



A STUDY FOR DEFUSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE WITHIN ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT PROGRAMMES SUMMARY REPORT

Co-financed by the F3E and carried out by a team of independent consultants: Mathilde Bullo, Angèle Grövel and Delphine Ahoussi

CONTEXT

For over 10 years now, Empow'Her has been dedicated to the socio-economic empowerment of women, with - at its core and starting point - feminist entrepreneurship.

The women supported by Empow'Her face many structural obstacles linked to the patriarchal system. Gender-based violence (GBV), whether economic, psychological or physical, can occur ahead of the entrepreneurial process, during business creation or later, in the form of a backlash to women's social and economic empowerment.

In light of this, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- to offer a common, cross-cutting strategy to better integrate the prevention of gender-based violence into the activities of Empow'Her
- to define an action plan for the community field in Côte d'Ivoire and to offer a reflection on its possible replication in other fields of intervention.

METHODOLOGY

Co-financed by the F3E network, the study was carried out from January to July 2024 by a team of independent expert consultants composed of Mathilde Bullot, Angèle Grövel and Delphine Ahoussi. Co-selected with the F3E, they ensured a participative and inclusive approach by co-constructing the recommendations with the Empow'Her teams.

The survey was carried out on 2 projects run by Empow'Her:

- Egalité 2.0, which supports cocoa cooperatives in implementing gender policies and the women of these communities to set up income-generating activities (IGAs)
- Communities, financed by the French development agency, which offers training to women entrepreneurs in urban and peri-urban areas to launch their entrepreneurial projects.

A field mission in March 2024 allowed data to be collected through the following process:

- 1 focus groups with women supported by the programmes
- 2 visits to women's IGAs
- 3 interview with community leaders
- 4 focus groups with men
- 5 interviews with Empow'Her trainers and focal points
- 6 several discussions with members of cocoa cooperatives.



FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



The main findings of the survey show that women are in competition, which hinders the development of a sisterhood or sorority that would be beneficial for women's empowerment and to prevent GBV.

Competition between women:

- reinforces the patriarchal system which fosters rivalry between women
- generates violence
- stimulates the emancipation of some, but hinders the emancipation of others.

The recommendations offered invite us to rethink our approaches and methods of intervention, using the promotion of sisterhood as a common thread.

1. FOSTERING PROGRESS TOWARDS ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION BY PROVIDING WOMEN WITH NEW RESOURCES

Findings

The programmes contribute to generous gains in self-confidence for learners and improve their economic security thanks to their IGAs. In the Égalité 2.0 project, the literacy programme has led to an increase in skills with multiple benefits. Supporting cooperatives in integrating a gender approach has also given women members a greater say.

Recommendations

Programmes can better equip women to reduce their vulnerability to economic, physical and verbal violence.

For example,

- by adding training on price fixing, self-defence against scams, or negotiation posture
- by stepping up training in assertiveness, self-confidence and assertiveness to arm women against GBV
- systematising literacy courses and increasing their frequency so that learners can take national examinations

Alliances with other players in the ecosystem could be useful to:

- encourage women to diversify their activities (produce several different products)
- work collectively in the different links of a value chain to mutually reinforce each other as well as the value chain itself

2. A COMPETITIVE LOGIC BETWEEN WOMEN THAT CAN GENERATE VIOLENCE, BUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SORORITY WHICH CAN BE A BUFFER AGAINST VIOLENCE AND LEVER FOR EMANCIPATION

Findings

Some activities, such as the “mobile nurseries” - women volunteers providing care for young children on a rotating shift basis - do stimulate mutual aid and solidarity. However, competition between groups and between individual entrepreneurs is observed when only one grant is available, this generates tension.

Recommendations

The first suggestion is to prevent the existing competition between women by:

- increasing funding opportunities
- amending selection methods by co-constructing them with women locally, in order to have a process adapted to each community
- starting with existing economic groups such as “tontines” (women’s community savings) or Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)
- developing a variety of selection processes to highlight women with different profiles and thus offer more role models.

This cannot be done without raising learners’ awareness about the benefits of sororal gatherings and the risks of rivalry. Sorority can also be stimulated by:

- sharing experiences collectively
- enabling favourable training conditions for all - especially those most in need - and fair treatment of learners
- creating alumni networks wherever possible
- promoting methods of operation that encourage cooperation
- offering collective grants
- promoting horizontal governance bodies such as VSLAs and women’s associations.

If sorority becomes a targeted impact of the project, then it drives the methods of action. So why not include sororal support within the impact indicators?



3. NO SAFE SPACE OR FORMAL MECHANISMS FOR RESPONDING TO GBV, BUT BONDS OF TRUST THAT ENABLE THE CREATION SPACES FOR DISCUSSION

Findings

The trainers are able to gain learners' trust, so much so that some of them confide to trainers when they suffer from GBV. Some spaces, such as co-development sessions and referral desks, do give women the opportunity to express their hardships. However, the physical environment (in the centre of villages), the presence of men at some training sessions and the sometimes large number of participants means that women cannot always speak out.

Uneven knowledge of GBV within the Empow'Her teams often makes it difficult for the trainers to receive reports of violence. This lack of tools also leads to a poor reporting of GBV cases.

Recommendations

Creating the right conditions for women to speak out is key to ensuring that they feel part of a togetherness, capable of transforming relations of power and subjugation.

First and foremost, training the teams to be able to detect, listen to and, above all, to guide survivors of violence is essential for them to adopt the appropriate stance when confronted with testimonies, while protecting themselves.

Several spaces/methods can help to break down certain barriers and promote mutual support between women:

- running sessions dedicated to the expression of injuries or traumas linked to GBV, within a psychological safety framework and/or by a professional
- organising events involving GBV survivors who have successfully set up their own IGA can inspire learners and encourage them to seek help from support structures
- identifying and training someone from the intervention communities in active, caring listening to co-animate discussion groups for women and act as reference for Empow'Her.



4. STUBBORN PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES THAT CAN BE COLLECTIVELY DECONSTRUCTED TO EASE RELATIONS BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Findings

Women's economic emancipation alarms husbands, who are suspicious of the programmes. Women's participation in training courses is conditioned and sometimes denied, which causes dropouts.

Economic violence is widespread and commonplace:

- men's monopolisation of resources generated by learners' IGAs is systemic
- husbands very often have a stranglehold on their wives' economic resources and control how these are used.

There have also been cases of physical violence perpetrated by husbands in response to women's participation in support programmes. Actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem also perpetuate physical and sexual violence against women when they go to the market, for example. Out-of-court settlements, organised by community authorities, and the weight of tradition, too often fail women in their bid for protection and justice.

The "husbands' school" created by the Egalité 2.0 project includes specific training courses for men that helps them to grasp the value of their wives'

economic emancipation and therefore to be more supportive of it. «They understood that, in the end, it's Mr and Mrs who win¹ ». Nevertheless, the trainers remind how essential it is to raise awareness with care so as not to cause a backlash: risk management is not always easy.

Recommendations

To make men allies, it is key to raise awareness of community authorities - role models in their communities - at an early stage. Several types of workshops are suggested to this end:

- expression and easing of men's fears and apprehensions seems to be a priority
- events on issues surrounding masculinity and the role of husbands as allies
- mixed workshops with role-playing to help manage household expenses more effectively and improve communication within the relationship.



¹As said by a trainer working on the Communities project

5. OPERATIONAL BUT NOT-YET-FORMALISED PARTNERSHIPS AND EXTERNAL COLLABORATIONS, WHICH COULD BE STRENGTHENED TO BUILD A MORE EFFECTIVE ECOSYSTEM AGAINST GBV

Findings

The teams' collaboration with institutions responsible for addressing GBV varies from one locality to another. The teams' involvement depends on the existence and functionality of GBV platforms - which build bridges between care institutions such as social centres, the Ministry for Women, the Family and Children, local associations, etc. - which in turn depends on external funding, the willingness of the stakeholders involved and, often, the support of a non-governmental organisation.

Recommendations

Empow'Her should forge partnerships with complementary stakeholders. Involvement in GBV platforms should be systematic. This would also allow the improvement of the existing mapping of GBV stakeholders and to create a shared database - potentially carried by the focal points if they receive training to investigate the ecosystem. Finally, it would be a good idea to set up a 'scientific council' with local feminist experts to advise on local interventions.

CONCLUSION

For Empow'Her, these findings and recommendations are essential to ensure the continuous improvement of its programmes. They are a summary of the study carried out in 2024. We wanted to share them to promote and encourage better consideration of GBV within projects run by other organisations, associations or institutions working for the economic emancipation of women.



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KEY POINTS

- 1 Empowering women through training in self-confidence, negotiation skills and literacy to fight their vulnerability.
- 2 Promoting sorority to reduce rivalry between women, by facilitating groupings and collective endowments.
- 3 Creating a safe environment to allow women to speak out and offering safe spaces for them to express their experiences of GBV, with the support of local people and/or experts.
- 4 Raising awareness among men, husbands and community authorities to deconstruct gender stereotypes and facilitate women's economic emancipation.
- 5 Creating strong partnerships with local organisations and institutions working on GBV.

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