



Changing You, Transforming All!

# Empowering grassroots women to amplify their voices

Haki Yetu, Jukumu Letu NewsLetter

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## Furaha's second chance- Kakoneni School Story



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### Affirmative action fund lifting the hope of girls in Kilifi

In the rural parts of Kilifi, many girls are at risk of violation; most common is gender based violence (GBV). Over the years, the County has recorded incidences of child pregnancies and child marriages which has remained a major barrier to them accessing and transitioning to higher levels of education.





## New dawn as chonyi gets its first police station

A 30 kilometers journey from Kilifi town leads us to Chasimba in Chonyi, one of the six Sub-Counties haboured within the oceanic County of Kilifi. It is about midday and the sun is warming up to usher us into a rather cool and conversational afternoon.

Over the roads, the greenery sight of maize plantations and the swaying palm trees that invokes the serendipity of freshness and harmony welcomes us to a village that has long reconciled with a past filled with crime.

### *Incidences of GBV*

It is here that wails of children and women enveloped the villages over the years and as Merceline Akinyi puts it; “not a day, not a week went by without the wails of children robbed off their innocence being heard in the nearby thickets.”

As a well known anti-GBV crusader in her village, Akinyi recounts the many nights women spent over at her home as they escaped from violent spouses. She tells the tale of the many cases of gender based violence (GBV) perpetrated by bodaboda riders yet the area lacked a fully functional police post to lock up perpetrators or safe shelters for survivors.

Today, hope is brought alive as the community gears to the opening of a newly established Chasimba police station; a first of the first since time immemorial. This has brought with itself a sense of safety and security among communities in the surrounding areas.

“The nearest police station we have ever had is located in Kilifi town; 25kms away. We had to travel miles away to report crime,” she says, adding “follow-up of cases becomes challenging with a transportation cost of Sh800 each day and most cases ends up being thrown out of court.”

It is a tale that Inspector Paul Achebi based Bando Salama DCC’s office in Chonyi knows to well. He grins as he narrates to us how Chasimba Police; located three kilometers away from where he sits has eased his work.

“Currently we do not have vehicles to transport suspects to Kijipwa where we have holding cells or to court. Most of the time we use bodabodas and run the risk of suspects escaping,” narrates Inspector Achebi.

Achebi tells us that he has had incidences where he uses his own car to support survivors to follow-up on their cases in court but he is happy that the Chasimba Police station will have all the infrastructure

and resources needed to improve police response to criminal activities in the area. CREAW has supported numerous community level dialogues that have also been led by Community Activists. In 2017, which was an election year in Kenya, the dialogues attracted political aspirants and thus giving women a chance to advance the health agenda and lobby for better service delivery.

The forums that were done periodically (weekly, monthly or quarterly) discussed balancing power, gender violence, negative cultural practices, Family planning, men involvement in maternal health, maternal and neonatal death audits in the community. During the dialogues, communities explore ways in which men can join their power with women and offer support especially to pregnant women, ensure they eat nutritious foods, and also assist in household chores.

### *And so what did it take to get the police station?*

Mwanajuma Kusa has lived in Chonyi since birth, she has lived through the insecurity and seen it all; how the bodaboda riders would slash to death residents, the cold bloodbaths by organized criminals like the outlawed Mombasa Republican Council (MRC)- calling for a responsive government to the needs of Coastal communities.

And the cases that add more salt to what Mwanajuma terms as the “evil that resides within the community” is the scourge of gender based violence that has left many homes broken, children left without mothers and fathers and many teenage girls defiled and impregnated by people well known to them: brothers, uncles, fathers and neighbours.

“We have a culture of ‘disco matanga’ that exposes girls to teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Despite the government outlawing such, the practice still persists in the community,” she says Mwanajuma’s concern was to have a safer community



for the many women and girls whose interest resides in her heart. As a member of Sauti Ya Wanawake, Chonyi Chapter, she gathered all the women to discuss the issue of a police post being established a stone throw away from the villages.

“To garner support, we first conversed with community members including the Kaya Elders. Together we agreed that we would approach the area Member of Parliament (MP),” recalls Mwanajuma.

She pauses and shifts to how it was challenging for them to stand before the Kaya Elders, knowing what the “traditions postulates”- voices of women are never taken into account. She says they stood firm and explained why it was time that the community got a fully-fledged police station. They needed to be heard not as “women” but as a community. It was a sigh of relief; their voices were heard and now they had a unity of purpose.

In the turns and sometimes postponement of meetings among the community and authorities, patience carried them through. “We knew even if it took years and ages, our call will be heeded,” she says.

In 2015, the MP would finally call for a meeting that included all the structures in the communities including the grassroots women leaders who have been at the forefront in the campaign. A committee was formed to fast-track the construction of the police post. Fast forward, in 2018 the dream of the community was born alive. Chasimba Police Station stands strong, tall and ready to kick.

### Addressing GBV

Inspector Achebi who has walked the journey with the women groups in the advocacies explains that he is happy with the network that the likes of Mwanajuma and Merceline have created.

He says, such network has helped in raising awareness

on critical issues in the community. It is such that has helped changed the perceptions on issues of GBV and accorded women the strong voices to participate in spaces that were regarded as “male only.”

“In all honesty, it takes the community to create safe spaces for their coexistence. As a law enforcer, I have learnt that we should always create an understanding with each and every member of the community. I attend Chief barazas to listen to community concern and address their issues,” explains Achebi who is also the Chonyi Sub-County Commander.



## Embassy of Netherlands field visit

To better interact with the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu project beneficiaries and key actors working on gender based violence prevention and response Naisola Likimani from the Embassy of Netherlands in Nairobi visited our program site in Meru. The deliberations centred on the gains made by the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu project in building a strong network of grassroots women to better advocate for efficient and effective GBV service delivery in Meru County.





## Meru County judicial colloquium discusses SGBV against children

May 24 2018, marked the beginning of a new milestone with a rather conversational and a very informative two-day colloquium for the Meru County Judges, Magistrates and other judicial officers.

The conversations on harnessing an effective and efficient judiciary in handling sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) matters had shifted to the county level, in this case; Meru County.

The Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) in collaboration with the Judiciary organized discussion to sensitize judges, magistrates and other judicial officers on Court decisions that have set precedents in determining SGBV cases with the theme: "Harnessing the emerging jurisprudence through best judicial practices, innovation and local remedies." The judicial officers were keen to dissect the rampant cases of sexual violence against children in the county.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the colloquium in Meru, Justice Anne Ongijo noted the difficulty in handling cases where minors come into conflict with the law. She observed that when it comes to the criminal justice system in Kenya the courts are put in a predicament where there are not able to determine which of the minor to bring to book and as such; It is still a grey area that is currently been handled by putting both minors under protection and care through the children department or probation office.

"There is need to amend the Sexual Offences Act to effect that where a sexual offence has been committed between two minors, none of them should be charged in the court of law. It is a matter

that should be dealt with in the community. Minors should be well educated on the dangers of premarital sex," notes Justice Ongijo.

Justice Ongijo also delve into the infamous ruling issued by Judge Said Chitembwe who freed a 24 year old man convicted of defiling a minor. Chitembwe who served as the Malindi Court judge then, failed to convict the accused person, arguing that the minor behaved in a manner likely to suggest she was an adult.

"Such rulings sets bad precedents for our justice system and exposes minors to further violations," she adds.

Under the Sexual Offences Act, a child below the age of 18 years cannot give consent to sexual intercourse and therefore, all intimacy with children, willing or not, is defilement.

Muthomi Thiankolu of Muthomi and Karanja Advocates however noted a landmark ruling by High Court in Meru where a group of young girls successfully challenged the government on its inaction regarding sexual violence against children.

"The case is commonly referred to as the "160 girls case." The petitioners in this case were majorly girls who had been defiled on diverse dates by a teacher. When they reported the matter to police, their case was mismanaged; the police were not willing to record statements or do proper investigations," narrated Thiankolu.

Thiankolu who was the lead advocate in the case say

when the matter went before the High Court in Meru, the judge ruled in favour of the girls, ordering the police to conduct prompt and effective investigations into each girls' cases as well as take measures to fulfill their constitutional duties to comply with human rights standards in all cases of defilement.

"This case made a legal history in Kenya and globally as it brought to light the plight that many survivors of sexual violence have to endure before perpetrators are finally brought to book. This is a classic case that depicts the importance of strategic litigation in the society," says Thiankolu.

Over the past few months there has been a wave of storm of sexual violence in school majority to which are committed by teachers who are supposed to be the custodians of learners while in school "loco parentis".

In 2017, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) struck off 71 male teachers for misconduct. In 2016, 22 teachers who had sexual relations with their students were banned from ever teaching in Kenya while in 2015, another 126 teachers were deregistered.

In the wake of this, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) said that principals would now be held accountable for the safety of learners in schools. But that is not enough; according to the teachers who spoke at this year's annual head teachers conference in Mombasa, there is need for the installation of surveillance cameras in schools as well as the employment of former military officers to boost security and curb sexual violence in schools.



In the courtrooms however, judges and magistrates are concerned of the emerging incidences where teachers stand as sureties to colleagues who commit sexual offences. It is such that has opened the gates court petitions against TSC for the failure to provide safe school environments and thereby exposing learners to SGBV but also the risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS.

One such public interest litigations was one spearheaded by CREAW and litigated by John Chigiti of Chigiti and Chigiti Advocates. This case brought to light the plight of students in the hands of their amorous teachers. In this, TSC were ordered by the court to put in mechanism to prevent and effectively respond to G.B.V violations with the intent of protecting learners in school.

"TSC cannot shuffle paedophiles from one school to another, and finally, content itself with dismissals. It has to put in place an effective mechanism, whether through an inspectorate department within TSC or the Quality Assurance Department within the Ministry, to ensure that no-one with the propensity to abuse children is ever given the opportunity to do so. Dismissal, and even prosecution, while important, can never restore the children's lost innocence," read the judgment delivered by Justice Mumbi Ngugi in 2015.

## Engagement with the County Government of Kilifi

CREAW met with the Kilifi County Deputy Governor Gideon Saburi and the CEC in-charge of Gender, Education Sports and Culture Maureen Mwangovya to discuss the status of gender based violence and women representation across sectors in Kilifi County. Notably, Kilifi is one of the counties that has met the 50-50 gender representation in the appointment of the executive committee members. This has also been cascaded down to the county government departments.

“We acknowledge that women and girls face a lot of challenges while trying to access education and ascending to political leadership and thus we are working to build their capacity to ensure that their rights are realised and budgeted for in the annual county budget,” said the Deputy Governor.



Deputy Governor Gideon Saburi receives the Baseline Report on GBV in Kilifi from CREAW's Executive Director Wangechi Wachira.

## Creating safer spaces for girls' education

Beatrice Charo confidently walks as she approaches us, with a fruity voice and a smile that paints a ray of sunshine all over her face, she greets us and ushers us in towards her living room. Here, she speaks passionately about the community she had called home for decades. It is here in the coastline town of Malindi that she had started her teaching career.

With the beautiful beaches that stretch across the horizons of the dark blue waves ocean; a picture is painted of a land at peace with itself yet down the sandy beaches, the cries of young girls making life in the twilight becomes just a whisper, and as Charo puts it, many girls are forced to drop out of school as a result of child exploitation that exposes them to sexual violence, early and forced marriages and child pregnancies.

“Often girls are forced into marital roles when their families betroth them as a trade off to ease poverty. These girls are forced to abandon their education and instead transition to fulfill the duties of wife and mothers,” she explains, noting that this limits girls' ability to earn income and build sustainable earnings that will lift their families out of poverty and so the cycle of destitution in the family chain becomes limitless.

She says these limitless challenges that the girls face in the community also mirrors in their school performance vis-a-vis boys. Therefore, it is imperative that these learning environments must always be safe and gender inclusive to nurture a sense of responsibility and respect among boys and girls.

At Kibokoni Primary School where she teaches, she has made it her personal cause to ensure that girls are retained in school and that they enjoy safer learning

environment free from any exploitation. She credits it to the knowledge that she acquired from several training sessions organized by CREAW for teachers in Kilifi County. In the trainings, teachers are trained on the aspects of gender-based violence (GBV), positive ways to discipline children and the rights and responsibilities pertaining to child protection.

“Every Wednesday, we have a forum where we sit with the girls to listen to the challenges they experience in and around school. This encourages them to speak up to avert severity of psychosocial issues and build on their self confidence,” she says.

Charo however is not alone in the anti-GBV war in schools; Getrude Karisa a teacher at the nearby Upewoni Primary School is elated that by virtue of being teachers, they have the opportunity and responsibility to nurture the voices of school going children under their care to be able to speak out on GBV. Both Charo and Karisa are members of the Beacon Teacher Movement.

The Beacon Teacher Movement is an initiative of the Teachers Service Commission that was initiated to give teachers the opportunity to promote child protection in their schools and communities. The teachers are trained to create awareness of child rights and responsibilities among learners and what to do when they are abused.

Karisa's major concern is the numerous night Disco matangas- night vigil dances around Malindi attended by men, women and children to dance the night away in celebration of the deceased. Beneath the celebrations, men prey on young girls.

Kilifi has been cited as one of the counties with high





Both Kibokoni and Upewoni Primary schools have speak-out boxes installed in key locations that pupils post their issues. During the monthly parents meeting, the teachers are given an opportunity to educate parents on child protection and to handle GBV incidences when they arise.



Karisa's main motivation lies with the fact that her parents gave her the opportunity to go to school despite the cultural conservatism on girls' education among the coastal communities.

"I would not be where I am if I was not empowered through education. I have to ensure all the other girls also get to experience what it means to ascend through education and become responsible adults," says Karisa.

prevalence of teenage pregnancies conceived mostly at the local disco matangas. According to the Ministry of Health (MOH) 22 percent of girls aged between 15 and 19 in Kilifi County have begun child bearing which is higher than the national statistics which stands at 18 percent.

"A week cannot go by without the night vigils. Many girls are defiled and some end up being pregnant and infected with sexually transmitted diseases in the process," says Karisa.

She notes that communities must now move away from the popularisation of night vigils, which are unsafe to their daughters. They must have candid conversations on how to protect children. She recalls of a recent incident where a 16-year-old girl who schools at Upewoni was defiled by 18 year old in a

disco matanga and the families were unwilling to talk about it or report the issue to the police.

How then does she handle such matters?

"I noticed the girl was pretty much disturbed and unusually quiet while in class. I called her aside and we talked at length, she opened up. We reported the case to the police. The matter is now in court," Karisa says.

In Kilifi, the County Government issued a directive that banned disco matangas citing the rise in cases of sexual abuse and HIV infections among minors. Despite that night vigils still continues under the watch of local administration officials who collude with communities.







## Furaha's second chance

Every Wednesday of the week, Saumu Mwadime and Eunice Baya set out to traverse through the villages of Kilifi North Sub-County with a mission to hold conversations with the communities and get an in-depth understanding into the issues that bedevils communal coexistence; of core concern to them is gender based violence which has a damaging impact on the education of many girls around Kilifi County.

### GBV Status

According to a report on gender based violence in Kilifi and Meru counties conducted by the Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) in 2017, cases of early marriages, child prostitution,

female genital mutilation and teenage pregnancies catapulted by the deeply enrooted cultural barriers strongly contributes to gender inequality. "Such issues affect attendance and performance of girls in school. This is also reflected in the low rates of enrollment, transition and retention of girls in school as compared to their male counterparts," states the report.

It is such challenges that Saumu and Eunice say must be well mitigated for girls in Kilifi to grow and enjoy their rights to quality education just like many other school going children across the country.

"On February 19, we were facilitating a community conversation session in Tezo Sub-County when a middle-aged woman stood and narrated how her

school because she had no means to continue paying her school fees. She said her daughter (Furaha) was depressed and suicidal," narrated Saumu.

Saumu says, her situation brought tears to their eyes and when the dialogue session came to an end, they sat as the Wima group and decided to visit her at home to vividly understand her predicament.

Women on the Move against Gender Based Violence (WOMA) is a women-led accountability group advocating for the rights of women and girls. Through the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu Initiative, CREAW has worked to strengthen the capacity of the group on social activism and advocacy to ensure that they not only engage with the community effectively on issues of GBV but also hold duty bearers accountable to deliver on their mandate.

### Affirmative Action Fund Scholarships

On arrival, gloomy faces met us; a reflection of powerlessness and hopelessness of not knowing

what tomorrow holds. Behold, was Furaha who offered us seats at the frontal of their mud-thatched house, roofed with palm fronds. She was frail, teary and almost didn't talk, leaving her parents to lead the conversation.

"The next step for us was to approach the Office of the Women Representative to see if they could support Furaha through to secondary school" says Eunice, and because they are community minded persons who are well known for their activism on women and girls' rights, they had been earlier approached by the Office of the Women Representative in Kilifi County to map-out all the children who had dropped out of school for lack of fees and link them to the office.

Their mission was successful. Through the National Affirmative Action Funds (NGAAF), Furaha secured a four-year scholarship to further her education at Kakoneni Girls High School located 25 kilometers away from their home.







## Journey through Education

When we visited Furaha in her new school just a week after reporting, she was full of life and her eyes were filled with happiness. However, the tale of her education journey brings tears to her eyes:

“When the Kenya Certificate of Primary exams were approaching, my parents promised that if I scored 300 marks and above they would send me to my preferred school. I studied days and night to fulfill the promise. Indeed I scored 361 and was admitted at.....do you remember the name?

Days on, my parents were mum as to whether I will proceed to secondary school. One evening I gathered courage and asked my mother about the promised she had made to me; ‘I cannot afford to send you to a boarding school. Wait until your brothers are done with school then we will decide which school to send you to’ my mother answered.

I was distraught; I contemplated suicide. A month later I joined Majaoni, a nearby day secondary school. I was not content with this decision however I did not want my parents to be disappointed with me.

At Majaoni, students would make fun of me that I scored highly yet I still ended up in the same school with them. That demoralized me and it was not long before I dropped out of school again to work at a nearby hotel where I would earn Sh150 per day.

I had given up on pursuing my education until I met Saumu and Eunice; they were very encouraging and inspiring. My dream is to be a lawyer so that I can help other girls from my community ascend to great heights. I am glad they made my dream come true.” Furaha’s tale is not isolated and as the chair of the Kilifi County Affirmative Action Fund Jonathan Mativo puts it; his office has supported dozens of young girls to meet their education needs.

“There is a challenge when it comes to transition of



girls to secondary schools because many of the families here live below the poverty line,” Jonathan says.

It is against this backdrop that his office has prioritized to sponsor children who are survivors of gender based violence, to pursue secondary education. This year alone, 59 girls were offered full scholarship to join various boarding secondary schools across Kenya.

“During holidays, we plan to offer mentorship sessions to the girls so that they can also become champions of education and realization of girls rights and responsibilities within their villages,” he says.



## Changing the narrative of GBV and alcoholism

Despite legislative measures, Kenya is still facing great challenges in curbing illicit alcohol consumption more so, in rural communities where alcohol and substance abuse is easily accessible some of the most visible effects is the productivity of men and young people, increase of gender based violence and crime in the community.

It is a tale that Faith Kagwiria knows too well; with her motherly instincts and a heart for community peace and growth; she identified alcohol abuse and unemployment as a contributing factor to gender based violence and deaths of male figures in the community.

“In 2017 alone, seven youths died from my Ward after consuming an illicit traditional brew. It was an awakening call for me; my resolve was to find solution to what was ailing the community put under my care. I was concerned of the young life that were wasted away yet they are the pillar of household and community development,” says Kagwiria, Chief Kithirune West Location, Meru County.

Kagwiria understands the struggles and the burden of raising families that women undergo when their husbands die from illicit liquor consumptions. As a chief, she handles matters that appertain to domestic feuds reported to her on daily basis.

“Death bears a huge burden to the families and communities both financially and emotionally; women are rendered as sole breadwinners, majority are unemployed and unable to provide basic needs such as education to their children,” she explains.

She says it is oppressive, how her community deals with widowhood, in most cases it viewed as a curse of the tangling oppressive community customs that disregards widow's property rights. Consequently, women are often neglected, mistreated and at times even evicted from their own matrimonial homes.

It is for this that she made a resolve to deal with the scourge of alcohol consumption as a root cause to family disharmony and gender based violence. Her starting point was to petition the Deputy County Commissioner, Meru Central Sub-County and the Alcohol and Drinks Control Board to have the bars and pubs that have clouded the village shut down.

In her petition, she observed, “excessive consumption of alcohol has led to many social evils resulting from irresponsible and unrespectable behavior, theft and inadequate provision of family needs leading to broken marriages, squabbles in families and deaths.”

To succeed, she galvanized support from the community through the routine monthly “Barazas” where she voiced out the ills of alcoholism and why it was important that the countless alcohol dens in the village be clamped down.

“I am happy that the community bought into the idea and we formed a community advocacy group that has since taken the anti-alcoholism and GBV advocacies a notch higher,” she says.

As a result, she portends that less homes will have squabbles and youth will be more proactive in community development.







## Empowered to speak out on incest

**Judith Kambi narrates how the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu project empowered her to go against the family bond to speak out on incest and a 15-year jail term for the perpetrator.**

When Judith Kambi got wind of the defilement ordeal that her cousin had gone through, her heart sank. It was a moment of confusion and disappointment coupled with an overwhelming rage.

As a strong anti-gender based violence (GBV) crusader, it did not occur to her that a day will come when the scourge will finally come knocking at her family's doorstep; the first cousin Karisa had defiled the sister Kadzo (not her real name).

Milalani village where Judith lives is 15 kilometers away from Mwanamwinga where Kadzo resides. A few years back, they lived in the same homestead with their extended family owing to the communal nature of the Giriama community where the family hails from.

She speaks fondly of a place she and her extended family once called home. It is in Mwanamwinga that she was raised up with the virtues of mutual respect and dignity. Deep within them there was unspoken trust that depicted support and protection. "But how come, Karisa stole away Kadzo's innocence?" she pondered!

In her community, incestuous incidences are often treated as private affairs, going the extra mile to get Karisa incarcerated set her against the family.

"Incest is regarded as a taboo, no one speaks about it. Sexual violence is nothing to be happy about; to me it is an injustice. We must speak about such acts to curtail their occurrence in the community and

among families," Judith says.

She only got to know of the defilement ordeal a day after when she got a call from a friend who Kadzo had confided in. It was a call placed in the test of time and one that would necessitate her to go against the family bond.

"I was aware that Kadzo needed medical care before anything else. Her safety was key. So I went in search of her and took her to the hospital. The tests were positive of defilement," she recalls.

When they were done, the sun had set and it was getting into dusk. They retired for the evening. The following day they reported the matter to the police station and Karisa was arrested.

"Seeing Karisa in court gave me an oomph of relief, I was motivated to follow through with the case to its conclusion even though his family had disowned me and we could no longer see eye to eye," she says.

When he first appeared in Court, Karisa denied ever defiling Kadzo and stated that I had malice to cause him trouble. He accused me of wanting to cause bad blood between the two families.

In the subsequent court hearing, Karisa's parents submitted that he was not of sound mind when the incidence happened and pleaded for leniency.

"I gathered that, that was an excuse to escape from the crime he had committed. I was not letting that dissuade me from getting justice for Kadzo. Each day I was more determined than ever," she explains. It was however a relief when the Court finally found Karisa guilty of defilement handing him a 15 year jail term.

"I feel good knowing that my actions counted in bringing justice to Kadzo," she says.



It is not the first time that Judith was handling a defilement case, she had handled those of women from across the villages who wanted their wayward husbands to commit to child maintenance, children neglected and that of the many girls whose innocence were lost at the mercy of bodaboda riders. The only difference was that this was family.

Judy who studies criminology hopes to bring order to the community and bring justice to the survivors of GBV. She is also a member of the Women on the Move Against GBV (WOMA); a women-led group that works to protect the rights of women and girls in Kilifi.

To ensure that they alleviate the cases of sexual offences in the community, Judy and other members of WOMA have been holding regular dialogues in the community to educate them on their rights and how

they can prevent GBV. "I am motivated when I see my community breaking the silence on GBV. When the community knows their rights, they are able to protect girls and inculcate a culture of respect," she says.

Through the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu project, women-led accountability groups like WOMA have been trained on GBV related laws, policy development, budget planning and cycle and GBV. This has enabled WOMA members to be confident when responding to GBV cases, engage relevant duty bearers when need arises and as well as create awareness in the community on matters on GBV.



## Budget tracking training for women accountability groups in Meru

The Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu project recognizes the important role that women play in governance and development process at the county level. As a result, CREAM with the support from Netherlands Embassy, organized a series of trainings on planning and the budget making process for women-led accountability groups in Meru and Kilifi.

The training aimed at building the knowledge and skills of women at the grassroots on the budget cycle at the county level to enable them participate and engage with the County. This ensures that gender perspectives are adhered to in the budget making and implementation processes, accountability to women's right issues as well as efficiency and transparency in the budget and policy making processes.





# Affirmative action fund lifting the hope of girls in Kilifi



transition to motherhood roles. In the wake of this, the office of the Women Representative through the Affirmative Action Fund has prioritized on educating girls to build a generation of informed, empowered and skilled girlhood.

The chairperson of the Affirmative Action Jonathan Mativo spoke to CREAM about the scholarship initiative and how it is building sustainable livelihood for women and offering girls an opportunity to access basic quality education from disadvantaged homes within Kilifi.

## CREAW: What is Affirmative Action Fund (AAF)?

**Jonathan:** Affirmative Action Fund (AAF) is an initiative of the national government that targets the vulnerable in the community. Established in 2015, the fund seeks to address the plight of vulnerable groups through enhanced access to financial resources for socioeconomic empowerment among women, youths, PWDs, needy children and the elderly. Currently, the Office of the Women Representatives in their respective counties manages the fund.

**Kilifi has been widely reported as among the counties that records high number of child pregnancies. How do you think your scholarship and mentorship initiative will address the plight of many girls across the county?**

We are committed to ensuring that families who live below the poverty rate are empowered and able to

In the rural parts of Kilifi, many girls are at risk of violation; most common is gender based violence (GBV). Over the years, the County has recorded incidences of child pregnancies and child marriages which has remained a major barrier to them accessing and transitioning to higher levels of education.

Cases of early pregnancies among school going children are widespread and a contributing factor to high incidences of school dropouts. According to a baseline survey on GBV conducted by CREAM in the County of Kilifi, cultural practice such as night vigil dances is largely to blame for the rising cases of teen pregnancies.

This year alone, more than 14000 cases of pregnancies among school going children were reported by the Children's Affairs Department. The girls affected are between the age groups of 13 and 19. The worrisome statistics tells the tale of many girls whose education has been cut short as they



HAKI YETU, JUKUMU LETU



meet their daily needs as well as create sustainable livelihoods. Our initiative primarily targets to create access to livelihood support for women and access to secondary and tertiary education for disadvantaged girls from extremely poor households in Kilifi.

I will give you an example of a girl named Kadzo. 'She comes from a family of eight. She is in class five and none of the siblings has ascended to higher education for lack of school fees. In the family, they do not have access to health and are not able to access information on critical issues that include getting access to bursaries.' This is a scenario mostly depicted among families in Kilifi. AAF is mostly for the inflicted: women, girls and the elderly. Our initiative provides yearly scholarships for many girls like Kadzo. We believe that with the strong educational background, women and girls have the capacity to achieve their goals and create financial freedom for themselves and their families.

#### **What are the challenges that girls face everyday in Kilifi?**

Apart from poverty that ravages their livelihoods, girls are at risk of violations such as gender based violence. Many of them are married off to older men at a young age; transitioning them to parental roles and are not able to ascend to higher levels of education. This limits their chances of accessing quality basic education subsequently employment opportunities to support their families. Additionally, cultural practices give preference to boy child education at the expense of girls. Such creates inequality in the community.

#### **Owing to the myriad challenges above and the glaring gender-gaps in the education of boys and girls, how does your initiative address the inequalities?**

We give priority to girls due to the fact that transition rate is low amongst girls, however we also give scholarship to boys from disadvantaged families.

But even with that, we know that there is need to address the deeply rooted cultural norms and barriers that disadvantage both boys and girls. The more reason why we are partnering with development organizations and partners like CREAM with community focused initiatives to bridge the gap.

Apart from the scholarships, we are also partnering with the national government to provide Information Communication and Technology skills training for unemployed youth. We traverse through the villages, set up computer packages classes for youths. The trainings are done in monthly intervals in all the sub-counties. Currently we are in 17 villages, reaching out to over 2000 students. For six years now we have done over 60,000 youths.

#### **Due to the nature of your work, how do you map out children who are in need of bursaries from the community?**

We usually conduct community dialogues and visit households as well. In the dialogue we talk about the AAF and its goals. We also talk about the importance of ensuring all children enroll in schools at the right age and transition to secondary schools.

In the dialogues, parents, guardians or community members point out names of the children who are out of school for one reason or the other after which we do household visits to ascertain the situation. We work with women groups; who bring along their children to forums. We sensitize them on what AAF aims at achieving and ways in which they can access the funds. They also are key in mapping out boys and girls who are challenged in accessing education in the community.

#### **How many scholarships have you given so far?**

In January this year we gave out 50 scholarships to 39 girls and 11 boys across the county. We capitalized more on girls who are disabled or those whose parents are people living with disabilities or they are

affected by cases of GBV. Every year we commit to getting over 50 girls on full scholarships that takes them through to form four.

#### **Is it only bursaries or the scholarship also covers other expenses?**

When we commenced the issuance of bursaries we realized that it was just a percentage of the money to address education needs of students. We needed to factor in logistical costs and basic needs. Apart from the yearly school fees, we also provide cash for pocket money and transportation to and from school. We do this to ensure we retain students in school and they are of good health for an improved performance.

#### **Do you follow-up on the performance of the students that your initiative is supporting?**

Yes. Every term we make visits to the various schools that the students are placed. We are keen on how they are performing in school throughout their education journey. Additionally, we encourage them to take up new skills through sports and joining clubs.

#### **Your term of office ends in 2022, are there measures that you have put in place to ensure sustainability of the scholarship initiative?**

After the girls are done with high school one of our ideas is to set up an education fund to see the girls go through the full cycle of 8-4-4 system of education. We are also creating partnership with development partners to support girls through universities.

In the short term, we want them to go through high school, keep them safe in school and comfortable. When they go to school they are safe from frustrations in school, but when they come back, they are back to such frustrations. When our session ends in 2022 we will hand them over to the new AAF committees to continue supporting them through school.

#### **During school holidays how do you engage the girls within your cohort?**

When schools are closed we organize mentorship boot camps for girls and young women. These boot camps provide safe spaces for the girls to voice out the challenges they are facing in school and at home. During the mentorship sessions we bring facilitators and speakers the girls identify with and are role models in their sectors to motivate girls to be achievers. Some are more or less their peers. In the mentorship we also look at their after high school life, we want them to take up courses that inform their talent and those that also are meaningful to them.

I am also advantaged to sit in a consortium in Africa that speaks about the future jobs, we can easily start predicting how jobs will look like in 2030, so we prepare the girls on the environment and the dynamics of such jobs in future. We want to also mold the girls to support their peers in the community. When they close school we want to deploy them in the community like in dispensaries or other institutions to start developing skills and get reports. That is part of the mentorship program. We would want them to grow not only as educated but responsible people as well.

I am so passionate about education because the community also educated me. When I finished high school my parents had no money to take me to school, the community did a fundraising for me and I got school fees for the entire four years. I know what it feels for a child who would not get the opportunity to transition to high school. As a community oriented person, I feel content when my community grows. Development is a collective effort and we must all participate to ensure we build a generation with the required knowledge and skills for sustainable livelihoods.





## Journalists trained on gender sensitive reporting

Recognizing the important role that the media can play in exposing and generating awareness on gender based violence; which depicts the ills and evils in the society today, CREAM with the support from the Netherland Embassy organized a two day training workshop for journalists in Kilifi and Meru on gender sensitive reporting.

The training came in the wake of heightened media reports on sexual violence in schools with questions raised on the safety of school going children while in school and at home.

In Kilifi alone, teenage pregnancies have been reported to be in the increase, between the 2016-2017 there was an 8% increase, with most associated to incidences of defilement and incest. This year alone 14000 teens were reported pregnant. According to MOH county Department, the root causes of teenage pregnancies in the county emanates from the age-old cultural practices, poor parenting, poverty and inadequate sex and family planning education.

Data from the Ministry of Health indicates that 22% of girls aged between 15 and 19 in Kilifi County have began child bearing which is higher than statistics at the national level which stands at 18%. Specifically, 3% are pregnant with their first child and 19% have ever given birth compared to 14.7% and 3.4% respectively, at the national level.

According to the 2015 report by the National Crime Research Center, the most affected by GBV in Meru County are often women and in most cases, the

resulting impacts are fatalities. The report posted 88.0 percent of cases of battery.

“Journalists have a role to play in educating communities and generate awareness on the societal ills and practices that are detrimental to the rights of women and girls. Issues of defilement and child brides cannot go unabated if the society is to develop,” said Jane Godia, a Managing Editor at the African Child Feature Services who spoke eloquently about the media and gender issues in Kilifi.



*Jane Godia, Managing Editor at the African Child Feature Services*

While examining the trends in media coverage of GBV, Godia recounted the case of a Member of a County Assembly who was so miscast by the media after being assaulted by a colleague in Tanzania while at a workshop. The reports identified the survivor while protecting the perpetrator. This placed the survivor in the limelight for public scrutiny with blames hurled at her for the attack.



For an increased and quality coverage; Godia said there should be a sustained media strategy to ensure continued coverage and follow-up of GBV cases in Kilifi County. She called on journalist to be gender sensitive in their reporting especially in challenging the myths and perceptions that normalizes GBV as



well as protect the images and dignity of survivors. A plenary discussion on the challenges and experiences of journalist in reporting gender and GBV cases was anchored by Nehemiah Okwemba a journalist with the Standard Newspaper who observed that trustworthy expert voices are equally important when reporting sensitive stories.

“Our role is to educate communities and write stories that include community and expert voices that not only garner the attention of the community but also duty bearers,” said Okwemba.

“As journalists we must build trust with the community and survivors to ensure that they trust us with sensitive information. We have a duty to sustain the visibility on GBV issues and draw the attention of duty bearers for action,” expressed Edwin Gitonga, a reporter with the Standard Media Group in Meru.

Maureen Ongallo observed that, there exist challenges at the community level in reporting as well as speaking out on cases of defilement and incest, which are viewed as taboos. She said some Chiefs and Village Elders colludes with community members to settle cases at family level. A scenario that also presents a dilemma to journalists in situations where they have report on cases that touch on their families.

“The media tend to give priority to politics than GBV stories. The airtime or space in the Dailies is less yet the media should be at the forefront in setting the agenda and shape attitudes against the existing gender stereotypes that perpetuate GBV,” explained Ongallo.

With an aim to help journalist understand how to pitch gender sensitive stories, the workshop explored the diverse ways in which journalist can ensure that they adhere to the ethical standards and principles as well as attribute GBV related laws in their stories.

Through the Haki Yetu Jukumu Letu Initiative, CREAW targets to capacity build media professionals with an aim to ensure an increase and quality coverage of GBV issues.



## Promoting awareness through activism





# To champion, expand and actualise women and girl's rights and social justice.

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