



EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

ACORD (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development) is a Pan-African non-governmental organisation that has been working for social justice and development in Africa since 1976. ACORD's work is guided by a number of fundamental values and working principles, chief amongst these is the belief that individuals are the primary actors in their own development.

ACTION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

African women are strong and brilliant. They have won Nobel prizes and they grow 70% of Africa's food. Women's movements played a critical role in independence and anti-apartheid struggles and have been increasingly visible since the 1990s—speaking out, claiming rights and changing their lives for the better. More and more women are holding public office in Africa, several African countries are reaching parity in girls and boys enrolment in primary school, and women's earnings are increasing.

Yet African women are still second-class citizens in their societies, as women are all over the world. Africa has some of the most progressive gender legislation in the world, but the reality does not reflect what is on paper.

Gender discrimination is embedded in all the structures of our societies. In every area of life in Africa the statistics tell the same story:

- More than 50% of women say they do not control decisions on their own healthcare decisions.
- Women are paid 30% less than men.
- Women account for almost 60% of HIV infections in Africa.
- Women hold only 19% of ministerial positions in government.
- Maternal mortality in Africa is 100 times higher than in developed countries.

ACORD is working to strengthen the capacity of women and girls to claim their rights and meet their own needs. Our work focuses on addressing the root causes of the marginalization of women by confronting cultural practices, promoting the rights of girls, building livelihood opportunities, providing information and access to sexual and reproductive health services, and advocacy.

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

ACORD is supporting communities to realize social change using the SASA! Methodology: an interactive community mobilisation approach for preventing violence against women and HIV. This methodology focuses on addressing the root causes of both GBV and HIV in communities.

What does it take to prevent violence against women? For ACORD, SASA! is part of the answer. It is uniquely designed to address a core driver of violence against women and HIV: the imbalance of power between women and men, girls and boys. SASA! inspires and enables communities to rethink and reshape social norms. This approach is about power and unpacking power dynamics, both its positive and negative uses, shifting away from the traditional focus on “gender” towards the heart of the problem. The methodology walks communities through a process of change and evolves step-by-step, avoiding the chronic cycle of “awareness-raising” without achieving concrete milestones. Through the SASA! approach, ACORD engages a critical mass of people across all levels of society in order to create social norm change.

ACORD is currently applying the SASA! model in Uganda through our response to the refugee crisis. Women refugees carry the greatest burden, having to protect their families in times of hardship in addition to being the primary caregivers. Women and girls are also at a high risk of gender-based violence. Unfortunately this happens not only as women and girls are fleeing the conflict and trying to arrive at the Ugandan border, but also on arrival in the various refugee settlements.



CONFRONTING HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES

In Chad, ACORD is combatting violence against 78,000 women and girls and contributing to the strengthening of their role and participation in economic and sociopolitical life. ACORD's intervention focuses on the issue of female genital mutilation and child marriage as a barrier to early childhood development. Thus, the action aims at two outcomes: denouncing and rejecting the practices of early marriage and excision in the project area and strengthening mechanisms and services for women's access to economic opportunities with the purpose of empowering women.

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF GIRLS

In Kenya, and in many sub-Saharan countries, dominant social norms support the idea and practice of male dominance, condone Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and support impunity for the perpetrators. ACORD believes that interventions designed to empower women and girls by promoting their leadership, informing and educating them about their rights, and supporting them to organize can help to breakdown these harmful social attitudes. Supporting such programs by running campaigns, working with men and boys, engaging local leaders, and teaching gender equality can amplify these positive effects. When women & girls know their rights and are empowered, supported, and resourced to claim them, then values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices will shift to recognise VAWG as unacceptable and a crime.

ACORD is working in partnership with the British Council and the English Premier League in Kenya, through the support of DFID, to use football as a tool to challenge harmful social norms, drawing on the brand strength of the English Premier League. The programme combines football and short education sessions to engage children and young people (from 10 to 20 years old) from different social and ethnic backgrounds in activities that build positive relationships among them and challenge attitudes and behaviours that foster VAWG. Coaches are recruited from the communities and trained to deliver a curriculum that will enable participants to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours around teamwork, fair play, self-confidence, and respect for self and others.

BUILDING LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

In Rwanda, ACORD has implemented a wide range of projects geared towards poverty reduction, and challenging exclusion and discrimination. Empowerment of civil society has been at the core of the programming. The current strategy focuses on strengthening the livelihoods of rural populations and their capacity to advocate for their rights and achieve food sovereignty. Specifically, ACORD is focusing on the promotion of women's land rights by improving knowledge and awareness of land rights and policies, supporting women in securing land ownership and increasing production through improved farming techniques, inputs and sustainable land preservation.

ACORD is also working to address the particular vulnerabilities of child-headed households by building solidarity, care and protection for child-headed households within their communities and improving their access to housing, education, health care, space for expression and debate, and safe opportunities to earn money.

ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

In view of contributing to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 3 and 5, ACORD's target population in Tanzania is "the hardest-to-reach women and girls," including persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV, and young unmarried girls. ACORD supports these individuals through community engagement, mobilisation, mobile clinics and outreach, while simultaneously working with the national and local authorities to strengthen fledgling information systems and distribution networks to integrate family planning at the district level.

The long-term goal of this effort is to reduce maternal and newborn mortality, by generating demand for and access to quality voluntary family planning in hard to reach communities, such as pastoralists. ACORD seeks to promote access to and use of sexual and reproductive health information and services.

ADVOCACY

ACORD's grassroots level approach ensures that solutions are community owned and led, driving program efficacy and sustainability. For example, in 2013, ACORD held 45 citizen-driven workshops in 13 different countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, in six of these countries ACORD held workshops specifically targeting women's issues and concerns. The idea was to harness the power of the African citizen—to privilege their position as agents in their own development. The workshops triggered debate and discussion in some of the most remote and marginalised communities in Africa today, with citizens reflecting on the challenges they face, and their ideas for how they want to see change take place. The findings of the consultations were used to influence the Common African Position, the Open Working Group and, ultimately, the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, in analysing the voices of women, ACORD identified key thematic issues, which included violence against women and girls and access to basic services with an emphasis on reproductive and sexual health services.



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