeper way than if you read something in a book.”

LESSONS LEARNT

When going in to a new community, send a few artists up front, try out different skits and see what people are drawn to.

Be flexible: if people are not receiving your messages well, change your approach and engage in one-on-one dialogue with them at the level where they are at, hear their concerns and then share your views in a friendly way

4 INFLUENCING CHANGE ALL AROUND US!

Many MEGEN members use the positions which they hold to bring forward the agenda to stop gender-based violence; talking to fellow men and women in the church, the football team, in women’s groups — and to any one they meet on the street or in the bus.

In this section, members share their experiences from trying to influence change for gender equality: by transforming their own lives and speaking to people around them.



THE LITTLE MUMBI

After my retirement, when I was at home listening to midday news, I heard a news item about a girl who was raped, killed and thrown into a Napier grass plantation.

To my surprise, the girl lived near my home, just about 4 kilometres. I developed interest to know more about the case, and came to know that the girl was little Mumbi.*

I recalled that, some months back, I had been participating in an activity organized by a group of men who were against gender-based violence. It was the first group of its kind in Kenya, and it was called “Men for Gender Equality Now” (MEGEN).

** Not her real name*

So when I heard about little Mumbi, I informed their coordinator. We arranged for the other members to join us in assisting the family of little Mumbi with a funeral.

When we were in that funeral, we received news, from the same area, of a girl of nine years who had been raped by a man of sixty two years. This made me feel so bad.

It was paining in my heart.

The same group followed up on the case and our work bore fruit: the man was jailed and given life sentence by the Law Court. Because of the good work this group was doing, I decided to join it, and not only to join – I promised to devote my time and money volunteering for them.

Being part of the group made me reflect on where I came from.

In my childhood, I was brought up in a very large family. We were 12 children: 10 girls and 2 boys. I was the sixth born. Although five of the girls were older than I, they were regarded as children. I was made to understand that they were foreigners in our home because they were going to “be sold” (for dowry) and go to care for other families. They were denied many things because they were born being girls – and this was not only in our family, it was the practice of the whole community.

One day, one of my close relatives was raped by a policeman in my presence – and there was nothing I could do about it. Although she was very bitter, no one came for her rescue. This made me feel so bad, for many years.

I joined employment as an ambulance driver, and my experience from work left me thinking even more about what is being done to women in our country. I saw many suffer, and noticed it was considered to be right.

I remember one day I was called to transport a woman who was in labour to the maternity ward. I asked her husband to join us, but he refused. After one month, I was called back to the hospital and asked whether I could remember where I had conveyed this woman from, because she had given birth and no one had come to fetch her. She could not remember the direction to her home, and had no identification on her. Together with a nurse, I took the woman to her home. Surprisingly, she found a stranger living there. After enquiring, we were told the husband had relocated to an unknown place. The woman told us she had been warned that if she gave birth to a baby girl instead of a boy, she would no longer be his wife.

Since I joined MEGEN, I have chosen to be a role model to my community in fighting for gender equality and the rights of women. I talk about it to my fellow men, and to my sons – and I practice what I say. Many men of my age accuse me of being ruled by my wife, but many whom I talk to are trying to catch up with me.

I talk to both men and women, in churches, schools and in community seminars, because both men and women need to be educated about equality. This is not a one day work, but a process which needs time and devotion. I have helped many girls and women who have come to me with problems and many have seen their lives change to the better. I have been a happy man since I joined MEGEN, because I have been trained to handle cases of gender-based violence without problem, and I now know there are people working together with me to end gender oppression.

Hegron Kaburu Boro

CHANGEMAKERS

“ In my community, I have been an example to other youths, and my neighbours. Many train boys to be like me. I can do anything without hesitating about it, whether household work or community work. Because of my role as a youth leader and a football coach, many people come to me with different problems. Since I joined MEGEN, I now have back-up, and can more easily assist with problems related to gender-based violence. I am also able to stand firm and talk boldly about gender equality. ”



Jeremiah Ochoo

“ I am a Pastor, but before I joined MEGEN, I could not talk about gender equality in the church. I had no basic knowledge about it, and was afraid that elders would turn against me and accuse me of telling their wives to overcome them. But now I stand firm and tell them what gender equality means. Because of what they have learnt from me, some are changing, though not all. ”

Pastor Kimani



HELPING OTHERS SPEAK OUT

I joined MEGEN in 2006 as an artist. I had attended an artists' outreach through drama activity (pre-test) at Githurai and Kawangware, where a story was told of young girls and boys who had been defiled by their relatives or neighbours. After the drama, men and women who had been victims of different forms of gender-based violence came out boldly, seeking advice and counselling.

I was very much challenged by their boldness, for I had been suffering silently. I had been in an abusive marriage for years, and according to the culture in my home area, it is a taboo for a woman to talk about her private life, especially in marriage. So I was all alone and quiet, with a wound burning inside. It was after this incident I broke the silence, and talked to the officials of MEGEN who helped me heal, through counselling and guidance. After attending several MEGEN meetings, I realised the need to speak out boldly, and I was determined to help others suffering silently, as I had been for years.

I often put on MEGEN t-shirts, with different messages about gender-based violence printed on the front, which makes it easier for the people in my residential area to identify me. People often stop me on the street, wanting to know about these messages, which gives me a good chance to talk about MEGEN and how to stop gender-based violence.

I have at times been called by women to solve domestic problems in their homes, and I feel happy that due to the help I got from MEGEN, I can help others with the same problem.

Lucy Kung'u



WOMAN IN A MEN'S ORGANISATION

One of the most frequent questions I get asked after introducing myself as a member of Men for Gender Equality Now is: What is a woman doing in a men's organization? The usual flippant reply is: **men cannot do it without women.** Almost always we laugh and leave it at that.

According to Moses Mbugua, one of the founder members of MEGEN, the organisation "was created by a women's organisation, FEMNET, to respond to the need of working with men, which was a prerequisite for moving faster in the fight against gender-based violence". He explains that MEGEN was meant to be a men's only organization, but in practical sense, this was not to be.

"We discovered that unless men and women, boys and girls join hands to fight GBV, we are bound to fail. One gender cannot do it alone," he says.

In the past, or rather most recent past, men have been solely and squarely blamed for violence against women. Having been in MEGEN for more than four years, I now know that it is not as simple as we think. In MEGEN, it is

possible to hear the male side of the story. We all know that men are in the absolute majority in using violence and they cannot in any way be absolved from blame. On the other hand, we know that the majority of them have been socialized into using violence. While the majority abhor to violence against their mothers, daughters and sisters, they readily come up with excuses for violating their wives and partners, since dialogue and communication has never been touted as a method of conflict resolution. In MEGEN, we have realized that once men are made to see the effects and consequences of violence, many are willing and ready to change their behaviour. Some take the step of becoming ambassadors of dialogue and communication.

One of the slogans of MEGEN is "Walk The Talk", which means the change in the man is supposed to be evident first and foremost to his family and close associates, and then he can be an agent of change to his community.

In our work, we have noticed that it is easier for men to influence other men, than for women to influence men. In the traditional African set-up, men and women had different and very distinct roles. Men being the sole bread winners and decision makers, while women's role was to care and support, and to take responsibility for farming. With the changes in the recent past, such as education for women, they have become economically empowered. There has also been a lot of rights education to women, but men have often been left out. These and many other factors have contributed to the gender roles being challenged. Often, when men's roles as breadwinners or decision makers are challenged, they resort to their obvious physical advantage to exert their manhood over women and children. This is also a common and easy response to pressures brought about by increased costs of living, high unemployment rates and the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Many men do not know how to practice positive masculinity. When they meet male gender trainers, they feel they have someone of their own gender who understands their side of the story, since many have been suffering in silence for a long time.

Being an organisation of both men and women makes it easier to bring men and women together in forums and meetings and have them discuss their issues together, in what MEGEN calls Inter-gender dialogue forums.

Violence has mostly been considered a private matter which everybody thought only affects the survivor. Now, we all know this is not the case – violence affects everybody; the family, neighbours, whole communities, and institutions. No fabric of society is immune to its effect. When men and women now put their heads together, they come up with ideas and strategies that work for both parties. In fact, what is noticeable is the lack of dialogue between the sexes. They both believe and have been made to believe that they have insurmountable differences. During the inter-gender dialogue forums, they are usually shocked at how much they have in common.

One of the things I have learnt is that the fight against GBV is multi-faceted and one of the greatest challenges is attitude, how and what people think of themselves and others. Other major factors include culture and poverty.

MEGEN's leadership currently consists of men only; this is clearly stipulated in the constitution. Having men as leaders is intentional as women's organizations are also led by women.

Since men's organizations are uncommon, there is a lot of curiosity surrounding MEGEN. We try and use this opportunity to inform members of the public, especially the men, that there is a forum through which they can address their issues and also get help.

Sarah Matindi

I am the fifth born in a family of nine children. I went to nursery school as other children and then proceeded to primary school. I passed my exams and joined a day secondary school. After four years, I finished my secondary school education. This is when my life changed. In the month of January, even before the exam results were released, I was already pregnant. When the results were released, my dad asked me which course I wanted to take. I did not answer, because I already knew my status.

I soon got married at the age of 20 years, with no means of earning a livelihood. It was a difficult life, bringing up three children as a housewife. Although my husband was earning a bit, he could not meet all our needs. I regretted that our parents did not teach us about sex education. I promised myself that I would teach my children, because I did not want them to follow the same path.

It was in 1997, when I woke up from a long dream. I joined women's groups in my community, and that was when I realized I had a talent in leadership. Whatever group I joined, I was among the three officials. We shared our life experiences with other women and realized that most of us had gone through similar things. In the year 2000, a relative asked me if we could experiment on a new enterprise of drying fruits and vegetables. I went to college and was trained in food processing. Now I am an expert in the drying of fruits and vegetables and I am also a trainer. I attend shows, meetings, exhibitions and open days. My life changed from there, and I have stopped regretting about my past. I tell women there is still time to recover the years they have wasted.

In the year 2005, a terrible thing happened in my village that led to another change in my life. A child was defiled close to where I stay, but although I was a leader of many women's groups, I did not know what to do. A gender activist from Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN) came to my home and asked me to accompany her to the girl's home. We met her parents who narrated the story of how the girl aged only 4 was defiled by a 70 year old man. We took the girl to Nairobi Women's Hospital, and I assisted in following up on the case. During the court hearings, I met with members from MEGEN's Rapid Response Team. I decided to become a member, and was given a chance to go for training on gender-based violence.

When people from my village heard that I was working on this case together with MEGEN, they started having more respect for me. The case was very sensitive, since the defiler came from a large, rich family, but their money could not save him. As MEGEN members, we stood firm and kept on attending court hearings to monitor that justice had its course.

Nowadays, when other people in the community have similar problems, they come to me for help, and I advice them on the ways to follow.

MEGEN has changed my life in many ways. **I have gained knowledge, skills and confidence.** In 2007, I was elected Secretary to the Constituency group. Our work at constituency level has involved training in sexual- and gender based violence. We are also learning about- and including the prevention of HIV/AIDS in our work. We have members who are HIV-positive and they speak out and educate us and other community groups. I speak in public and to the groups I belong to about sexual- and gender based violence. By talking openly about these issues I hope to assist other girls and women in taking control of their sexuality so that they can avoid both violence and unwanted pregnancies in their lives.

**SWEET
MARRIAGE**
Mary Njenga



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

BRIEF BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS ¹

Violence against Women (VAW) is a fundamental violation of human rights, it amounts to a global health crisis, and it is a serious obstacle to development. It affects millions of women and girls all over the world – within all cultures and religions, and despite of their different socio-economic status, educational levels, sexual orientation and other diversity.

Violence is the result of the complex interplay of individual, community, social, cultural and environmental factors. The root cause of violence is the unequal power relations between females and males in most societies, which makes violence a critical gender issue. Other factors which may further contribute to violence include legal, policy, political, economic and institutional ones. Violence against women has serious consequences which are far reaching and include the erosion of self-esteem, deterioration of the physical and psychological health, loss of productivity, costs of health care, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV/AIDS and legal and judicial costs. Effective strategies for dealing with gender-based violence can only be developed when the concepts, forms, consequences, factors and the impact of violence are understood.

DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

Violence

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (World Health Organisation, Geneva 2002).

Violence Against Women

The Beijing Platform For Action (PFA) defines violence against women as “any gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence refers to all forms of violence that happen to women, girls, men and boys because of the unequal power relations between them and the perpetrators of such violence. Gender, which is inherently about relations between men and women, is a determinant of social relations that legitimises and sustains men’s power over women.

1 Source: FEMNET training manual on Gender-based violence

FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that are perpetrated in the domestic sphere and includes: *physical violence* such as battering, beating, punching, slapping, shoving, kicking, etc; *psychological and emotional abuse* including verbal abuse, intimidation, servitude, eviction, destruction of personal property, threats, accusations, humiliation, isolation, control and desertion; and insulting the modesty and integrity of a woman’s body.

Economic violence includes: trafficking of women and girls, property grabbing, deprivation of basic necessities, controlling earnings or forbidding employment, using victims as unpaid labour and exclusion from decision-making.

Socio-cultural violence includes: harmful traditional and cultural practices such as Female Genital Cutting, wife and property inheritance, early and child marriage, forced sexual exposure and training, and dowry and bride price abuse.

Sexual abuse refers to all forms of forced sexual acts including: rape (systemic, date, gang and marital rape), defilement of girls and boys, incest, abduction, forced prostitution, forced dry sex and bestiality.

Political and collective violence affects women and girls because of their sexuality. It includes: war-related rape and abuse, violence by law enforcement forces including border officials, state-perpetrated violence including ethnic clashes and organised crime such as banditry and abductions.

APPENDIX
2

MEGEN PROGRAMS

Rapid Response Team

MEGEN runs a rapid response team, which assists survivors of SGBV in accessing medical and legal services, as well as temporary shelter. The team attends courts in its trade mark red T-shirts, branded with anti-violence messages, in order to show solidarity during court deliberations. In close contact with the police, the team also rescues survivors from violent situations.

The Men’s Traveling Conference (MTC) and training

Every year during the 16 days of Activism on Gender Violence, MEGEN organizes a Men’s Traveling Conference (MTC). During this period, members divide into groups which conduct campaigns across the country reaching out to remote areas, where they meet with men and women in various places, such as bus stations, churches, mosques and provincial administration offices, in order to raise awareness on the role men can play in ending GBV. The methodology includes participatory theatre, community sensitization workshops, one on one dialogue, and distribution of campaign materials with messages about GBV. During the rest of the year, training and education seminars are held in local communities and with key stakeholders.

Media and Public Awareness

In order to increase visibility of its work, MEGEN runs media campaigns promoting positive male role models. It also liaises with journalists to improve reporting on GBV and gender equality.

Artists

MEGEN has a team of community artists, who develop art and theatre with messages on GBV and gender equality for training and awareness raising purposes.

Resource Mobilization

A committee of members is responsible for raising funds, and for providing consultancy services on issues of GBV and men’s involvement.

Welfare

In order to secure the well-being of MEGEN members, a fund has been established through which members can be assisted to set up income-generating projects.

ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVORS

Are you a survivor of violence, or do you know some one who suffered from violence?

Feel free to contact MEGEN’s Rapid Response Team for assistance or advise!

Phone: 0713-828044 or 020-2712971/2,
e-mail: rapidresponse@megenkenya.org, coordinator@megenkenya.org

Contacts to other Kenyan organisations providing assistance are available in Appendix 4.

If you live outside of Kenya, please refer to this web page to find contact details to organizations working on gender-based violence in your country: www.preventgbvafrica.org.

Things to keep in mind if you or some one you know have been sexually assaulted:

- Go to a safe place. Call some one you trust for support and to accompany you.
- Visit a clinic or hospital as soon as possible after the incident. Ensure to get preventative treatment for HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), as well as anti-pregnancy pill – as soon as possible, and within 72 hours. A Post Rape Care form should be filled at the clinic, and you should get the original.
- If you are within Nairobi, you can seek medical assistance from the Nairobi Women’s Hospital GVRC (Argwings Kodhek Rd, Hurlingham) or Kenyatta National Hospital GBVRC. Any cases that occur outside Nairobi, seek medical assistance from the nearest District Hospital or other health facility.
- Avoid showering/bathing before going to see the doctor. Preserve any evidence, such as the clothes you were wearing.
- Report to your nearest police station. The police must enter the report into the occurrence book (OB) and you should be given an OB number. A P3 form should be issued to the survivor free of charge, and should be filled by an authorized health worker.
- Seek psychological help (counseling) and legal redress.

APPENDIX
3

CONTACT LIST

MEGEN Kenya:

MEGEN Kenya, c/o FEMNET,
PO Box 54562, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya
Phone: 020-2712971/2. Cell: 0713-828044
e-mail: coordinator@megenkenya.org

FEMNET:

PO Box 54562, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya.
Phone: 020-2712971/2
e-mail: admin@femnet.or.ke

MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Nairobi Women’s Hospital

Gender Violence Recovery Centre,
Hurlingham Medicare Plaza, Argwings Kodhek Rd
P.O. Box 10552 – 00100 Nairobi
Tel: 2736845/2726821/4/6/7
Mobile: 0722760146, 0728249825 /6, and 0733618353
Email: info@nwch.co.ke
Website: www.gvrc.or.ke

Kenyatta National Hospital

Gender Based Violence Recovery Centre,
Patient Support Centre
P.O. Box 20723 – 00200 Nairobi
Tel: 020–2726300 – 9, ext 43136 or 44101
Mobile: 0722829500, 0733606400
Email: knhadmin@knh.or.ke

Liverpool VCT, Care and Treatment

P.O. Box 19835-00200 KNH Nairobi
Tel: 020–2714590 / 2715308 / 3861879
Fax: 2723612
Mobile: 0728607615 / 0733601333
Email: enquiries@liverpoolvct.org
Website: www.liverpoolvct.org
Jocham Hospital
Kengeleni, Off Mombasa / Malindi Rd, Mombasa
Tel: 041-2314204 / 2314205 / 2222148

OTHER KENYAN WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Coalition on Violence Against Women Kenya (COVAV)

Leroghi Gardens, Mbaazi Avenue Off King’ara Rd
P.O. Box 10658 – 00100 GPO Nairobi
Tel: 020 - 3874357/8
Email: info@covaw.or.ke
Website: www.covaw.or.ke

Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Kenya)

Secretariat
Amboseli Road, Off Gitanga Road
P.O. Box 46324-00100 Nairobi
Tel: 020 – 3873511 / 3876954 / 3876991
Fax: 3876372
Email: info@fidakenya.org
Website: www.fidakenya.org
Fida also has legal aid clinics in:
Kisumu (Tel: 057–2025560)
Mombasa (Tel: 041-2224500)

Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW)

Isaac Gathanju Rd, Off James Gichuru Rd,
Convent Drive, Gate 5, Lavington
P. O. Box 11964-00100 GPO, Nairobi
Tel: 020 - 3860640 / 3861016 / 2378271
Mobile: 0720357664
Email: info@creaw.org
Website: www.creawkenya.org

Women’s Rights Awareness Program (WRAP)

P. O. Box 3006-00200 Nairobi
Tel:020 - 205 0148 / 374 4874
Mobile:0733812013 / 0722252939
Email:wrap@wananchi.com
Website:www.wrapkenya.org

Wangu Kanja Foundation

P.O Box 12608-00100 Nairobi
Tel: 020 – 2368000,
Helpline: 0722790404
Email: info@wangukanjafoundation.org
Website: www.wangukanjafoundation.org

Child Rights Advisory Documentation and Legal Centre (The CRADLE)

Wood Avenue, Off Argwings Kodhek Rd, Kilimani
P.O. Box 10101-00100 Nairobi
Tel: 020-3874575 / 6 Mobile: 0722201875
Fax: 020-2710156
Email: info@thecradle.or.ke
Website: www.thecradle.or.ke

Childline Kenya

P.O. Box 61955-00200 Nairobi
Tel: 020 - 3865690
Fax: 020 - 3869869
Toll Free Helpline: 0800 221 0800 or 116,
Email: info@childlinekenya.or.ke
Website: www.childlinekenya.org

African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN Kenya)

Chemusian Apartments, No B3,
Argwings Kodhek Rd,
Hurlingham
P.O. Box 46516-00100 GPO
Nairobi
Tel: 020 - 2722835 / 7 / 8
Fax: 020 - 2723104
Email:
admin@anppcankenya.co.ke
Website:
www.anppcankenya.co.ke

Kenya Female Advisory Organization (KEFEADO)

Awuor Otiende Rd, Milimani Estate,
Opposite KBC, Kisumu
P.O. Box 6025 – 40103 Kisumu
Tel: 057–2023219 / 2024742
Mobile: 0720996532
Email: kefeado@swiftkisumu.com, info@kefeado.co.ke
Website: www.kefeado.co.ke

Womankind Kenya

P.O. Box 627, Garissa
Phone: +254-46-2508
Fax: +254-46-3480
E-mail: wokike@wananchi.com

Rural Community Development Agency – RCDA

P.O. Box 2089, 60200 Meru
Phone: 064-30428
E-mail: rcdadevcom@yahoo.com

Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors

- Head Office
Parklands 2nd Avenue, Off Limuru Road
P.O. Box 55472-00200 Nairobi
Tel: 020 3741051 / 6, 020 3741123
Mobile: 0721296912, 0733761242
Web: www.kapc.or.ke
E-mail: nairobi@kapc.or.ke
KAPC also has offices in:
Mombasa - Tel: 041-493050 or 0725797888, 0722 733 27
Kisumu - Tel/Fax: 057-2027071, 057-2027959 or
0727232452, 0733770531

Amani Counselling Centre and Training Institute

- Head Office
Mbagathi Way, Near Langata Rd Junction
P.O. Box 41738-00100 Nairobi
Tel: 020-602672 / 3
Email: accti@wananchi.com
Amani also has offices in
Mombasa - Tel: 041-2315906
Nyeri - Tel: 061-2034641
Kisumu - Tel: 0572024525

How does change happen? What can spark men and women to start challenging the gender roles they have been socialized into performing? And is it possible for men who have always had negative attitudes towards women, even using violence to control women, to change and become activists for gender equality?

In this book, gender justice activists from the organisation Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN Kenya) share their personal experiences as individuals and as Changemakers. MEGEN Kenya works to challenge unequal power relations between men and women, transform harmful masculinities into positive ones, and put an end to gender-based violence (GBV). It was started in 2001 by the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), and it presently has over 200 active members, working in 15 constituencies in Kenya.

Besides personal stories told by activists, this publication also includes short briefs on the work of MEGEN Kenya, highlighting the challenges, successes and lessons learnt in different program areas. The aim of publicly sharing these experiences is to inspire other organizations to learn from FEMNETs and MEGENs work with men to promote gender equality.



**The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network**