STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN FIGHTING SEXUAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KENYA

Dr. Anthony Luvanda

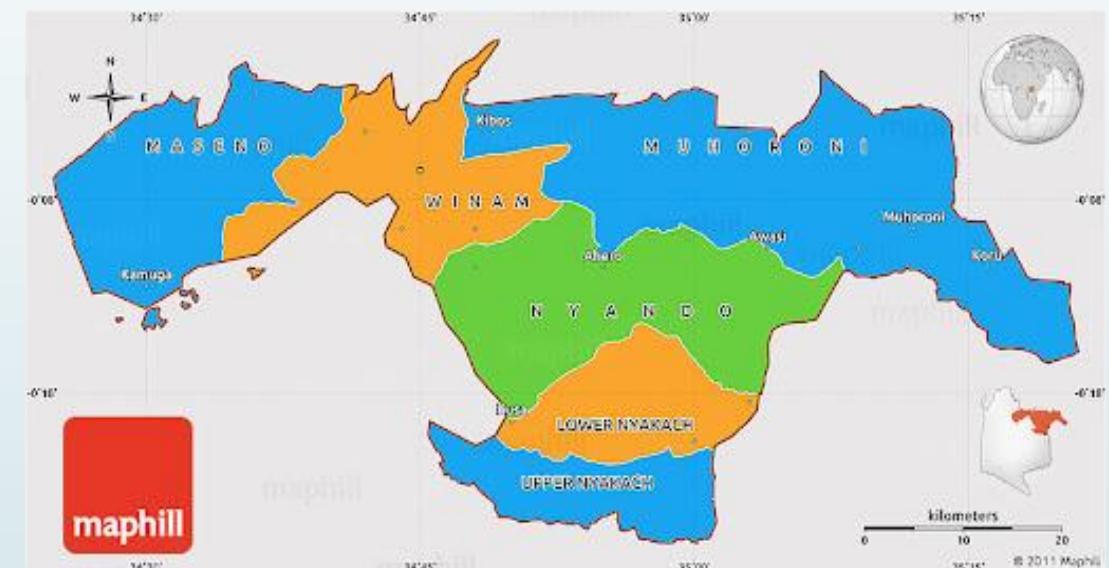Prof. Mary Otieno

Prof. Adefunke Ekine

Opening Reflection

 Is SGBV a concern in your context on a policy or social level for adolescent girls? Why? why not?

Background: Description of Study Location

Map of Kisumu County, Kenya

- The study was conducted in Kisumu County, which is one of the 47 counties in Kenya, located around the Lake Victoria region.
- Kisumu is among the counties with the highest incidents of SGBV violations

- SGBV violations in Kisumu County have been linked to:
  - certain cultural beliefs and traditions, post-election violence, and the socio-economic status of vulnerable groups.
  - Environment and occupation of inhabitants such as cane growing, and fishing.

Description of Study Location

- Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital (JOOTRH) GBV Rescue Centre records indicated: 411 SGBV cases (Jan–Jul 2023)

  - 75% were girls aged 10–17

  - Above national average of 40% (KDHS, 2016)

  - SGBV Hotspots: Muhoroni, Seme, Nyakach Sub-Counties

  - Factors: poverty, fishing economy, cultural norms, post-election violence

Background – Gaps in Practice

- **Policy vs Practice Gap**:
    - Limited awareness of legal provisions.
    - Rare accountability of duty bearers.
    - There is limited visibility in Kisumu County, in terms of knowledge and awareness of the specific provisions of SGBV policies
- **SGBV in schools is rising** (Otieno 2020; Republic of Kenya 2019)
- Community-level SGBV responses remain **fragmented and under-evaluated**

Rationale for the Study

- Community awareness of SGBV legal provisions is weak

- There is lack of localized data on community engagement in SGBV prevention.

- Need to :

  - Assess how schools & communities engage in prevention.

  - Identify existing strategies & opportunities to strengthen engagement and SGBV prevention.

- Builds community-level capacity to fight SGBV.

- Encourages student resilience and policy literacy.

- Aligns with both national goals and grassroots realities.

- Forms basis for training, awareness, and localized prevention strategies.

Target group: Students, teachers, parents, BoMs, and community leaders.
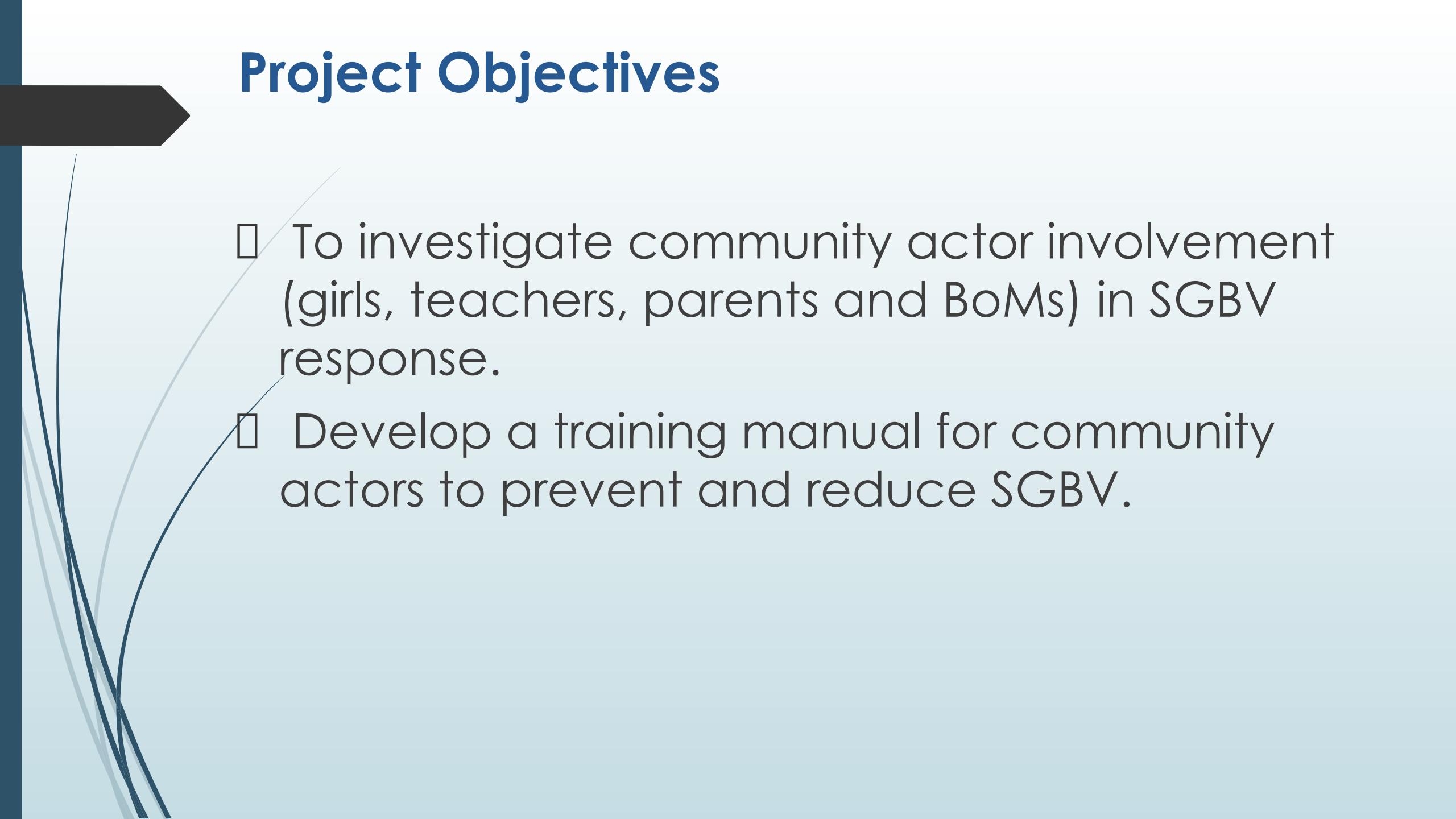
Project Objectives

 To investigate community actor involvement (girls, teachers, parents and BoMs) in SGBV response.

  Develop a training manual for community actors to prevent and reduce SGBV.

Problem Statement

- Adolescent girls are still at higher risk compared to their male counterparts.

- Data from Kisumu County - JOOTRH GBV Rescue Centre records (2024) showed that the majority of survivors are females (98%).

- The policies and frameworks are limited in terms of specific and localized laws, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and guidance documentation for service providers (World Bank, 2017).

- Consequences of exposure to sexual violence have long-term effects on girls and women, including increased risk

Methodology – Research design

- The study employed a mixed method, where both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used

- data collection conducted through focus group discussions, administration of surveys and Key Informant Interviews

  - FGD's – 6, a total of 63 girls from 6 secondary schools

  - Survey with school principals - 6

  - teachers – 6

  - BoM's   -   5

Methodology - Limitations & Challenges

- **Planned Activities that did not occur**

  - Community walkabout & musical band match cancelled due to **political protests (June 2023)** during Kenya Finance Bill demonstrations

- **Study Limitation**

  - Stakeholder engagement was limited to **schools under the 8-4-4 system**

  - Despite this, rich qualitative and quantitative data was obtained and R was the chosen analysis tool.

Findings: 1. Forms of violence identified

- **Sexual Violence:** Rape, harassment in isolated areas

- **Physical Abuse:** Caning, beatings, aggressive punishment

- **Psychological Abuse:** Threats, discrimination, negative feedback

- **Discrimination:** Delayed meals, leadership bias

Quotes: *"The watchman may suggest sexual favors"* – Nyando School

2. Understanding GBV – Girls' Perspectives

 Girls define GBV As:

- Sexual violence and forced relationships

- Discrimination, limited opportunities, unfair treatment

- Emotional and physical abuse in both home and school

Quotes: *"GBV is when a girl faces harassment that is harmful"* – Muhoroni School *"Violence is hurting or killing someone"* – Mutwala School

3. Community actor engagement in SGBV response

Girls: identification of:

- Spaces they feel comfortable - Classrooms, Dormitories, Girls' Toilets, Staffrooms, Canteen, Library, Laboratory, Matron's House, School Gate, Kitchen

- Spaces girls feel unsafe and uncomfortable - Sugarcane plantations, boys' zones, staff quarters, Isolated natural spots (bushes, rivers, farms), Toilets (especially shared), watchman's place/station

4. Key Attributes where girls feel safe and comfortable

- Emotional support, social interaction, safety, privacy

- Presence of supportive adults (teachers, matrons, guards)

Quotes: *"Girls want open air or under trees to relieve stress"*

Key Attributes where girls feel safe and comfortable

 Positive Adult Engagement:

- Teachers: Academic help, respectful interactions

- Kitchen Staff: Warm service, informal support

- Security Guards: Safe check-ins, encouragement

- Secretaries & Vendors: Guidance, career motivation

Impact:

- Foster self-confidence, academic focus, and emotional wellbeing

Quote: "She encourages us to study" – Ngeny School (on a female guard)

Challenges of Spaces Girls feel Unsafe and Uncomfortable

Challenges:

- Harassment, assault and intimidation

- poor hygiene, fear of authority,

- Negative encounters, including inappropriate behavior from boys, watchmen, or even some teachers, deter girls from using these areas.

- Concerns over hygiene and poor sanitation in some toilets further contribute to girls' discomfort.

Quote: *"Boys can touch you in the toilets and you will be ashamed"* – Ngeny School

Girls mapping their school

- Yellow and orange Places where girls like to be, and feel comfortable, free of violence.

- Blue- Places where girls don't like to be, and feel uncomfortable

- Red- People girls do not feel comfortable with and do not like.

- Black- Spaces and places associated with sexual Abuse

Forms of SGBV in School and Community

In School:

- Harassment by boys, bias from teachers, corporal punishment
- Pregnant girls discriminated against
- Affects all grades, most prevalent in Form 3 and Form 4
- Older students more open to sharing
- Occurs both within schools and in transit (e.g. to/from school)

Quote: *"She jumped off the motorbike to avoid being raped"* – Nyeng School ; *"Raped by guardian, threatened with death"* – Nyando School

In Community:

Rape, coercion, domestic violence, "*boda boda*" threats

- **Sexual Violence:** Harassment, molestation, rape
- **Incestuous Abuse:** Sexual advances from male relatives
- **Forced Marriages & Exploitation:** Coerced sexual acts for financial relief
- **Physical & Domestic Abuse:** Assault by husbands, beatings
- **Psychological Abuse:** Isolation, humiliation, suicidal thoughts
- *Examples:* Rape in sugarcane plantations, parental coercion into early marriage

Causes and Challenges of SGBV victims

Causes:

- Poverty
- Peer pressure & early relationships
- Drug abuse
- Inadequate parental support
- Cultural perceptions on dress

Challenges:

- School dropout
- forced marriage
- Mental health issues: depression, suicidal ideation, physical trauma,
- Social stigmatization and rejection
- Early pregnancies and marriages
- Health complications (STIs, HIV)
- Financial burdens on families
- Shame, isolation

School - Teachers SGBV Engagement Strategies

We note that all the strategies identified, did not specifically target or focus on supporting SGVB cases either at school or in the community but were general unstructured support programmes

In School:

- Guidance and counseling

- Motivational programs

- Boarding facilities for safety

- Flexible policies for pregnant girls

Community – BoM's and Parents SGBV Engagement Strategies…

 In Community:

- Chiefs, elders, police, churches, hospitals
- NGOs (e.g. DREAM Girls, KEDA Foundation)
- SACCOs for financial support
- Peer counseling

Conclusion

- SGBV deeply affects health, education, and social development
- Current efforts insufficient—require systemic reform
- Lack of awareness and understanding of SGBV existing policies and frameworks inhibit application and support to victims

Key needs:

- Awareness creation of existing policies and enforcement of implementation
- Enhanced counseling and justice access
- School-community collaboration
- Empowerment and resilience for girls
- Sustainable support mechanisms

Quote: "Empowering girls is key to ending SGBV and fostering a just society."

Girls Recommendations on SGBV response Strategies

- Training on SGBV policies
- Training on protection from SGBV perpetrators
- Train more guidance and counselling experts
- Establish mobile counseling units
- Sanitary towel distribution to adolescent girls
- Community sensitization and awareness of SGBV effects on adolescent girls
- Curriculum integration of SGBV education
- Better school policies and justice systems against SGBV

Discussion

The conversation and research on SGBV has been around for a long time, however the gains are minimal while the incidences of SGBV continue to increase.

- What are your thoughts about this reality & what do you see as next steps?

- What strategies have worked in your context?

  - Could engaging community be an option? Why or why not?

Thank you