

SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS: Barriers to Justice



DFPA supports GSWG engagements. GSWG members seen engaged in a meeting on Gender issues

Gender norms shape every aspect of our lives, from daily interactions to major life decisions. These shared expectations dictate how individuals should behave based on their gender, often limiting personal freedoms and reinforcing inequality. While social norms can provide a sense of order, not all of them are beneficial. In fact, many of these gender norms can be harmful, particularly when they perpetuate violence and inequality.

In many Kenyan communities, harmful gender expectations sustain the belief that violence is acceptable. This mindset not only fosters injustice but also leaves lasting scars on individuals and society. Normalizing violence

leads to devastating consequences, including loss of life, trauma, and entrenched inequality. Building safer, more just communities requires challenging these destructive beliefs.

KELIN is at the forefront of this fight, dedicated to dismantling harmful social and gender norms that contribute to the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). KELIN's initiatives focus on breaking down traditional gender roles, combating stigma, and confronting the normalization of violence. Traditional roles often enforce a divide, positioning men as dominant and women as submissive, reinforcing power imbalances. This makes it harder for women and marginalized genders to assert their rights or seek help. KELIN

promotes gender equality and empowers individuals to reject these oppressive beliefs.

Victims of SGBV frequently face stigma and shame, which hinders them from seeking justice, while societal attitudes often blame them instead of the perpetrators. This allows abusers to escape accountability. KELIN works to shift these attitudes, fostering an environment where survivors are supported and justice is served. In some societies, violence against women and marginalized groups is so common that it's considered normal. This cycle of abuse traps victims, making escape difficult. KELIN is committed to breaking this cycle by advocating for a society where violence is neither accepted nor tolerated.

To address these challenges, KELIN has embraced a gender-transformative approach, focusing on altering harmful social and cultural practices. This includes fostering conversations on gender equality and advocating for change that promotes justice and safety. Additionally, engaging men as champions in the fight against SGBV has proven effective in shifting attitudes and behaviors.

KELIN has implemented a range of initiatives to bring about tangible change. These include community sensitization forums on SGBV prevention and response, capacity-building and mentorship programs for community health providers and male champions to lead anti-SGBV efforts, and training for policymakers on gender equality. The

organization also advocates for policy changes related to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). In Homa Bay County, KELIN's efforts have led to significant milestones, such as the development of the [domesticated SGBV Policy](#), which provides a critical framework for addressing gender-based violence at the local level. The reconstitution of the County Gender Sector Working Group has also enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders, and a comprehensive [SGBV Situational Analysis](#) offers valuable insights into ongoing challenges.

KELIN's integration into the County Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network has further strengthened the collective response to SGBV. Additionally, through mentorship programs, KELIN has empowered Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AYSRRH) champions, equipping young advocates with the skills and knowledge needed to lead change in their communities.

As KELIN continues its collaboration with the Homa Bay County government and other partners, it has become clear that addressing SGBV requires a multifaceted approach. This means tackling not only the societal norms that perpetuate violence but also the systemic barriers that prevent access to justice. By challenging harmful social and gender norms, we can create a society where all individuals can live free from the threat of violence and discrimination.

Read more on the KELIN's work in Homa Bay county [here](#).