

Gender Champions in Kaduna

Background

ESSPIN is currently working with stakeholders in Kaduna state to support the government's aim of achieving universal access to education for all children especially girls .

Through the Gender Champions Initiative, men and women role models are identified by communities who stand out in terms of their commitment to support women's empowerment and community participation. The idea is that Gender Champions can inspire and motivate School-Based Management Committees (SBMC) to influence positive change in their behavioural attitudes and practices that women's participation and gender awareness is essential to their success.

The pilot in Kaduna state began in 2013, with mobilization and sensitization activities, with 97 identified gender champions attending a three-day training workshop in February and March 2014. The gender champions have subsequently been active in seven Local Government Areas (LGA) in Kaduna state (Kudan, Makarfi, Kaduna North, Kajuru, Kachia, Kaura, and Kuru).

In October 2015, another training session was held to help roll out the Gender Champion Initiative to ten more LGAs (Jaba, Zangon Kataf, Kaduna South, Giwa, Sabon gari, Igabi, Zaria, Lere, Kubau, and Ikara).

What are gender champions?

Gender champions engage with schools and communities to increase girl enrolment, talk about the benefits of women's participation and child protection, as well as address other inclusive behaviours at schools. Gender champions are:

Both male and female

Based in the school communities

From the local community (e.g. active SBMC members, women's group leaders, teachers) and from LGEA or State (e.g. politicians, professionals, civil servants)

Fully supportive of – and convinced of the need for – women's participation

Able to persuade, inspire and motivate women to participate and men to encourage and facilitate women's participation

Positive deviant personality

Volunteers (small allowances paid for transport).

What do gender champions do?

Gender champions are responsible for:

Providing information on the operation of the schools within the community

Supporting the schools development plan (through the women and children committees)

Providing a link between the school and the community	They visit SBMCs in pairs (preferably one man, one woman per clustered schools) to talk about the benefits of women's participation and encourage discussion. They also offer guidance to SBMCs in establishing or strengthening women's committees.
Ensuring that funds received and expenditures of the school are publicly displayed every month for public awareness (through the women's committees)	
Supporting schools and community to fund raise for the schools	
Liaising with Foundation/Philanthropists Bodies to the schools projects	
Reporting regularly to parents and the community on the status of school program, challenges and policies.	
Demonstrating exemplary leadership	
Building and enhancing relationships with all stakeholders (women and children's committee, the school authority, community)	
Dealing with issues that affect the outside school environment	
Supporting the creation of space for girls and women's participation in the community leadership	
Raising women's concerns and issues	
Sharing information with SBMCs on improved methods of working (through the women and children committees)	

About the training

93 gender champions 64 men and 29 women attended several workshops and trainings. The training involved:

Introductions; overview of the Gender Champion initiative; review of previous activities; engaging with communities and children; identifying and supporting survivors and victims of gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

Recap; action plan for next outings; presentations on strategies that new LGEA intend to take in identifying and engaging positive deviants as gender champions; tentative monitoring movements of gender champions going forward.

Gender champions say they benefited from training which has helped prepare them for the role as well as giving them a personal sense of achievement and the opportunity to change things in their communities. For example, a gender champion from Kabode/Insame Cluster said, "As a woman, I have benefitted from these trainings and we women feel cheated by not being enrolled in school when we were children, but now we are working to change this so that our girls don't fall into the same situation".

The gender champions emphasised the need to:

Be prepared and organized

Have good negotiation and communication skills

Engage schools and communities – identify relevant stakeholders including community leaders

Work with SBMC to address community issues

Develop strategies for facing challenges

How are gender champions selected and trained?

Gender champions are 'positive deviant' men and women, who despite experiencing similar challenges find ways to support education, speak out on the value of education, and send their children to school.

Gender champions are nominated by communities, civil society organisations, and government staff. Before beginning work, gender champions attend an initial two-day orientation training, to discuss gender issues and develop messages to take to the community.

Examples of success stories shared in the training

Mobilising resources for out-of-school children to attend school: “We noticed the presence of children who were out of school. When the parents were asked why the children did not attend school, they complained of no money for books or uniforms. We had meetings with different community groups and mobilised resources to send the children to school. We are proud to say no child of school age is out of school in our cluster” (Kaura LGEA).

Female gender champions go to sensitize parents during weddings especially the women. As a result more women are enrolling their children to school. “Now you find more girls in school which ordinarily wasn’t the case in previous years. The enrolment drive has started even before the school feeding program, however recently the numbers have drastically increased as a result of the school feeding provided by the Ministry of Education”.(Kudan LGEA)

Reducing alcohol and drug consumption: “We discovered some of our school girls were taking Indian hemp and drinking local gin. I met with one of them, based on our learning from the training we were able to strategically talk with them and convince them to desist from drinking” (Gumel cluster).

Monitoring teacher attendance: “Before now, no-one went to monitor teacher attendance. Now, we the gender champions always go to school and support SBMCs to monitor teaching and learning. We also made sure that teachers are properly dressed to serve an example for the children to dress neatly to school” (Nasa cluster/Sakwai).

Addressing the issue of distance to school: “Distance from home to school is a reason why our children don’t like going to school. We called parents and discussed how we can help our children to go to school and that is why we have decided to relocated the Junior Secondary to a central community to reduce the distance they have to travel to get an education daily” (Dutsen Kagoro cluster).

Reviving non-functioning SBMCs and women’s committees: “We have worked together to revive our SBMCs that were becoming non-functional. We called a meeting and when discussing, we found out that the women committee was not active. We revived the SMBC and the women’s committee and made sure they visit the schools” (Fadan Daji cluster).

Identifying funds to buy school equipment: “We contacted a councillor to help restore our first aid boxes. An old boy bought boxes of chalks for our schools worth N2,000. Our school furniture was broken. We brought out the broken chairs and called a meeting for the repairs. We found carpenters who followed school-by-school to repair our furniture. An old woman who was a pupil also contributed nails worth N700 for the repairs of the furniture. Also, in another school, the toilet had fallen in. We located another site and built a new toilet” (Fadan Daji cluster).

Protecting children from violence in schools, including corporal punishment: “A girl and a boy were reported to have been beaten in school. The boy was badly injured and the girl fainted and we were called to address the issues ... We had issues with the teachers because they felt we were intruding in their affairs. The District head who also confirmed his son was once beaten by same teacher was informed of the case and the teacher was called to order after we held a roundtable meeting. The teacher was made to write an undertaking not to do so again” (Kachia cluster).

Talking to parents about the impact of early marriage on girls’ education: “We have monitored schools and sensitised parents and the children to encourage regular attendance at schools. Due to this move, a law was put in place in the community that any girl that is to be married while in school has to be allowed to continue schooling. We have about 15 young married girls who are still attending school after being married” (Musawa cluster).

Working closely with religious leaders on increasing girls retention in schools: “I visited the District Head of with a religious leader whose daughter was about to be married. After several discussions and with the support of the religious leader we managed to convince him not to marry his daughter, the father went to his daughter’s school and spoke to the head teacher to discourage any suitor from visiting the girl while in school. Now no more girls are sent off to an early marriage in that area. We have been able to overcome a big challenge. I visited them at home afterwards to confirm that children have been taken to school.”

Mobilising community leaders: “Before now our street was tagged ‘The Street of Drug Addicts’. When we became gender champions, we met with community leaders and later with other community members. Now we have a task force which is well equipped ... Now our street name has been changed to ‘The Street of the Holy’” (Kaduna North Centre)

Sensitising parents about the need to improve children’s school attendance: “Every time there is a tomato and pepper harvest, the classes are empty. I go house to house during naming and wedding ceremonies to sensitise women. When I call for meetings, the women refuse to come. Gradually, they started listening to me (Godai cluster).

Engaging community leaders on the importance of education: “In one of the communities, they found out that the Chief’s children were not in school so they (SMO, SBMC and the gender champions) sat him down and discussed with him on his role as a leader and a mentor that he needs to show an example for others to follow which he was not doing. He promised that he will send his children to school after their discussion and they have confirmation that he has done that” (Kabode/Insame cluster).

What challenges do gender champions face?

Gender champions highlighted a range of challenges affecting education in Kaduna, including:

Children out of school

Insufficient teachers

Teacher and pupil attendance

Early marriage of girl students

Poor maintenance of school infrastructure

Lack of school equipment, such as furniture, books, first aid kits

Poverty, particularly the cost of uniforms and books, and children going to school hungry

Conflict and crime

Violence and sexual harassment in and on the way to/from schools

Alcohol and drug consumption

Distance from school for some children

Non-functional SBMCs or no women’s committee

Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI Committee)

The GSI is a place for dialogue between government, CSOs and the community about the importance of girls’ education and social inclusion. Many of the GSI committee members also work with SBMCs and women’s committees, or are members of SBMCs themselves.

The GSI Committee has been involved in a range of work in Jigawa including reviewing the state Gender and Social Inclusion Policy, procuring and distributing school learning materials, and monitoring the work of SBMCs and Gender desk officer.

In addition, gender champions occasionally face hostility to their role. For example, in Fadaj Daji cluster, the gender champions noted, “The challenge we faced is that people in the community accuse us of being paid to do the work we do, but we made them realise that we are volunteers who are working for the cause of humanity, our community and our children... Some people expect us to pay them for the times we call them for meetings, but we keep encouraging them because we are working for the sake of our children with the hope that when our children are educated, we will break the cycle of poverty”.

Abakpa/ Ungwan Kanawa Cluster Gender Champions proudly stated, “We are all known in our communities because and they trust us that is where we get our strength to continue this work”.

How to identify and support survivors and victims of GBV and sexual harassment?

On Day Two of the training, gender champions discussed the issue of how to deal with cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment in schools and communities. SBMCs have previously received training on child protection through mentoring visits of Social Mobilisation and civil society organisations working in partnership. The gender champions and the LGEA staff identified the following steps to be taken when a child protection situation arises in the school or community:

Child protection: what should happen in cases of rape or sexual harassment?

Immediately take the child to the hospital accompanied by a Police Officer and get a signed and stamped Doctors report

The child should be immediately taken from the scene of the incidence and protected from further exposure

Convince the family to give their consent for the issue to be followed up to its conclusion

Ensure that the culprit faces legal consequences to serve as a deterrent to others

Where a teacher or head teacher is involved, they should be dismissed rather than transferred

Sensitise the family, community and school on the need to show care and support to the child

Parents and teachers should be sensitised on the importance of encouraging parent-child and teacher-pupil relationship

Teachers should be stopped from sending pupils on errands to their homes

How are gender champions protecting children?

Case study of an 11 year old girl being abused on her way to school: "Our District Head is very old and can do very little because of his age while the village head is ill so the youths are taking advantage of this. The herculean task now lies with us (the Gender Champions and SBMCs).

There is an 11 year old girl (name withheld) who goes to school daily with her little siblings, but on the way makes a stop at a house where a man has asked her to make a stop daily. She goes in and does not report to school until break time. Some men reported this case to me and I told the head teacher.

The next day we watched out for her and when she came in at break time, she was waylaid by the teachers and I asked to see her privately in the head teacher's office where I spoke to her convincingly and she later told me that the man takes off her panties and has his way with her after which he gives her N50 (fifty Naira only) to buy food during lunchtime in school and asks her to return in the evening.

I asked her what time she leaves home? She replied at 7.45am and does not eat breakfast. She buys food and water with the money the man gives her.

I called the head teacher and shared the girl's story and we reported the case to the Police. The man was arrested and we took him and the girl to the hospital where they were tested. Luckily he was not HIV positive and the girl was taken care of.

I followed the girl home and spoke with her mother on the danger she has exposed her girl to because she was not feeding them breakfast and has allowed them to walk to school unprotected. The mother responded that the girl's father is a beggar and they are so poor, but will make sure that she improves in taking care of the children.

The man who has molested the girl is still serving his two year sentence in the Kaduna central prison and the girl comes to my house every morning to collect her breakfast and we walk to school together daily".

For further information, please contact ESSPIN on:

Email: info@esspin.org

Phone: +234 (0) 8058008284