



**My mentoring experience with
Kenya National Association of Parents**
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Using the case of Kenya National Association of Parents, the following were the steps we have followed so far in mentoring them to mainstream gender in their work

Brief about KNAP

This is a national coordinating body which brings together all the Parents & Teachers Associations in the country. KNAP's main mandate is to monitor how government funds are used in schools. When I joined CEF as a mentor, gender was not an issue that KNAP had taken on board. The first meeting with the secretary general reflected a general ignorance about gender issues. He was however willing to learn how this can be part and parcel of KNAP's work. We agreed that my role would be that of a mentor rather than the usual consultant that people are used to where I would do the work and come and give reports to them or carry out as series of workshops and trainings. But rather, I would walk with them in a period of one year where will take them through step by step issues of what they need to consider in their work. At the time we started, KNAP was in the process of recruiting monitors to work at the community level the following has been the process followed to mentor:

- The first step was to get the monitors from around the country into one venue where we could spend at least three days going through the key gender issues that they would need to take on board in their mentoring work. Through this meeting, I had a chance to identify the areas that I would need to mentor them on in the 1 year that we would be together.
- I facilitated the meeting in a workshop form and went through some of the basic gender concepts. We focused on the key gender issues need to be monitored in Kenyan schools. Although each region had different issues – the common ones were lack of sanitary facilities especially for girls, lack of enough female teachers in schools, poor school attendance – girls missing out more in some areas although in others like the Coastal region it was indicated that tourism kept some boys out of schools. In the same region however, girl child marriages were a major challenge affecting completion. Culture, poverty, lack of leadership were seen to be the major causes of gender inequalities.
- The monitors took the issues well and the decided to carry out gender audits in their schools to identify the real situations on the ground.
- We agreed to meet after three months to discuss their findings and decide the way forward.
- I continued to support them through the telephone because they had many issues they needed clarified.
- The reporting and review meeting was held three months later. From the experiences they had gathered and the data collected, together we worked out a monitoring form which each of the monitors would be taking to each of the schools they visit. The form included all the gender issues that need to be checked in schools. Reports compiled from these forms will now be fed back to the Ministry of Education who will then focus on the issues raised.
- KNAP also works through media – radios and TV where they sensitize the public on education matters. We have now agreed that these media briefs will also mainstream gender using the reports from the monitors.
- From the review meeting it was clear that the attitudes and practices of the monitors had changed dramatically as all of them saw with gender lenses. They no longer looked at issues in gender but were able to appreciate that girls and boys face different challenges and even when the challenges are the same, they are affected differently. Hence programs should also factor in these differences. The monitors were especially taken by the issue of sanitary towels which many of them said they were sensitizing communities about.

- For me, the key issues that one needs to consider when mentoring people who have not considered gender in their work is to first of all give them some background information which will assist them to appreciate the importance of considering gender in education. The mentor has to be someone who is very sensitive to people's ways of thinking, one who starts by recognizing that their cultural beliefs and practices are not inferior – but then manages to move the forward to a point where people can begin to appreciate the need to change.
- Support needs to continue through telephone so that partners can feel that the mentor is still with them.

Challenges

- Even though Kenya has a gender and education policy, the actual implementation of the policy has not yet trickled down to the grassroots. According to one of the monitors we trained, some funds were allocated to some schools to specifically build toilets especially for girls. A spot check later indicated that more boys' toilets had been constructed. This may indicate that although there are gender specific policies and even allocations towards girl friendly interventions, this has not been translated to communities themselves seeing the need for the same. The physical monitoring is therefore very crucial.
- Mainstreaming gender through mentoring can be challenging if the mentor join partners who have been working without considering gender and have their programs already set. At the beginning I realised that fitting into the programs of the partners was not easy; they all had work plans going and including my work was going to take a lot of commitment and a belief in the need to mainstream gender in their work.
- I suggest that to deal with such challenges would require that that such an important project is not added on in the middle when partners have already filled up their diaries.
- To bring all on board, as a mentor I have learnt the need to be patient and to keep urging the partners on the need to include me in their work. This is lacking at the moment.

Main Successes of my work

- The three days mentoring workshop was a great success and offered a rare opportunity for coaching and mentoring so many people in a very short time. It would have taken all year to reach these people in their work places.
- Having a mentor who mentors me has been of much help. The CEF GEEP manager has been mentoring and supporting me, helping me when I am stuck.
- KNAP is an organisation that did not have the word gender in their vocabulary – today their field monitors have mainstreamed gender in all their work. Their attitudes and practices have truly changed.
- The reports of these monitors will soon be getting back to the Ministry of Education gender unit which can use those issues to advocate for more government funding on these issues.