

INTERNATIONAL LEARNING EVENT

The role of social inclusion and social norms in promoting inclusive governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings

Every Voice Counts Programme

4 November 2019

Den Haag, The Netherlands



Participants in the International Learning Event

Women and youth have been playing an increasingly large role in governance processes worldwide, but yet, their political inclusion and influence still faces seemingly insurmountable barriers. How can we think outside of the box about how and why these barriers persist? An event, organized by the *Every Voice Counts* (EVC) programme of CARE Netherlands, brought together development practitioners from around the world alongside academics and policymakers from the Netherlands to consider questions such as:

- What are the **pathways or factors** that enable women and youth to participate in formal (government) and informal planning and budget processes?
- How can **social norms** shaping the role and functioning of local public authorities be transformed towards making them more inclusive, responsive, accountable, and transparent toward women and youth?
- What approaches/models/interventions are effective in strengthening the **effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of local authorities**?



Remarks from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Jan van Renselaar from the Stability and Humanitarian Aid Division of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) provided a warm welcoming to the guests and a detailed overview of the MFA's approach to governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). The MFA's aim is to promote legitimate stability; stability is not a goal in itself, rather giving people a sense of their own stability is necessary for sustainable development.

Following the EVC mid-term review, the MFA was recommended to take up a facilitating role in strategic exchange, in particular on strategic lobby and advocacy strategies. In response, the MFA has said it "will continue to share learnings with embassies as an entry point in particular on how to improve civic space to open a dialogue."

Jan van Renselaar also provided recommendations to future strategic partnerships by the MFA based on the most recent evaluation conducted by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the MFA. These recommendations included:

1. **Choose strategic partnerships** above other contractual relations;
2. **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** for learning purposes;
3. **Invest in open relationships** with implementing partners and come up with alternatives for tender procedures.

Further, the MFA is investing in a shift in their relationship with partners to have more transparency, both between the MFA and partners, as well as between NGOs and their implementing partners. In this effort, embassies can play a key role and their active involvement will become institutionalized in programming. Finally, the MFA plans to reserve more capacity for project management, M&E, and relationship management.



Jan van Renselaar, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Social Inclusion in Fragile Settings



Presenter: Berlinda Nolles, CARE Netherlands

The event highlighted two studies recently published by CARE Netherlands. The first study, *Social Inclusion in Fragile Settings: Pathways towards inclusion of women and girls in local governance processes* investigated the extent to which women and girls are able to access, participate and influence decision-making processes. CARE Netherlands, through the *Every Voice Counts* (EVC) programme, supports knowledge building on the inter-relationships of **gender equality, social inclusion and addressing fragility, and promoting stability in FCAS**. Thus, investigating the pathways toward social inclusion of women and girls may shed light on improving inclusive governance (IG) processes.

Key message: The biggest challenge for women is moving from participation in governance processes to real influencing.

Women and girls may be able to participate (e.g., attend meetings) – due to existing laws or legal frameworks – but their ability to influence remains low (e.g., their ideas being adopted into formal plans and budgets). Those women who are able to influence tend to already be in elevated positions and social statuses.



This challenge is reinforced by donors and development actors' tendency to (a) treat women as passive beneficiaries of governance rather than being actively included, (b) focus on formal and national processes by governments rather than the informal and more utilized community spaces and mechanisms, and (c) overlook the important role of social norms and informal power in affecting inclusion.



Participants posing a question to the speaker

The study recommends that donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and civil society organisations (CSOs) support **women as active agents**, including providing small grants for running costs of social movements and locally-led funding mechanisms. In addition, gaining a better understanding of **normative roots and work to change norms** by organizing community dialogues and providing trainings, engaging with men, taking a more intersectional approach to gender equality, and **improving feedback mechanisms** between local authorities and governments to citizens are important approaches.

Social Norms and Related Practices of Public Authorities in Fragile & Conflict-affected Contexts

The second study, *Social Norms and Related Practices of Public Authorities in Fragile & Conflict-affected Contexts: How do social norms practices of public authorities impact public accountability and responsiveness?*, utilizes a systems framework, placing public authorities (PAs) as a locus of analysis, to answer the main research question: what are the perceived social norms and related practices at the local, regional and/or national level that hinder and/or enable the ability of PAs to be inclusive?

Key message: There are many social norms and related practices that affect engagement and inclusive governance (IG) delivery from the perspective of PAs at all levels in the system – from individual, to workplace, to government and context levels.

At the national government level, governments in FCAS impose IG to comply with international pressures in order to secure donor funding or investment. For example, PAs elect to avoid responsibilities because they know they can rely on INGO partners to implement. Also, the priority for IG development disintegrates as it moves to the local level, if it reaches that level at all. PAs must balance both internal and external pressures to sustain and accrue power, while also manage being powerless to those superior (upward accountability). PAs must navigate competing identities, and must balance their identity as an individual, a PA, and a community member. In many cases, it's the competing social norms between these personal, community, and government levels that can lead to negatively reinforcing IG norms and practices. Cultural and religious norms can trigger and reinforce norms linked to gender, youth, and marginalized communities. Frequently, these social pressures combined with contextual



Presenter: Katie Whipkey, CARE Netherlands



factors like lack of education and poverty, lead women to internalize their oppression, adopt these norms as their own while perpetuating them to other women. Additionally, participants described the influence of informal power holders (clans, political parties, political supporters, friends, family, and the immediate community) on PAs. Finally, many PAs believe that adopting IG practices implies giving up power to the public.

Key message: There are laws in place in most countries that promote inclusion (e.g., 30% women’s quota), but the implementation, especially at the local levels, is often limited.



Presenter: Freddy Sahinguvu, The Hague Academy

In some countries (or sub-national levels) where PAs have strong political will, and others where PAs perform IG activities simply to ‘tick the box’ rather than because they believe in it. Alternatively, public authorities may not consult and bring in the voices of communities because they believe that they already ‘know what they need’, they do not truly understand what IG is or how to do it, or there is participation fatigue by communities. Often the most successful cases of IG involve an external supporter, but there are serious questions around sustainability and the legitimacy of international organizations or civil society performing the role of the government. Further, PAs often see gender equality as an NGO responsibility or something they can simply assign to someone as a duty, so the real work comes in changing perspectives and mindsets. Working with local authorities to build their understanding of IG is a useful first step.

Panel discussion on the intersection of social inclusion and social norms with governance processes

Four distinguished panelists shared their experience and expertise about the two studies presented as well as their insights on inclusive governance process. The panelists included:

Nabawia Harbi Gasour: Gender and M&E Specialist, Sudan Social Safety Net Project

Lemien Sakalunga Mwanavita: Editor & Kinshasa Coordinator, [Habari](#) RDC

Astrid de Vries: Senior Policy Coordinator, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Alina Rocha Menocal: Senior Research Fellow, Overseas Development Institute



Panelists: (right to left) Nabawia Harbi Gasour, Astrid de Vries, Lemien Sakalunga. Interpreter: Lenneke Kono-Tange

Key takeaway: Social norms are context-specific; they need interventions that are developed based on a sound understanding of the context and power dynamics at play.

Nabawia Harbi Gasour described the Sudanese context and its recent breakthroughs politically, particularly how youth and women are coming together to form a movement for inclusion. The main issue in Sudan is the **disparity between urban and rural women**. Women in agro-pastoral communities participate less in political processes,



partially due to their economic status and education levels. There are also social norms in some societies that encourage women to 'be patient' whereas others are very proactive.

Astrid de Vries emphasized on the importance of inclusiveness to the Dutch MFA's agenda and the political role they play to promote inclusive development. The work of the Dutch embassies is **context specific**, but generally their approaches in sensitive contexts focus on framing the issues in a way that the MFA can engage in **dialogue and collaboration** (e.g., gender equality is promoted from an economic empowerment perspective, the work on human rights is framed within the women's rights agenda). The Ministry and Embassies typically work at a national level; they are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the work being done at sub-national levels, but they are uncertain about their legitimacy at these levels. Rather, they encourage local actors to take the lead sub-nationally.

Key takeaway: Digital media can play a role in promoting inclusion even in sensitive contexts.

Lemien Sakalunga highlighted his work with Habari DRC, a youth-focused affiliate of RNW Media in DRC that uses digital media as a strategy for inclusive governance. Their five pillars for amplifying citizen's voice include inclusive communities, teams, content, technology, and partnerships. They work to ensure that any stories or blogs published **do not reinforce negative stereotypes** and that their staff and writers are diverse and gender-equal. In DRC, public authorities are important decision makers and need to be increasingly included in digital platforms that seek to promote inclusive dialogue.

Key takeaway: Testing assumptions about inclusion and related programming can facilitate identifying underlying conditions that support inclusive development process and outcomes.

Alina Rocha Menocal encouraged NGOs to **reflect on the assumptions** under which they work and to test them – for instance, is there enough evidence that inclusion leads to development and stability? She stressed the **importance of knowing both the formal and informal rules of the game** in each governance context. For example, because there are inclusive formal rules in place, it does not mean that there will be change. Thus, social norms become crucial to understand. Also, there is evidence that social movements are important vehicles for empowering women, but we must not forget to involve men and to ensure that basic needs (e.g., access to health, education) are also met. Making sure to contextualize interventions and/or tools and taking the enabling environment and conditions necessary for social inclusion into account are essential to effectiveness. Alina also appealed to donors that processes are long-term, so programming must not have unrealistic expectations on short-term outputs and outcomes.



Participants listening to the panelists



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Four breakout groups (grassroots women and girls, public authorities and other powerholders, local CSOs and activists, and international and national CSOs), identified key recommendations on the topics of improving social inclusion and promoting social norm transformation. The main themes that emerged included the need for **contextualization** of any strategy into the specific context, robust **context and power analyses** prior to designing interventions, focus on good policy **implementation**, and supporting **alternative spaces** for dialogue.



Breakout group focused on grassroots women and youth discussing challenges, strategies, and key recommendations

- Donors and Embassies, including the MFA and Dutch Embassies, must focus efforts on ensuring **implementation of good policies** that promote inclusion of women and youth and combat negative social norms.
- INGOs, embassies, and CSOs should utilize **evidence-based advocacy**, such as giving examples that are interesting for public authorities, to support improved inclusive governance process.
- INGOs, academia, and CSOs should collaborate to **develop guidance on clear steps to follow and tools to use** when working on transforming social norms. For example, identifying existing community structures – formal or informal – to link to in social norm transformation processes (e.g., women role models).
- **Gather evidence on social norm transformation** to inform interventions, including continually monitoring progress; recognize that social norm change may be the right thing to do in some cases, but it may not always be the smart thing to do. Be mindful of negative externalities from social norm change and remember that it is often a very long-term process.
- Recognize that some topics are quite sensitive in some contexts, and considering the **safety and security** (socially, physically, and financially) of community members must be a concern at the forefront of all NGO interventions, including social norm change.
- Consider key **logistical challenges for IG processes** that are often neglected by NGOs and governments alike, including language barriers and translation of policy documents and processes.
- Make the **link between women's economic empowerment and women's political participation** where possible through interventions, as poverty is often a limiting factor for many women. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) are one example that shows how local organizations should drive inclusive

governance content and interventions. The role of NGOs is to assure these spaces are safe and the voices of the women and girls in these spaces are taken forward into formal processes.



Participants making their personal commitment to enacting a recommendation in their organizations

Contact information:

For any inquiry regarding the event, please contact Katie Whipkey (whipkey@carenederland.org), CARE Netherlands.