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**Together
for a better
future**



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Art as a tool for

change

Art is a powerful tool. And when it finds a voice and speaks into an issue, it becomes unstoppable. Hindia Ali, a film maker and writer from Isiolo believes that her interaction with ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) has given her art the voice it needed to speak up and speak out against the injustice going on around her.

"ActionAid has taught me how to use art to change society," she says. "I never used to communicate well in front of people but now I am empowering girls in school by teaching them how to film and tell stories of injustice around them."

Isiolo County remains as one of the last bastions of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kenya. With this also comes other forms of Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) that go unmentioned. Conversations within homes or in public spaces hardly touch on these subjects yet, human rights defenders have consistently raised the alarm of the increased numbers for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as well as Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) within the county.



As Human rights defenders we can only be successful if our interventions and advocacy reaches as many people as possible."

In one way or another, Hindia says, the cycle of silence had to be broken, and this started by her attending different trainings by AAIK in Isiolo, Nairobi and other major towns around her.

"The workshops didn't just help me as an individual. They have helped my entire community," she says.

Many beneficiaries of the training programs get back home and pass on the knowledge received to their peers. Soon, these little steps eventually define the journey that women and girls make towards making their concerns heard and acted upon by decision makers and Hindia has chosen film to raise these concerns.

"There is this day AAIK taught us on the steps one needs to take when they have been violated," she remembers. "I came back home and learnt that a neighbour had been sexually assaulted but didn't know what to do. I assisted her make the necessary steps following the knowledge I had received from the workshops and she got the necessary assistance."

Hindia didn't stop there. Believing that the message of reporting pathways needed to get to a wider audience, she has now developed a film script on Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) that she hopes will go a long way in educating many more on what needs to be done in case of an assault.

"As defenders of

human rights we can only be successful if our interventions and advocacy reaches as many people as possible," she says.

For impact and change to happen in society, numbers remain absolutely crucial.

"This is why we have brought together women and girls together to discuss their priorities and goals and come up with common solutions," Yusuf Abdi, AAIK's Programme Coordinator in Embu and Garissa County says.

"We brought these girls together to discuss their issues of concern to them. They have talked of issues relevant to them and have offered solutions that will work for them," Yusuf says.

The views and solutions that the girls shared were well documented in the course of the summit and will be shared at a larger forum bringing girls from across the continent.

"These views will then be shared at the African Union Summit, making sure that the voice of every girl is heard and not just heard, that it matters as well."



Hindia Ali

Standing up against harmful

cultures

Culture can be a good thing. It connects the present to the past. It shows us who we are and most importantly where we come from. But culture can also be a double edged sword.

For every good, there is a corresponding evil and Celestine Ndege, through the Sauti ya Wanawake Mwakirunge Umbrella spends a good amount of her time fighting the ills perpetrated by culture. Ills that are in most cases aimed at making the lives of women and girls in Kilifi County unnecessarily difficult.

"In our culture women have a lot of responsibilities. We do everything. Yet, when important decisions with regard to the family or the community are being made, women are never consulted," Celestine says.

For the Giriama people and many other communities in Kenya's coastal regions, women are regarded as second class citizens. Their opinions are never taken and their counsel never sought.

"We want to correct some of these beliefs by fighting for the rights of girls from before they are born to when they turn 18," she says.

As an organization, Sauti ya Wanawake Mwakirunge cannot take on age old established cultures alone. So in partnership with ActionAid International Kenya, Sauti ya Wanawake organized trainings and workshops to first educate the women on the possibilities that life has for them. The possibilities that would lay bare their rights with regard to the economies of their households as well as with regard to their sexual and reproductive rights.

"We told them what sexual assault means and to speak up whenever they are violated," Celestine says.

In most parts of coastal Kenya traditions have greatly affected women. Even in families, parents regard boys as better than girls as a result, males receive favourable attention in comparison to girls whom are still viewed by many as a chance at households to increase their wealth through early marriages.

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We want to correct some of these beliefs by fighting for the rights of girls from before they are born to when they turn 18.”

Antonia Riziki David knows too well about these cultures and early marriages too.

She was married at an early age in 2016, but unfortunately, her husband died two years later.

"When my husband died they wanted me to get inherited by my late husband's brother. But fortunately at that time, I had joined ActionAid's young mother's group and I was aware of my rights as a woman. So I rejected the attempts to get me inherited," Riziki says.

Apart from knowing about her rights, the Young Mother's group also provided an opportunity for her to learn about various livelihood projects that she could get involved in to provide for her child, even in the absence of her husband.

"I now have the knowledge to run small businesses. Other young mothers and myself have started a table banking group that gets us to save some Sh50 every day. At the end of the year I will have some money to do things for my children," Riziki says. "Through the Young Mothers Program I have come to know about livelihood projects and I now know my rights. I now know that there are things I can do to make my life better."

Early marriages and wife inheritance are not the only things that Celestine and her group are fighting.

They are also intent on fighting disinformation among the women and girls in the region.

"ActionAid has helped us educate the women in our communities. We have been taken to seminars to know our rights, about improving our livelihoods through small businesses like bee keeping as well as agribusiness business," she says.

Celestine Ndege



Broken

to be made whole

The trauma caused by gender based violence can last a lifetime. Survivors live with anger, regret and pain for nearly the rest of their lives. The emotional impact is immeasurable. And many times, girls who have undergone a form of abuse often find themselves caught in a vicious cycle of assault. A cycle that threatens every aspect of their livelihood.

It has taken Irene Mbalilwa almost an entire lifespan for her to start her recovery journey from a rape ordeal. When she speaks, it is hard to relate her story with what she went through. She wasn't always confident. She wasn't always sure of her words. She wasn't always outspoken.

"I am a survivor of sexual violence. At one point in my life I was shy, withdrawn and angry," she says. Angry at what happened to her. Withdrawn from a world she thought had turned its back on her. The ordeal left her violent and unloving to herself. All these emotions coming from a place of blame.

"I blamed myself for all that happened," she says.

It mattered little that the assault occurred when she was a child aged 11.

"Throughout that time I never accessed any health support and never spoke up against the person who defiled me or spoke out against sexual violence," she says.

As she got into her adulthood, she knew she needed help to deal with her past. She just did not know where the

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I saw people who had gone through the same thing as me...sometime worse. This encouraged me to open up and share my story.”

help would come from, or more crucially, who would offer the help. Until she heard about the different programmes offered under the various projects by ActionAid International Kenya in advancing the rights of women and girls.

"Before the trainings I received from Action Aid I would not even speak in front of people. I was very shy. I didn't believe in myself," Irene says.

She, like many others have gone through trainings that have empowered them in different ways. For Irene, what stuck on her from the engagements was the boosting of her confidence. From the workshop rooms and the retreats, she found herself again and discovered the power that lies in self-belief and standing up against evil.

"I saw people who had gone through the same thing as me...sometime worse. This encouraged me to open up and share my story."

As she opened up in forums, she realised that there was power in her voice. There was power in letting go of the past in preparation for a new, bolder future. And most importantly that her story would prevent the next girl to get assaulted.

The leadership and organizational skills she received helped her start her own community based organization, Circle of Hope, that offers a safe space for survivors of SGBV to open up and share their experience. But most importantly, a space that addresses the mental

stresses that survivors of SGBV are under. "A lot of focus is put on the physical health of survivors, yet a lot of the lasting damage is mental and emotional. My experience taught me that wellbeing cannot be achieved unless our mental and emotional needs are taken care of," she says.

The counselling she has received from action aid has helped her address old wounds too.

It was not until she turned 23 that she told her mother of the rape, a truth that was not easy for her mother to take.

After the tears that followed Irene's confession though, the relationship between mother and daughter has never been stronger.

For Irene, AAIK does not only mean providing support to SGBV survivors such as herself, but it also means mending broken relationships and looking at life through a different lens. A lens that supports survivors of violence and motivates law enforcement officers to prioritize cases of violence against women and girls. A lens through which she sees herself as whole again.



Irene Mbalilwa

Giving hope to women in informal settlements

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Before coming in contact with ActionAid I used to see things differently.”

Millie Akinyi's childhood in Nairobi's Mukuru Kwa Njenga was not different from that of most of her friends. Mukuru, like many other informal settlements around the country had its own uniqueness to it. Some good. Some bad. It was only when she became older that she realized many of the memories she carried into adulthood were those of trauma.

“I grew up witnessing many violations. We grew up around police brutality, around cases of sexual gender based violations, sodomy and even female genital mutilation. But at the time, these were all normal,” says Millie.

Violence, particularly against girls and women as a normal occurrence within her neighbourhood. There was no reporting of the crimes, neither was there any complaining by the survivors.

But as she grew older and started her own family, she started to realize just how blurred some lines had become. Assaulters justified their actions. Survivors blamed themselves for whatever ill came their way.

“Before coming in contact with ActionAid I used to see things differently. At that time, I had normalized violence

against women. I had grown up in a violent family. But through the trainings and seminars and workshops I knew the boundaries that people should not cross and how men should behave around women,” she says.

A series of leadership and governance trainings eventually moulded her into a gender defender.

“After knowing my rights I am now a GBV champion and a peace champion,” she says. “Every time I get an opportunity I tell girls to join one of these groups programmes supported by ActionAid. It is only these programmes that will teach them how to speak up for themselves and what their rights are,” she says. “I tell them that within these programmes they will find safe spaces to express themselves and if they continue talking something is bound to change.”

For a brief period in her marriage, change was not something that Olga Otieno and her husband would talk about. Infact, in the early days their union, the status quo was preferred. A status quo that left Olga at their home within Mukuru look after the children and take care of all the unpaid care work.

Her days were often a blur, moving from one activity to another with little time to think about herself. This turned the woman who had grown up a bubbly child into a withdrawn mother who never spoke up.

“One day a friend told me I needed to get out of my shell and speak up. She told me about a program ran by ActionAid on Unpaid Care Work and a seminar on the same. I was intrigued by what this meant so I joined the programme.”

That year, Olga was among tens of women from around the country who attended a

workshop in Mombasa on Unpaid Care Work, what it meant and the effects it had on the wellbeing of the entire family.

“I came back home and had a candid conversation with my husband. At first he did not make sense of what I was saying but when I broke it down to him the way we had been taught during the workshop he saw my point of view and now helps around the house.”

The extra time that Olga has received when her husband steps in and helps in chores around the house is used wisely. She has found time to talk to and organize other women to take action against issues affecting their community.

“We now know our rights and have some time on our hands. We have taken on water cartels in Mukuru and helped organize refuse collection in our area to become an efficient service,” she says.

With their increased knowledge and confidence, women of Mukuru such as Olga and Millie are now listened to. Their views are sought on community matters. Now, they say, their opinion not only matters, but it is valued.



Millie Akinyi

A generation breaking the chains of

FGM

and poverty



When women are empowered they become the pillar of the community and the entire world.”

Amran Ali knows all about poverty. She knows all about discrimination too and how these two can make girls vulnerable to violent abuse. But in spite of these, she also knows about the importance of speaking up against all forms of discrimination and abuse not just for her, but for other girls and women around her as well.

“ActionAid has empowered me to grow into a capable lady who can fight for her rights,” said Amran.

A key right she now fights for after gaining her confidence is the ability to speak out against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

“FGM is one of the biggest problems that girls are facing in our Somali community. Although most people have stopped it there is a minority who still practice it in rural areas with less vigilance,” Amran says. “They do

this knowing they are hurting their children... sometimes even killing their daughters in the process.”

She was among dozens of girls from Isiolo, Meru and Garissa meeting for the first time since the outbreak of Covid19 to try and find solutions and make recommendations over the common issues that affect them.

For Amran and her community, Sexual Gender Based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation remain the key dangers to the growth and progress of women and girls within her community in Kenya’s Northern County of Garissa.

“These two things have for years been responsible for girls dropping out of school, early marriages and even death.”

More often than not, women and mothers facing these twin dangers never spoke up or out against these acts. Now, however, through various programmes by ActionAid International –Kenya, these girls and women are finding their voice and are speaking out against these harmful practices.

“When women are empowered they become the pillar of the community and the entire world. Girls want to be viewed as individuals first and not bodies with regards to FGM. That is why we need to be empowered to help communities understand this and fight FGM,” Emily Kathiria Thurania, from Isiolo county also says.

Just like Amran, she too is a beneficiary of the various projects that AAIK has across the country to empower women and girls.

Women such as Amran and Emily have received trainings on leadership and empowerment that have resulted in them becoming more vocal on matters concerning them. Now, they speak up and act whenever their rights are violated.

“Because of these trainings I am now the Chairperson of the Student body at my college,” Amran says. “My passion has grown and the trainings I have received have helped me pass on important

knowledge on SGBV referral pathways to my family members and neighbours.”

Hundreds of girls from the counties of Garissa, Isiolo, Meru and Embu who have gone through the workshops by ActionAid also learnt about the different definitions of SGBV and most importantly what to do to make sure the voices of the voiceless within society do not disappear into everyday life.

In this journey of advancing the rights of women and children, economic empowerment remains a key pillar because a financially stable household is less susceptible to ills such as early marriages, FGM and SGBV. In light of these, the girls have over the past years been taken through livelihood projects to not just improve themselves, but their homesteads as well.

In Garissa’s, Kamuthe area, ActionAid has provided households with palm trees to help buffer the effects of poverty. Palm trees are a key source of dates and palm oil, both of which are a key driver of household economise in the region.

“Trainings from ActionAid have helped me start a village loans and savings association which gives women the opportunity to save and access loans to improve themselves,” Emily says. “This is how our partnership with ActionAid has changed not just my life, but for those around me as well.”



Amran Ali

The courage to speak for the voiceless

As a university student at Kenyatta University's main campus, Beryl Akinyi knows all too well about the pressures surrounding the four years of an undergraduate programme. Most importantly though, she knows what it takes to keep this pressure off herself and those around.

"As a social advocate, I love empowering young people and making their life equal. I fight against Gender Based Violence and in particular sexual harassment," she says.

Sexual harassment has become common in institutions of higher learning. Sex in exchange for grades is one of the most visible skeletons for universities and colleges around the world. Yet, not very many voices actively speak up against it partly because of the normalization of these crimes in these institutions and what Beryl refers to a power imbalance in universities.

"When one speaks up they have to be alive to the power dynamics around them. Lecturers and administration officials who are in most cases the main perpetrators still hold a lot of power within these



ActionAid came as a partner to help us organize and run the CampusMeToo movement to end sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning."

institutions so it is very easy for one to be victimized for speaking up," she says.

From her early days in University, Beryl learnt the importance that partnerships hold in speaking truth to power, and, as she grows in her advocacy within the students' network, ActionAid International Kenya has emerged as a key partner in her journey.

"ActionAid came as a partner to help us organize and run the CampusMeToo movement to end sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning. They support us on issues of resources and have helped us get the expertise to run successful campaigns. Without their support it would have been nearly impossible to run our advocacy campaigns and reach as many students as we have," Beryl says.

CampusMeToo Movement is a student led Pan-African Movement against sexual harassment from staff towards students in higher learning institutions. It draws its membership from both private and government run institutions from across the continent.

ActionAid has helped the CampusMeToo Movement find direction and set achievable goals in its advocacy journey. Members of the movement have benefitted from workshops aimed at instilling greater self-confidence and helping the students leverage on technology to tell their advocacy stories better.

"ActionAid trained us on using social media as an advocacy tool. The organization also funded the building of our website which is a critical tool on how we reach our audiences," Beryl says.

For her and her team, the next frontier lies in lobbying for the protection of victims of SGBV. She says that the law protects under age victims but there exist many loopholes with regard to the protection of adult

SGBV victims. Not enough cases get convictions even when the crime seems obvious. Survivors often leave in fear of retribution or in shame after going through lengthy court processes only for their cases to fall through the cracks.

Like many of her peers, engaging with ActionAid has helped her report cases of violence, build her trust for law enforcers and effectively document cases of violence while preserve evidence.

"ActionAid has helped us move the campaign to the next level and even meet other policy makers. Unlike before when we just talked amongst ourselves, we now have the confidence to talk to the entire world. This is what every girl should aspire to."

Even with these strides though, many barriers still lie in the wake of the movement. Victimization of those who speak up continues. The power imbalances persist. Institutions look at the more vocal students as a destabilizing force.

"We may be going up against people with power and influence. But with the support of ActionAid, our voices will forever be heard," she says.



Beryl Akinyi



Girls and women from across the country were brought together by an ActionAid International Kenya under an umbrella project that seeks to address common problems in different parts of the country through building confidence.



The participants were drawn from a pool of girls in and out of school who have experienced sexual, physical or emotional violence so that they can report cases of violence, build their trust for law enforcers, build their knowledge of seeking professional help and change patriarchal attitudes.



I WANT EVERY
GIRL TO KNOW
THAT THEY CAN
FREELY SHARE
THEIR DREAMS
TO THE WORLD



I WANT EVERY
GIRL TO WALK
IN HER COMMUNITY
WITHOUT FEAR
OF BEING SEXUALLY
ABUSED

The girls and women also formulated solutions around detrimental cultures such as accepting violence against women and girls as norm entrenched in the target communities, strengthen WRNs' systems to effectively document cases of violence and preserve evidence and the need to improve capacity to provide support to survivors of violence.



WE DEMAND EQUAL
PARTICIPATION &
REPRESENTATION
OF GIRLS IN ALL
SPACES OF DECISION
MAKING

The summit was meant to provide a safe space with and for girls across various contexts and spheres of life where their voices can be heard to articulate the issues and bring profound changes in the society, advocate for deliberate strengthened action by policy makers and government to institutionalize, fund and implement efforts towards elimination of VAG/W through concrete political, economic and cultural actions and strengthen the commitment of allies and partners for the promotion of equality of girls in all areas of professional, economic, social and political life.



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