

## Community Gender Transformative Approach to end female genital mutilation and gender-based violence

### Workshop

Date  
01/09/23

Time  
2pm to 4pm  
CET

### DISCUSSIONS OF THE COP

### Thème

The involvement of men from the concerned communities to put an end to FGM and GBV

THE COMMUNITY GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH  
DESINFIBULATION with  
Dr Jasmine Abdulcadir

## The trainer



Fara Djiba, Executive Director at AFASCO, sub-regional and national trainer of the Generations Dialogue approach and on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) since 2014 in Guinea Conakry to discuss these issues. Fara is also a member of COP MGF.

## Introduction

On 1 September 2023, COP FGM organised a training webinar on the Community Gender Transformative Approach (ACT) as a tool for involving men in ending female genital mutilation.

The aim of this webinar was to introduce the methodology of the ACT approach and enable participants to gain an in-depth understanding of this approach and how it promotes the involvement of men in the fight against GBV/FGM.

The Community Gender Transformative Approach (ACT) is a strategic approach that aims to tackle gender inequalities by working directly with communities. Founded on principles of inclusion, participation and empowerment, ACT seeks to empower individuals and create lasting changes in social norms and power structures that lead to harmful consequences such as female genital mutilation.

The Community Gender Transformative Approach is much more than a one-off intervention - it is a process of profound transformation that requires the commitment and cooperation of all members of the community.

The strengths of this approach lie in the fact that: Before starting the ACT process, it is essential to understand the target community (married men, unmarried young men, married women, unmarried young women), identify specific gender issues and form a competent team that will organise dialogue sessions with the community to raise awareness, educate and engage members in discussions about gender equality. This is how to achieve real transformation, which aims to create concrete change in the community by putting in place, with the public authorities, actions and initiatives that challenge sexist norms and behaviours.

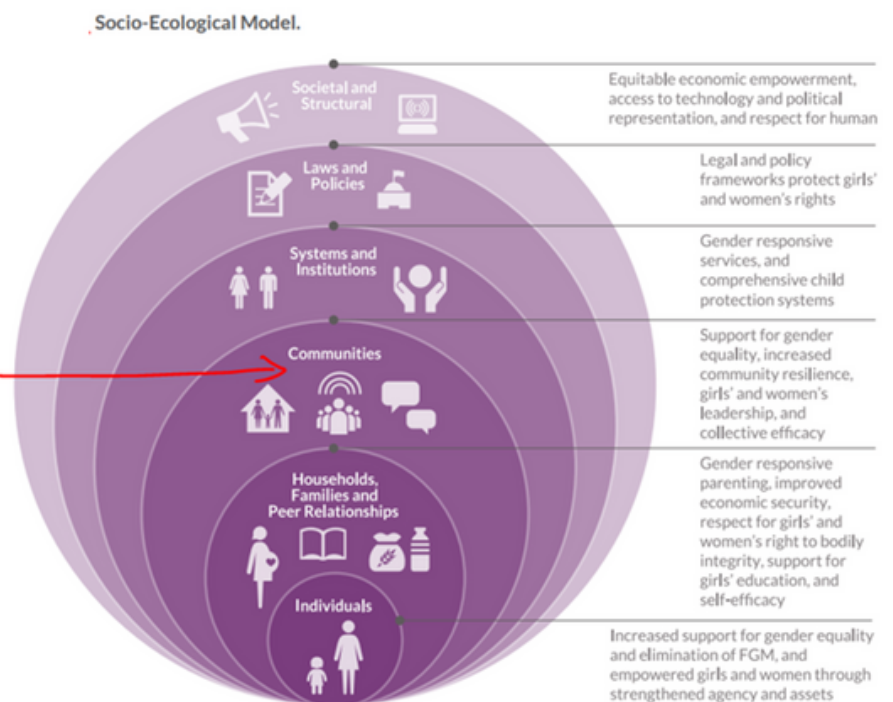
## I-Reminder: What is a gender-transformative approach?

The gender transformative approach aims to deconstruct stereotypes, to become aware of how one has been socialized and the roles expected by society to realize the inequalities of power and the discrimination that this entails.

The Community Gender Transformative Approach is a component of this approach because it is since the change that results from this awareness leads to listening, respect between the sexes, equality between men and women and a reduction in violence against women, including FGM.

Change can take place at the individual level, but also at the structural and societal level (work, school, institutions, etc.)

The socio-ecological model of gender transformative approaches describes 6 levels, it is important to have a coordinated approach on the different levels for a sustainable impact via a set of actions. The actions implemented in the Community gender transformative Approach affect **levels 1** (individual), **level 2** (households, families, and peer relationships) and **level 3** (communities).



Source: UNICEF, 2020, Technical Note: gender transformative approaches for the elimination of female genital mutilation.

## II-From action research to an innovative approach for scaling up: What is different about the Community Gender Transformative Approach to end female genital mutilation and gender-based violence?

The Community Gender Transformative (ACT) approach was discovered following Action research on FGM in the Republic of Guinea. Indeed, it all started in Guinea and more precisely in Mamou. Initially, the NGO AFASCO was asked by a partner to implement a project to abandon FGM in this region. The aim of this project was to create initiation camps without female genital mutilation. To this end, the NGO AFASCO had been identified by this partner to carry out activities called alternative initiation rites without excision. This project consisted of developing training modules related to tradition and reproductive health with girls who are not subjected to female genital mutilation to strengthen their self-protection. For the implementation of this project in the said region, it was necessary to prepare the ground by organizing awareness-raising sessions among families not only to sensitize them on the harmful effects of excision but also to obtain their support for this project, by getting them to enrol their daughters in initiation camps without excision. The aim of these camps was to change the situation: instead of circumcising girls, they had to be trained without affecting their physical integrity.

Unfortunately, this rural community had refused to allow the project to be developed in their country. Even though the facilitators were there to make them aware of the benefits of this project, namely, to guarantee the physical integrity of the young girls of this community. This community developed a resistance that led the authorities of the region to ban this project even though the partner of the NGO AFASCO had already established their action plan and the corresponding budget.

Later, during an Action Research on FGM and gender-based violence, the same rural community was targeted to see what had happened, especially with the failure of the previous project.

This time, the approach was completely different, and in line with the action research approach, the NGO AFASCO's facilitators chose first to identify and train facilitators to hold dialogue sessions to identify and listen to the needs and demands of this community without judgement or criticism, while showing an interest in the community's culture.

After adopting this new approach, the facilitators reported that the communities were much more interested and gave their feelings and shared their concerns with the AFASCO facilitators. This community had become more open, shared their idea more without taboos and the discussion sessions had increased and people openly discussed excision, sexuality, ...

**The community, which in a previous approach had refused to raise awareness about FGM, finally accepts with the action research approach.**

- *Why did the trainer share this experience with us?*

To show the importance of the approach we take when working with communities affected by FGM. By whom, with whom the approach is defined and what needs and requests does it meet?

- ***Why were the members of this community more interested and committed after the organisations changed their approach, particularly with the second approach?***

For one of the participants, the community members were more interested and committed because they were asked for their opinion and involved in choosing the topics to be discussed during the dialogue sessions, unlike the first time when they may have felt more attacked and uncomfortable with the proposal to enrol their daughters in female genital mutilation-free initiation camps. The trainer invited to this online workshop shared this observation because, in his opinion, with hindsight, the community felt attacked with the first approach, we came to share with them, to raise their awareness as if we knew nothing but, moreover, by wanting to implement a project that did not correspond to their context. In the second approach, we listened and above all we consulted this community.

- ***What differences have been noted in the new approach? And how does this kind of approach lead to change?***

Another participant highlighted that the difference lies in the entry point: how we approach the communities we want to raise awareness of issues such as FGM or GBV in general.

With the second approach, which aims to be gender-transformative, the involvement of communities, including men, is sustainable because communities are at the heart of change, hence their strong commitment. As a full-fledged player, they are invested and feel they have something to contribute. In addition, it comes down to the way we build projects aimed at involving men, communities in the abandonment of FGM, but also in the way organizations work and collaborate with communities. With this second approach, it is easy to see how a change has taken place within a community that was initially hostile to any awareness of FGM. The community-based approach through this example therefore requires putting the communities concerned, including the men and boys to whom the project is addressed, at the centre of the process, from the design stage through to the activities.

According to the trainer, this second approach requires going further and working on how to involve communities as actors. In his view, their empowerment plays an important role in the degree of involvement. Making them responsible for the implementation of the project and its activities also enhances their contribution.

- ***The attitude we adopt is very important: why?***

The trainer emphasised the attitude we need to adopt as field workers organising awareness-raising activities, discussions and dialogue with the communities concerned about gender-based violence in general and female genital mutilation in particular.

It is important to be aware of the attitude we adopt, which will play a key role in engaging the communities concerned. Adopting an attitude of listening to the needs and expectations of the communities concerned is a stance that fosters the participation and lasting involvement of the communities.

The speaker also stressed that it was important not to position ourselves as "experts" with a well-defined roadmap, which would create more resistance.

When working with the communities concerned, including men, it is important to listen respectfully and not to judge or criticise anyone's point of view. Show a particular interest in the local culture and traditions that they were going to hear about and show an interest in.

During the webinar, the speaker also focused on identifying the needs and demands of the communities by group, i.e. identifying the needs and demands of women, married men and unmarried young people (girls and boys), so that these groups could express themselves freely on the harmful effects of excision, the socialisation process, the community's expectations of women and girls,...

### III- The steps in the Community Gender Transformative Approach (ACT) to end female genital mutilation and GBV.

The Community Gender Transformative Approach to End FGM and GBV is composed of 3 steps. These three phases were constructed, implemented, and validated during several cycles of action research conducted in Guinea in Mamou and N'Zérékoré.

#### A- How does it work?

The approach consists of training facilitators from the communities concerned who will lead dialogue sessions in gender and generational non-mixing (to promote discussions) who will discuss the relationships between men and women, the way in which we have been socialized, questions of sexuality, pleasure (to make the link with the impact of FGM), sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence. Dialogue sessions take place every 15 days. During this period, participants are invited to speak with at least 5 people from their neighbourhoods to disseminate the messages and thus have an impact on the community.

Once the 7 dialogue sessions are over, the 4 groups are invited to regroup, mix to share what was easy, difficult during the sessions, what it changed on an individual level, in their family or in their community. Together, the participants prepare important messages to convey to the local authorities and a feedback day is organised with the authorities where the participants take the floor. The authorities are also invited to give their commitment since some actions and recommendations are at the institutional level.

The results of the activities are then shared at the national level during the coordination meetings of the national platform to fight for the abandonment of FGM and GBV to promote the scaling up of the approach. The **3 steps** of the ACT approach:

- **Step 1:** Cycle of 7 community dialogue sessions with 4 different groups (8 married men, 8 unmarried young men, 8 married women, 8 unmarried young women)
- **Step 2:** Discussion days between the different groups in gender and generational mix with the 4 mixed groups (1 day) and the organization of a restitution workshop with key local actors (1 day)
- **Step 3 :** National Feedback Workshop

## B- Thematic content of the Community Dialogue Sessions

The 7 community dialogue sessions of Step 1 of the ACT approach address the following themes:

- What is a man? What is a woman? (difference between sex and gender)
- How we are socialised, what role we are expected to play
- Sexuality, Family Planning, Intimate Hygiene
- Female genital mutilation and sexuality, the notion of pleasure
- Sexual and reproductive rights
- Gender-based violence
- How to Prevent Violence: Managing Emotions, Dialogue

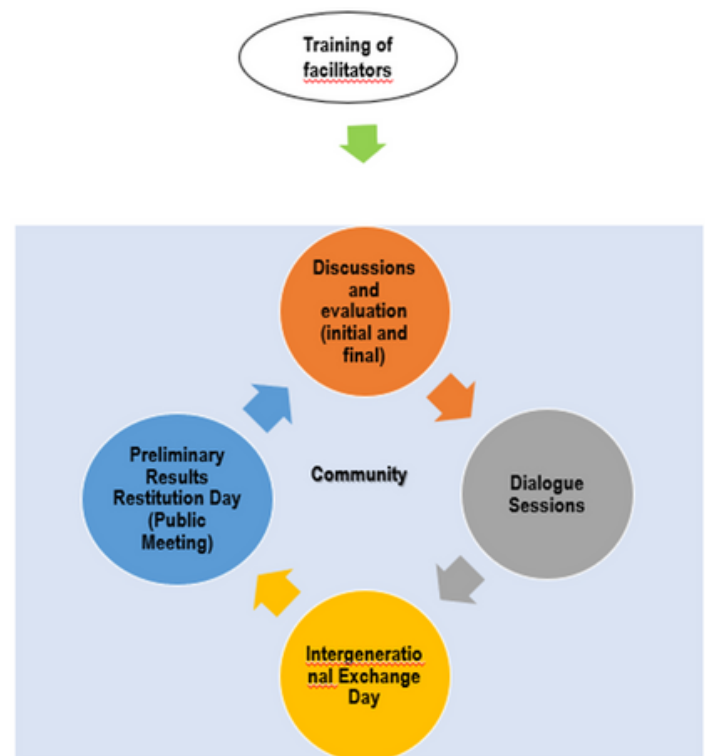
## IV- Community Gender Transformative Approach Cycle

One of the important elements of the Gender Transformative Community Approach cycle is the holding of community dialogue sessions. Indeed, it is the place where social norms and gender norms are questioned with both men and women.

We noted that several members identified an important factor to consider when setting up Gender Transformative community dialogues: the involvement of influential people in these communities, such as: notables, chiefs, local authorities, wise men, etc. In fact, the participants and the facilitator highlighted the importance of involving these influential people/local authorities because they are the gateway to the communities. What's more, these influential people know their communities best, and they help to identify the people who can take part in the Gender Transformative community dialogue sessions.

It appears that, to better involve communities, including men and boys, it is important to have preliminary meetings with these local authorities and influencers because it allows that:

- Community members will feel reassured if they know that their chiefs have approved this project.
- If the authorities feel that they have not been consulted, they can boycott and sabotage the project.
- Authorities that commit to getting involved in a project can make a significant contribution to its success.



COP Webinar September 2023, The Gender Transformative Community Approach.

## V- The Principles of the Community Gender Transformative Approach to End Female Genital Mutilation and Gender-Based Violence

The Community Gender Transformative Approach is based on the continuum of change: **How do we create change at the level of this Community Gender Transformative Approach?**

This change is achieved through 4 principles:

**-Involvement:** involving is, as we said before, consulting the communities on the place, the date, the construction of the content of the community dialogue sessions on socialization, FGM, gender violence, sexual and reproductive rights, etc., à they feel involved insofar as we have shared with them all the steps and asked for their opinion throughout the preparatory phase of the community dialogue sessions.

**-Participation:** communities participate in the sense that they take part in discussions on all these themes mentioned above; they give their opinion during dialogue sessions, their opinion is valued and considered. Communities also participate in the sense that they identify community challenges related to the problems identified (GBV, FGM, etc.) in the community and propose solutions. This participation manifests itself through individual commitments, commitments at the family level and at the community level, including with elders, leaders, and other administrative authorities. By doing so, it makes it possible to identify actions for each community partner and to make the implementation of community dialogue sessions in living spaces more concrete.

**-Empowerment:** in other words, people will put into practice what they have learnt during the community dialogue sessions on socialisation, gender-based violence including FGM, sexual and reproductive rights, etc., in their family, their services, their group and in the community.

**-Ownership:** this is carried by the participant and manifests itself through peer awareness. Indeed, by following these four principles of the gender-transformative community approach, communities, including men and boys, who have participated in the entire process of deconstructing harmful social norms and gender norms during the dialogue sessions are able to raise awareness beyond their communities. This is called ownership because the people involved become the bearers of the voice of change beyond their community.

*"As a community actor, our intervention is limited to participation. Between empowerment and ownership, we must act as coaches because empowerment is carried by the participants themselves, who generally take the lead naturally. It is at this level that the participant has fully understood the outcome of the community dialogue sessions on socialisation, FGM, gender-based violence, etc., and is able to take a progressive message to the people around him and to other neighbouring communities at everyday events (weekly markets, ceremonies)".* Fara, COP webinar speaker September 2023, The Community Gender Transformative Approach.



Once participants have been able to take this step through the different stages (involvement, participation, empowerment, ownership), they are said to have appropriated the Gender Transformative Community Approach and are ambassadors who help to challenge social and gender norms that are harmful to girls and women, such as FGM.



COP FGM Webinar September 2023, The Gender Transformative Community Approach.

*The experience of a Community Gender Transformative Approach to end gender-based violence in Senegal. In the Kédougou region of Senegal, an approach like that of ACT is already being implemented, involving all members of the community. We make sure that the approach is holistic and considers all the concerns of the authorities in consultation with the authorities (CDPE).*

*We then go out into the community (including women and schools) to carry out an initial diagnostic assessment that will highlight the community's real problems, such as FGM and gender-based violence, which have already been identified through surveys and feedback from individuals.*

*And once these two stages have been completed, we organise a general meeting with the community and really invite local decision-makers, religious leaders, traditional chiefs, women's leaders, and youth leaders to this general meeting. The activities are also organised by age group to encourage discussion during these activities. The groups receive the same questionnaire, reflect on it and then a feedback session is organised with all the groups to see what each group thinks of the issues that have been raised. This will enable the community (men, women, children and teachers) to ensure that certain practices harmful to the dignity of women and girls can be integrated and communicated in order to reduce them.*

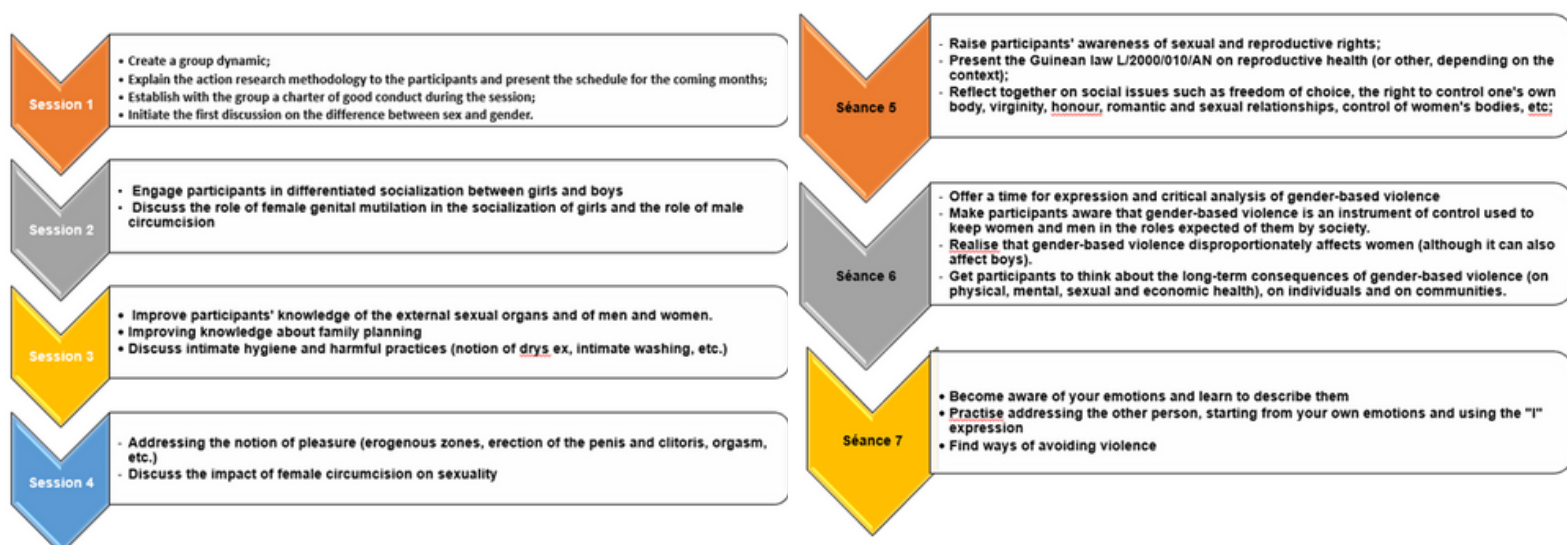
*Member of the COP FGM, COP FGM Webinar September 2023, The Gender Transformative Community Approach.*

## VI- Facilitate community dialogue sessions on a gender-transformative approach to ending female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

### A- The content of the sessions

The 7 Community Gender Transformative Approach dialogue sessions cover the following topics:

1. What is a man? What is a woman? (difference between sex and gender)
2. How we are socialized, what role is expected of us
3. Sexuality, Family Planning, Intimate Hygiene
4. Female circumcision and sexuality, the notion of pleasure
5. Sexual and reproductive rights
6. Gender-based violence
7. How to Prevent Violence: Managing Emotions, Dialogue



### B- Some guidelines for Gender Transformative community dialogue sessions to end to female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

**At the beginning of the session:**

- Greet participants warmly as they enter the room.
- If participants are bringing "guests", gently explain that only participants in the Generational Dialogue who have been selected can take part in the sessions.

**During each session:**

- When all the guests are there, start the session with a song or a prayer.
- At all ACT sessions (except the first session) ask all participants for feedback (individual, family and community changes)
- Check the feedback of the participants.

**At the end of each session:**

- Ask participants to give their evaluation of the session.
- If you have time, ask all participants to share one thing they learned during this session,
  - After particularly long sessions, just ask two volunteers from each group to describe what they found most interesting during the session.
- Synthesis of each discussion group to possibly improve things during the 2nd cycle.
- Self-assessment worksheet to note the changes over the course of the sessions: inner power, power of, power with, ...

## **C- Once all the topics have been discussed during the dialogue sessions, what happens next?**

Once all the themes of the community dialogue sessions have been addressed, two major days of dialogue are organised. One with all the members of the community who took part in the community dialogue process (1) and the other to present the preliminary results at local level (2).

### *1) Organization of the Gender Dialogue Day*

This day:

- Serves as a space to facilitate meetings and the sharing of experiences between participants in the dialogue sessions.
- It then provides an opportunity to present the changes made at individual level and in the immediate environment of the participants in the dialogue sessions; each group takes the floor and shares what it has learned from the other groups. It is also a way of initiating and encouraging gender dialogues where men, women, boys, and girls discuss gendered representations within the community.
- Finally, it provides an opportunity to present and agree on the requests/recommendations that will be addressed to the community partners (local and administrative authorities, religious leaders, security, etc.) on the day when the preliminary results are presented. Each group formulates requests and recommendations to the local authorities, religious leaders, and teachers.

### *2) Preliminary results feedback day at local level*

The objectives of this day are to:

- To report on the preliminary effects of the dialogue sessions at individual level and in the immediate environment of the participants in the dialogue sessions.
- Present to the authorities, the commitments, and recommendations of the participants in the dialogue sessions.
- Present the results of the project to key stakeholders at the central level.
- Present lessons learned;
- Share best practices;

It is addressed to local and administrative authorities; Sectoral authorities (health, justice, security, religious, education, media, leaders of groups and associations, etc.), all actors involved in GBV and FGM issues are invited.

## VII-Success and challenges of the Community Gender Transformative Approach

### 1) Success of the Community Gender Transformative Approach

- With the Community Gender Transformative Approach, the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence is only tackled once the difference between sex and gender has been understood, and once people have become aware of how they were socialised as boys and girls... so we go back to the roots, the basis of inequalities of power.
- Community Conversations using a popular education method: the Community Gender Transformative Approach uses collective intelligence, empowerment and participatory methods.
- A "safe" environment that allows people to speak freely and provides security: a group that is not mixed (age, sex), non-judgemental, able to talk about sexuality without taboos.
- The Community Gender Transformative Approach brings together operators who are familiar with the region, the community approach and gender-based violence, including FGM.
- Regional and local authorities that are very supportive and involved.

### 2) Challenges to the Community Gender Transformative Approach

- Many people still attached to beliefs in the minds, witchcraft in Guinea Forest with people who fear to have a bad fate if they stop FGM .
- Duration of the approach: For short projects (3-4 months) this approach is not recommended.

## Conclusion

'The Community Gender Transformative Approach (ACT) is a strategic approach that aims to combat gender inequalities by working directly with communities. Based on principles of inclusion, participation and accountability, the Gender Transformative Community Approach seeks to empower individuals and create lasting changes in social norms and power structures with harmful consequences such as Female Genital Mutilation.

The Community Gender Transformative Approach is much more than just a one-time intervention – it is a process of profound transformation that requires the commitment and cooperation of all members of the community.

The strengths of this approach lie in the fact that: Before starting the ACT process, it is essential to understand the target community (married men, young unmarried men, married women, young unmarried women), identify specific gender issues and form a competent team that will organize dialogue sessions with the community to raise awareness, Educate and engage members in discussions about gender equality. This will lead to a real transformation that aims to create concrete change in the community by implementing actions and initiatives with the public authorities that challenge sexist norms and behaviours.