



CASE STUDY 7

VOICES FOR CHANGE: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

Country: Nigeria

Focus: Women's empowerment

Donor(s): Consortium led by Palladium, including Social Development Direct, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives and ITAD.¹

Organisation(s): UN Women country and multi-country, and regional offices

Budget: GBP 29.6m²

Timeframe: 2012-2017

FEBRUARY 2018

KEY POINTS

- Changing discriminatory norms and behaviours that impact the lives of young women may require focusing primarily on those who have most opportunity to influence change, rather than directly on the most marginalised or excluded
- Bringing men on board is crucial to challenging gender roles and bringing about behaviour change
- Working politically by engaging religious and traditional leaders can help women access positions of power

- A shared vision and long-term commitment to addressing transformative gender programming between donor, program and partners can be critical for success
- Research into the lives of young women and men and application of social network theory builds understanding of where to focus program interventions, and what messages will resonate with young people and their influencers

OVERVIEW

Voices for Change (V4C) has operated across Nigeria since 2012, including an initial year of program design and inception. The program's stated mission is to "inspire a generation of new voices to 'speak up and speak out', empowering adolescent girls and young women to achieve their real and full potential".³ Its key activities include providing communications and messaging at scale allied with targeted transformational gender leadership and gender awareness at post-secondary institutions across Enugu, Kaduna, Kano and Lagos State, through virtual and physical safe spaces and events as well as engaging young people and adolescents through its own Purple social media platform and brand. The program has been working with influential religious and traditional leaders and the media to increase their awareness of gender inequality and to challenge harmful gender norms in relation to issues such as violence

POLITICALLY INFORMED

Being politically informed is a way of working that recognises that development outcomes are determined by the dynamics of power and politics. It is not about formal governance reforms, such as elections or civil service reforms. It involves analysing stakeholder interests and incentives to understand what is politically feasible.

against women and girls' and women's leadership. At the federal level, the program has revived the Gender Technical Unit⁴ within the National Assembly, and has worked with several ministries to secure gender aware budgeting and legislation.⁵

GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

V4C distinguishes itself as a program which addresses gender roles and norms as well as ensuring that women are represented among beneficiaries. Furthermore, V4C places strong emphasis on working with boys and men. This is not only to gain support for the empowerment of women, but also to engage with and promote positive masculinities.

The issues targeted by the program include social norms related to violence against women; women in leadership; and women's role in decision-making. V4C is operating at several levels to shift attitudes and encourage behaviour change. For example, a keystone of V4C is the Safe Spaces program which works face-to-face with students aged 16 to 25 in post-secondary institutions. Working in both gender-segregated and mixed groups, students receive training in areas such as assertiveness,

"We recognised that gender norms hinder men as well as women."

GENDER AWARE

Being gender aware is a way of working that analyses how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally, and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. A robust analysis also looks at how gender intersects with other forms of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability, and non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

leadership, negotiating and influence, as well as understanding social norms and change processes.⁶ These approaches have evolved into a 'virtual' safe space model adapting the curriculum of the physical safe space through the online Purple Academy which can reach young men and women at scale. Evaluations indicate that the effects have been significant. Young men who participated showed "an amazing change in attitude, they now value women more and have told stories of supporting the young women to enter elections in institutions where this had not previously happened, to take part in decision making and to be assertive".⁷

As well as working face-to-face, the program has extended its reach by partnering with 11 radio stations in four states. Radio presenters and producers have been identified as key influencers and have been given gender awareness training that "provided clarity that gender equality is not just about women, that gender roles are assigned by society and that they are not static".⁸ As a result, "radio station staff and management are more aware of gender issues, believe in the value of gender equality, and take action to support gender justice within their organisations and in other parts of their lives [and] encourage dialogue on gender equality and broadcast more gender sensitive programs".⁹

To engage men further, V4C has partnered with gender equity organisations focused on men and masculinity such as Promundo¹⁰ and Sonke Gender Justice¹¹ and consulted with the 'Engendering men: Evidence on routes to gender equality' (EMERGE) project.¹² In 2015, the program published its landmark report, *Being a man in Nigeria: Perceptions and realities*, which found that "rigid, gender stereotypical and inequitable ideas about men and women still hold sway in Nigeria. However social expectation and realities may be changing and there is evidence that many men support and practice equitable relationships".¹³ The report recommends the development and promotion of alternative images of Nigerian manhood as well as the benefits to men and women of more gender equal roles, the use of positive role models and compelling messages to communicate this, and the full involvement of men and boys in gender quality programs. The report has been disseminated widely and there is evidence of its take-up and commitment to its use in many spheres of Nigerian society, including in development programs, academia, government and civil society. The program is currently undertaking further ground-breaking research into young women and men's agency and channels for influencing change.

Finally, the program is also working with formal institutions to improve the representation of women's interests through political and governance processes. For example, V4C has revived the country's Gender Technical Unit within the National Assembly which supports civil society efforts to advocate for gender equality legislation. As a result, the GTU has "played a pivotal role in the passing of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in 2015 – seen as a watershed moment in Nigeria and commonly regarded as the most significant change affecting the legal framework for girls and women in the country".¹⁴

POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

In addition to engaging boys and men, the key facets of V4C's approach include its attention to networks of influence, a highly developed media strategy and collaboration with religious and traditional leaders. The program began with an extremely research intensive inception phase, mapping young people's aspirations and communication networks¹⁵ as well as opinion leaders and gender champions.¹⁶ The underlying theory of change was developed collaboratively with stakeholders and partners. This focus on understanding the local context informed several critical decisions regarding the program's activities. For example, radio was identified as a dominant media and communication platform, and religious leaders were identified as key informants of public opinion.

The resultant communications strategy has multiple components which combine a mass media / broadcasting approach, with a networking approach. A consistent brand, 'Purple',¹⁷ has been developed for all media outputs. Since its rollout, the Purple Academy (virtual safe space) has resulted in a dramatic increase in numbers of female and male users engaging on new learning; especially on nurturing healthy relation, communication skills and speaking up and speaking out against gender based violence. Nearly 60,000 young people across Nigeria have accessed the Purple Academy. Over 45,000 feedback comments from users are overwhelmingly positive and suggest that personal transformation is taking place, alongside a willingness to take action based on learning. Purple branded educational programming, such as the popular radio drama, 'Purple Tinz', promotes positive gender roles in an entertainment format, and V4C's social Media platform, 'iampurple.ng', provides advice, support and networking opportunities.

Evaluation of the brand impact shows growing coverage and deepening engagement across all media platforms. The Purple brand has garnered impressive level of awareness

and interest from the target groups. V4C's radio programming has had considerable effect – reaching at least 15 million listeners per quarter. Radio stations have reported that the combined benefits of Purple Tinz and V4C awareness training included “gender messages and actors included into programming, more program time for women's issues, more women in leadership, better communications and more peaceful workplaces in the stations”.¹⁸

Collaboration with religious leaders has also had demonstrable effects. For example, Christian and Muslim religious leaders who have participated in V4C gender and masculinity training report “changes, to their own awareness and behaviour, and in their ability to influence others on the issue [...] of being profoundly moved, of understanding gender concepts for the first time, seeing gender relations in a new way, and seeing the relationship between culture and religion in a different light”.¹⁹ Furthermore, since attending training, religious leaders “have begun to promote women's leadership and this has led to a rise in the number of women taking on senior roles in religious, student and community level government institutions”.²⁰ Similarly, following provision of gender and masculinity training for male traditional leaders in Enugu, women have been installed as fully titled chiefs and members of cabinet for the first time.²¹

CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

Broadly speaking, the politically informed and gender transformative aspects of V4C's approach have been complementary, as is evidenced by the program's work with religious and traditional leaders. However, this comes with two brief caveats.

Firstly, “there is always the risk of backlash if people don't like the message”.²² Thus, there is a careful balance to be struck between having control of the content of messaging, and securing support from powerful influencers.

Secondly, there have been tensions between adopting a politically informed approach predicated on the view that “society-wide change does not take place targeting the most vulnerable,”²³ and the ability to support and empower the poorest, most disadvantaged or vulnerable women. This has been “one of the most contentious aspects of the program”.²⁴ V4C instead targets young women and men as “most likely to generate [...] wider change, i.e. current influencers and the potential leaders of tomorrow”.²⁵

EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The most critical factor for V4C's success has been the ability to apply social networking theory to identify key influencers and work at the level of the individual, institutions and society at large, to understand and influence gender norms at scale using a range of innovative communications channels to reach young people in new ways. However a challenge of such a program is the need to ensure long-term commitments from donors to approaches which are “less easily understood than supply-side health and education interventions”²⁶ and ensure longer term funding “beyond the normal four to five-year funding cycles to bring about sustainable and transformative change”.²⁷

METHODS

A rapid review of select program documentation, combined with confidential interviews with at least two key informants per case. Informants include project staff, independent reviewers, donors and other stakeholders. Identifying and listening to local and/or female informants has been prioritised. Interviews for this case took place on 30.01.2017 and 06.02.2017.

SELECTED RESOURCES

www.v4c-nigeria.com

1. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/about/working-with-and-through-partners/>
2. <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-202370>
3. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/about/v4c-vision-and-mission/>
4. GTU is a resource centre set up by government and civil society and located in the National Assembly to build the capacity of female legislators, male gender champions and legislative support staff to pass gender responsive laws and put gender at the core of legislative processes.
5. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/where-we-work/>
6. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Safe-space-Manual-for-girls.pdf>
7. Annual review, 2016, p.8
8. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Case-Study-Radio-O1-FINAL.pdf>
9. Ibid
10. <http://promundoglobal.org/about/>
11. <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/>
12. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/about/working-with-and-through-partners/>
13. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/being-a-man-in-nigeria-perceptions-and-realities/>
14. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/strengthening-mechanisms-that-support-gender-responsive-legislation/>
15. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Study-1-Mapping-with-Young-People.pdf>
16. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Study-2-Opinion-Leaders-and-Gender-Champions-June-2013.pdf>
17. <http://iampurple.ng/home/purple/>
18. Annual report 2016 p.11
19. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/religious-leaders-speak-up-for-gender-equality/>
20. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/religious-leaders-open-up-spaces-for-womens-leadership/>
21. <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/traditional-leaders-advocate-for-female-decision-makers/>
22. Key informant, 30.01.2017
23. V4C Implementation plan august 2013 p.16
24. Key informant, 06.02.2017
25. V4C Implementation plan august 2013 p.16
26. Key informant, 06.02.2017
27. Key informant, 30.01.2017

This case study was written by **Orlanda Siow** of UCL as part of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project. It is one of 14 short case studies focusing on development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware. See *From Silos to Synergy* for a synthesis of the lessons that emerge. Explore all GAPP publications at dlprog.org/gapp.

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World Bank, The people of the fishing village of Orimedu: Arne Hoel



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