

Ward Development Committee Gender Champions

Orientation and Discussion Guide

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Acronyms

CHARP	Community Health Action Resource Plan
FGC/M	Female genital cutting/mutilation
G&EE	Gender and Economic Empowerment Sub-committee
MNCH+N	Maternal, newborn, and child health and nutrition
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WDC	Ward Development Committee

Introduction

Human behavior is not always a choice. Often it is automatic and unintentional and rooted in the belief that others expect us to behave in a certain way, particularly when upholding traditions and culture.

The Challenge

Our outer appearance and visible behaviors are the main things we notice about each other. Yet, behind what we do and say and how we look, there is so much more about us—much that is normally hidden from view (sometimes even from ourselves). When we talk about our feelings, beliefs, values, and experiences with others, we make it easier for people to know us as we truly are. This helps reduce unconscious biases, distorted perceptions, and misinformation. It also promotes understanding, empathy, and respect and allows us to value each other and ourselves more fully.

You are being challenged to:

- Pay attention to the assumptions, feelings, beliefs, values, and experiences that are driving your behavior.
- Make conscious choices about sharing these aspects of yourself with others.
- Encourage and invite others to share aspects of themselves with you.

Who are Gender Champions?

Gender champions are both women and men who are dedicated to breaking gender barriers, challenging gender stereotypes, and enabling gender equality through their work and communities. Communities see Ward Development Committees (WDCs) as a well-respected and well-connected group of persons who support the growth and development of their communities. Its members can serve as gender champions.

Gender champions play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and promoting inclusivity. Here are some reasons why:

- **Advocacy:** Gender champions advocate for policies, practices, and initiatives that promote gender equality. They use their influence and platform to raise awareness about issues such as gender discrimination, stereotypes, and disparities.
- **Role Modeling:** By publicly championing gender equality, they serve as role models, inspiring others to take action and support the cause. Their visibility helps normalize the idea of gender equality and encourages others to follow suit.
- **Influence:** Gender champions often hold influential positions in politics, business, academia, or the media. Their influence allows them to enact tangible changes, such as implementing gender-inclusive policies in organizations or advocating for gender-responsive legislation.

- **Networking and Collaboration:** They facilitate networking and collaboration among individuals and organizations working towards gender equality. By bringing diverse stakeholders together, they amplify the impact of collective efforts and foster collaboration across sectors.
- **Education and Awareness:** Gender champions engage in educational initiatives to raise awareness about gender issues and promote understanding of the importance of gender equality. They use their platforms to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.
- **Policy Influence:** Gender champions can influence policy decisions at various levels, from local to international. By advocating for gender-sensitive policies and legislation, they contribute to creating a legal framework that promotes gender equality and protects the rights of all individuals.
- **Creating Change:** Ultimately, gender champions are instrumental in driving meaningful change towards a more equitable society. Whether through individual actions or collective efforts, their advocacy and leadership contribute to dismantling barriers and creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender.

Agenda

Total time = Five hours of activities (add breaks as warranted)

GENDER CHAMPIONS AGENDA	
TIME	ACTIVITY
30 minutes	Registration
15 minutes	Opening prayers and self-introduction
15 minutes	Objectives of the meeting
30 minutes	Roles and responsibilities of the Gender and Economic Empowerment Sub-committee and gender champions
20 minutes	Overview of gender and social norms
55 minutes	Gender transformative discussion
15 minutes	Overview of Breakthrough ACTION's <i>adalci</i> concept and gender and social norms of focus
30 minutes	Line listing of pregnant women
90 minutes	Action planning
20 minutes	Q&A Closing

Objectives

- Orient the Gender and Economic Empowerment Sub-committee (G&EE) within the WDC to support community-facility linkages for women including empowerment activities and line listing for pregnant women.
- Orient the gender champions as advocates to develop and conduct activities targeted at addressing the dynamics of gender and social norms in relation to maternal, newborn, and child health and nutrition (MNCH+N) issues.

Roles of the Gender and Economic Empowerment Sub-committee

To assist the WDC in implementing its community action plan, it should set up appropriate sub-committees as the need arises to lead the implementation of specific activities and report progress to the WDC at its monthly meetings.

The G&EE Sub-committee has the following responsibilities:

- Identifying gender-related norms and issues as they impact the health of the community and making recommendations on how to address these gaps.
- Empowering communities to mobilize resources, enhance participation in health services, and addressing the underlying causes of health issues, including gender biases and norms.
- Advocating and mobilizing the community to embrace education of girls and primary education for all eligible children in general.
- Developing and implementing action plans targeting economic empowerment to address the identified problems.
- Facilitating awareness-raising, education, or promotional activities related to the health issue and adopting positive health care-seeking behaviors.
- Documenting and reporting on implemented activities and providing feedback at the WDC meetings to inform them about achievements, challenges, lessons learned, and next steps.

Roles of Gender Champions

Gender champions will support and serve as advocates to develop and conduct activities addressing gender and social norms dynamics in the management of the WDC and in relation to MNCH+N topics.

Overview of Social Norms and Gender Norms

- Social norms are the unwritten (or sometimes written) rules of society that differ from culture to culture and make up what others see as normal, acceptable, and respectful behavior.
- Gender norms are social principles and rules that govern the behavior of girls, boys, women, and men in society and restrict their gender identity to what is considered to be an appropriate

gender role at the time. As with gender roles, gender norms are neither static nor universal and change over time.¹

- WDCs and other community and program stakeholders will focus on positively impacting gender and other social norms, beliefs, and practices related to the project’s priority behaviors.

Check with the WDCs to ensure they are using the WDC gender mainstreaming checklist to encourage women’s participation and integration of gender activities in its Community Health Action Resource Plan (CHARP).

- **If the response is yes, reflect on the following:** How effective has the tool been and how has it helped the WDCs integrate gender activities into CHARP 2.
- **If the response is no, reflect on the following:** What are the challenges with using the tool?

WDC GENDER MAINSTREAMING CHECKLIST		
QUESTIONS	YES	NO
Does the WDC have a Gender and Empowerment Sub-committee?		
Is gender equality included as an agenda item in all meetings?		
Do women and men participate equitably in the WDC activities both in terms of physical presence and meaningful participation?		
If there are some imbalances in participation, have appropriate measures been taken to ensure the full participation of women and men equally?		
Does the community action plan contain any activities that address gender inequality?		

Gender Transformative Conversations

Gender transformative approaches seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles, and relations while working towards redistributing power, resources, and services more equally. When both women and men are engaged in the process, communities can bring about changes in discriminatory gender norms, attitudes, behaviors, and power imbalances and thus create positive changes related to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The gender transformative conversations are aimed at having WDC members:

- Identify their strengths, constraints, responsibilities, and contributions.
- Reflect on their personal biases.
- Analyze community values and practices.
- Explore strategies for addressing challenges that prevent women from fully participating in the WDC.
- Take ownership of the process of change and further disseminate the concepts and transformation of others in their communities.

¹ Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-64.

This discussion is more likely to be transformative if participants abide by the following rules.

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with an ear to understand others' views. Don't just think about what you are going to say while someone else is talking.
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating. Comment in order to share information, not to persuade.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- Avoid assumptions about any member of the WDC or generalizations about gender roles. Do not ask individuals to speak on behalf of their gender.

Nothing stops good communication faster than judgment. When we judge others as good or bad, right or wrong, or this or that, they naturally get defensive and pull or fight back. Even if we do not communicate our judgments, we still stop the flow of communication, because we stop listening fully and stop being present with the whole person.

To suspend our judgment is to clear the space for receiving. It is like coming to someone with a glass in your hand and wanting to receive some of the water in his or her glass. If your glass is already full, there is no room to receive anything from them. You need to empty your glass to make space for welcoming something new.

Discussion Guide: The Dynamics of Power

Explain that the redistribution of power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways. It is commonly defined within three domains which work together to enable empowerment.

POWER TO: This power relates to having agency, decision-making authority, or power to act to solve problems and can be creative and enabling.

POWER WITHIN: This power refers to self-confidence, self-awareness, dignity, and assertiveness. It relates to how individuals recognize how power operates in their lives and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this.

POWER WITH: This power involves solidarity, collective action, mutual respect, organizing with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals.

1. What is power?
2. What do you love about having power?
3. When was the last time you took over someone else's power?
4. In what situations do you not trust yourself with too much power?
5. Do you agree with this statement: "Everybody within the WDC has some power—just different amounts of it depending on the situation." Why or why not?

Try to get opinions from all participants, not just one person.

Discussion Guide: Participation by Everyone Within the WDC

1. What is holding women back from participating in WDC meetings and activities? What are the barriers to equal participation?
2. What would the WDC be like if everyone (men and women) felt they were able to participate equally?
3. What are we missing out on by not maximizing the knowledge and skills of both genders?
4. What do we see that tells us we have room to improve the way the WDC is run, so everyone feels comfortable participating?
5. What are examples of times we have made every member (female and male) feel welcome and able to participate?
6. What can you do to encourage equal contributions during meetings?

Discussion Guide: Decision Making Within the WDC

1. Do you believe it matters if men hold a majority of leadership positions on WDCs? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe it matters if women hold a majority of leadership positions on WDCs? Why or why not?
3. What barriers do you feel might impact women’s ability to reach the highest levels of leadership on WDCs?
4. How are decisions typically made by the WDC?
5. Who is involved in making decisions on the WDC and why?
6. Should every member of the WDC be equally heard, respected, and given the opportunity to voice their opinion? Why or why not?
7. Do you believe the equal participation of women and men in decision making on the WDC will lead to better decisions? Why or why not?

Self-reflection and Action Planning

Use the questions below to gain clarity on your behaviors and mindsets. Be honest with your responses. This is for your reference only.

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE			
HOW COMFORTABLE AM I WITH ...	1 = Always 2 = Sometimes 3 = Never		
Speaking up when I’m the only man/woman in the room?	1	2	3
Asking questions to understand other people’s experiences?	1	2	3
Encouraging everyone to share his/her perspective during a discussion?	1	2	3
Listening to someone’s perspective even if it doesn’t match my own?	1	2	3
Providing feedback to people who are a different gender from me?	1	2	3
Mentoring, or asking for mentoring, from people who are a different gender from me?	1	2	3

Overview of Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria's *Adalci* Concept

The goal of *adalci* is to provide a level playing field and is rooted in Islamic teachings that guide family and community life. Using the lens of *adalci*, Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria implements interventions to include women deliberately and disseminate information in the community to bring the needs of women to the forefront.

The WDC members and other community resource persons are well-positioned to engage influential individuals (women and men) and organizations, communities, families, and men as heads of households to promote *adalci* for the improved health status of families and communities.

Common Gender Inequalities in Nigeria

Gender inequalities commonly arise and impact the health of women and children. The following list represents some of the gender inequalities which we see emerging most frequently in Nigeria and which should therefore be a priority focus.

1. Limited mobility and social interactions for women.
2. Unequal health decision making.
3. Acceptance of early marriage/childbearing.
4. Tolerance for gender-based violence.
5. Traditional nutrition practices and food restrictions.
6. Belief in traditional practices for MNCH+N problems.

The following section features discussion guides for use to discuss the common gender inequalities.

Discussion Guides for Use with Community Members

1. Gender Inequality: Limited Mobility and Social Interactions for Women

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor knowledge seeking on MNCH+N. • Reduces access to services from male providers. • Limited learning and job opportunities for women. • Affects prompt care-seeking, especially in emergencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women have unrestrained access to available health facility information and services. • Women have access to resources for information on MNCH+N, childbirth spacing, and malaria. • Women can go to the health facility whenever the need arises. • Women can receive unrestricted health information.

2. Gender Inequality: Unequal Health Decision Making

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects “family planning.” • Use of contraception for childbirth spacing may be prevented. • Prevents uptake of health services like immunization and net use. • Affects the choice of food/nutrition for household. • Child education; girls in particular are not permitted to go to school. • Early marriage for girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared decision making on household and health matters in the family. • Women allowed to make independent decisions on their own health. • Shared decision making on utilization of specific health services. • Support for women’s decisions on their own health.

3. Gender Inequality: Acceptance of Early Marriage/Childbearing

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early pregnancy. • Maternal and newborn complications. • Adolescent pregnancy often leads to babies that are born underweight. • Girls drop out of school. • Limited employment prospects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childbearing is delayed till girls attain the age of 18. • Girls can complete their education. • Girls have access to information on MNCH+N and childbirth spacing before they start having children. • Girls’ bodies have more time to develop and get ready for motherhood.

4. Gender Inequality: Tolerance for Gender-Based Violence

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. • Depression and/or anxiety. • Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. • Female genital cutting/mutilation (FGC/M) is more likely to occur, which leads to additional potential health problems. • Hinders women’s and girls’ abilities to earn a living, access education, and participate in social and political life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and women demonstrate care and empathy for family members. • Men demonstrate empathy and care for women and children. • Physical and emotional abuse not tolerated by families and communities discontinue FGC/M. • Children of both sexes are given equal opportunities.

5. Gender Inequality: Traditional Nutritional Practices and Food Restrictions

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate nutrition and food insecurity among women and children. • Women do not have the power to decide how food and other resources should be distributed among household members. • Women and girls are more likely to experience undernutrition or malnutrition than men and boys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce beneficial traditional nutritional practices. • Increase decision making ability for women in the household. • Provide care and nutritious foods to pregnant women and new mothers. • Promote production and consumption of locally available nutritious foods.

6. Gender Inequality: Belief in Traditional Practices for MNCH+N Problems

EFFECTS	DESIRED CHANGE (ADALCI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents use of modern health services. • Affects prompt care-seeking. • Interrupts the course of modern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern health practices and trained providers used for MNCH+N. • Seek prompt care for MNCH+N problems. • Follow through on modern treatment regimens.

Action Planning

Based on your reflections and discussions on social and gender norms earlier, identify key action items you can commit to working on as gender champions. Activities in the action plan should cover:

- Activities addressing gender inequality within the WDC.
- Activities from the self-reflection.
- Activities addressing social and gender norms within the community.

- Each WDC should identify two gender inequalities that are a priority within their communities to address and focus on those in their action plan.
- Activities developed should be integrated into the CHARP 2.

Conclusion

Gender champions play a crucial role in driving progress towards gender equality and creating a more inclusive and equitable society for everyone. You have the opportunity to serve as a role model within your community, inspiring others to become advocates for gender equality and empowering individuals to challenge gender stereotypes and norms. You represent the voices and interests of women, girls, and key groups most impacted by inequality and discrimination within the community. As a gender champion, your inclusion on the WDC helps ensure these groups are adequately represented in decision-making processes and their concerns are accounted for. Moreover, your presence can encourage greater participation and engagement from individuals who may have previously felt marginalized or excluded. Thank you for taking on this valuable role!