Chapter 51
Challenging Norms Supportive of Violence:
Gender–Driven Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Norms have a contribution in determining violence: how it starts, is unleashed, and its effect on the entirety of the society. They are important in moulding the behaviours of the people. However, they may be problematic and instigate violence. Realising an upsurge in violence emanating from some of the norms in Zimbabwean cultures, the study sought to understand all the various forms of norms, their functionalities, and how they influence violence before seeking to craft means of challenging them. The study is guided by the social norms approach. The study found out that social and cultural norms have over a period grown to define most societies' ways of life. However, there are elements that always try to create conflicts. To attend to the disruptive elements, there are interventions that may be applied to challenge some of these norms, usually combined with other methods, legislation and policies, education, adoption of contemporary world standards, communication, and inclusive lobbying and advocacy, among others.

INTRODUCTION

Norms are not fixed. They can mutate whenever new roles, duties, behaviours or thoughts become extensively recognised or earlier ideas get defunct. Huge changes in educational level, economics, population structures or conflict circumstances in any community can influence changes in behaviours and norms, as can change-makers, individual advocates and groups of like-minded people that seek to transform the status quo.

Norms are very important in moulding the behaviours of the people. They also have a contribution in determining violence; how it starts, unleashed and its effect on the entirety of the society. Norms in their various forms could be understood and interpreted differently depending on various factors. However,

they may be problematic and instigate violence. Norms contend that individual behaviour is motivated by insights of what other people take and anticipate, and how they behave. With these views and arguments, it then becomes necessary to understand all the various forms of norms, their functionalities and how they influence violence before seeking to craft means and mechanisms of challenging them. Any of the means of challenging these norms supportive of violence may be gender driven.

BACKGROUND

It is realised that societies and economies change over time, and so do norms. Change in all the various forms of norms can be so slow that people barely see it, or it can be fairly fast. People's ideas of gender can transform; so can the areas where and the means in which these ideas are shaped. It can be influenced by wide-ranging processes like the spread of communication technology, economic development or by government-led initiative, like legal restructuring or growth of education and other basic amenities. Changes in gender relations are at times seen as being in conflict with seriously held religious philosophies and cultural standards about the various responsibilities of men and women and how people live.

Since norms mirror deeper social structures, and since they are sustained and strengthened by several social institutions, moving them is an overwhelming assignment. Change is even more challenging because certain people may be benefitting from the situation. Some men usually view this change as encouraging insubordination, wearing away traditions, a loss of status and causing misunderstanding and tensions across generations and between men and women.

In Zimbabwe, while change is slowly coming in, there are some areas that still see women and girls as objects and unequal. This imbalance is largely perpetrated by some African traditional cultures and Christian religious beliefs and practices. Women and girls in Zimbabwe are not as yet enjoying the rights and freedoms to lead in some religious groups. Similarly, in some homes, women are still regarded as minors while the girl child is treated as inferior to the boy counter-part. Socially, women in some societies are far from seeing the rights enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Equally, the media and the arts sector still view and present women as objects of entertainment and sexual pleasure. This is seen in some of the media articles, music and television series and movies including out-door advertisements. Besides, women around Zimbabwe still face discrimination and gender obstacles that inhibit them from releasing their full economic capacity. Women's efforts towards economic empowerment interventions at times result in an upsurge in gender-based violence from male household members and their husbands.

There are also some individuals who are opposed to change that they justify all their deeds culturally, socially or religiously. It is such individuals and institutions who either create or reinforce norms supportive of violence. The study therefore seeks to explore systems that could be employed to challenge some of these norms in society. The study tries to achieve its goal by employing gender sensitive approaches; applying interventions that mainstream gender in all the systems and practices. The study uses Zimbabwean lenses to understand and see various concepts and experiences. While Zimbabwe is multi-cultural and secular in religion, the study uses the general Shona lenses as seen and understood in the capital city of Harare.

This is a sociological discussion which however peeps into conflict areas. Violence therefore becomes an issue of interest as it affects the welfare of women, deprives women and girls of their rights and other opportunities and retards development. The study realises that while the concepts being discussed are

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