



How does the gender of the facilitator influence the delivery of Action for Equality?



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Acknowledgements

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Photograph on the cover is of a programme mentor and participants from Dhagagia Social Welfare Society and has been taken by Alex Sunshine.

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Executive summary

This study explores how the gender of the facilitators who implement Action for Equality influences the delivery of the programme in the context of the Hummingbird Raise project. It focuses specifically on the impact of the facilitator's gender on the rapport built with participants and stakeholders. The analysis is based on data collected through surveys and group discussions and on observations during field visits.

After questioning the exclusive use of male facilitators to address adolescent boys to implement gender-transformative programmes, it compares responses provided by male and female facilitators who were involved in Hummingbird Raise.

Findings from the study indicate that gender had a limited yet significant impact on the delivery of Action for Equality. Thus male and female facilitators reported similar challenges related to facilitation of the programme, for example when delivering knowledge-based discussions or sessions on sexuality. However, some of the challenges reported were gender-specific. While it was more difficult for female facilitators to encourage participants to take actions to challenge gender norms, male facilitators had more difficulty to collect personal experiences from participants.

One important factor that appears to have influenced the results of the study is the experience of female facilitators. Thus among the group considered, female facilitators had more experience both related to facilitation and to implementing gender-related programmes as compared to their male counterparts. One of the main conclusions of this study is that female facilitators have managed to overcome some of the challenges caused by their gender due to their skills and experience. Nevertheless gender differences have remained, since female facilitators still struggle to build an equal and friendly relationship with their participants, which is less frequently the case for male facilitators.

Regarding stakeholder engagement the findings followed the same pattern. While both male and female facilitators managed to engage community stakeholders and parents on gender issues, female facilitators reported to have faced more resistance. It is likely that the patriarchal structure played a role here, as female facilitators who represented the programme and challenged inequitable power relations were more often perceived as a threat than male facilitators doing the same thing.

The conclusion of the report insists on the need to provide both male and female facilitators a space to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours towards gender, in order to limit the impact of gender differences on the delivery of Action for Equality. It provides recommendations for organisations who implement gender transformative programmes to identify challenges in implementation related to the gender of the facilitators and provide appropriate training to their teams to minimise effects on participants.

Introduction

This study is based on a literature review of both academic and grey literature produced by practitioners in the field of prevention of violence against women and girls. It is interesting to note that the literature does not provide definite answers on the most effective model to follow regarding the preferred sex of facilitators when engaging men and boys to challenge existing gender norms.

In the field of engaging men and boys for gender equality through group education, the model of programmes addressing single-sex groups of men and boys; and facilitated by male trainers has been predominant.¹ Studies have demonstrated that, the fact that facilitators were male can be a motivating factor for male participants to get engaged to prevent violence against women.² The Menengage network, which serves as a reference for the field, recommends using primarily male mentors to create safe spaces for young men to discuss their own experiences, even though introducing co-facilitation with a female facilitator is considered as beneficial over a second phase of the programme. The main arguments to support this recommendation are:

- in the context of existing gender norms, male facilitators are considered to be the most ‘effective messengers’³ to engage men and boys as they tend to be taken more seriously than female facilitators by participants;
- male participants are more likely to feel more comfortable and share personal experiences and reflections with a male facilitator.⁴
- facilitators can become role models for male participants, which is likely to favour their attitude and behaviour change.⁵

However, the exclusive use of male facilitators for single-sex groups of boys should be questioned as it does not challenge existing gender norms and therefore corresponds to an accommodative approach as opposed to a gender-transformative approach.⁶

As pointed out by Michael Flood, the practice of using same-sex facilitators is based on the assumption that the best persons to talk with men on gender and sexuality are other men, which is problematic as it reinforces the idea according to which men and women are essentially different and cannot communicate on certain issues. Most of the reference manuals in the field of engaging men recommend to resort to co-facilitation by a man and a woman as a means to model equitable relationships and to integrate a woman’s voice⁷.

¹ Flood, Michael, [Work with men to end violence against women: a critical stocktake](#), *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 17, Iss. Sup2, 2015

² (Piccigallo, Lilley, and Miller 2012) cited by [Flood, Michael Work with men to end violence against women: a critical stocktake](#), *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 17, Iss. Sup2, 2015

³ Guedes, Alessandra, ["Men and Boys Knowledge Module"](#), published by UNIFEM and MenEngage, page 17

⁴ See the following manuals: [Yaari Dosti: Young Men redefine masculinity](#) published by Population Council, New Delhi, CORO for Literacy, Mumbai, MAMTA, New Delhi and Instituto Promundo, Rio de Janeiro, [Caring for Equality](#) published by Menengage, Promundo and World Vision; [Manual for facilitators 'Changing the world'](#) published by Plan.

⁵ Promundo, ECOS, Instituto Papai, Salud Y Género, “Program H: Working with Young Men”, 2002, page 17

⁶ The categories “accommodative” and “transformative” are taken from the Integrated Gender Continuum model developed by the United Nations Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG). For details about the model, click [here](#).

⁷ Promundo and World Vision (2015). [Caring for Equality: A World Vision-Armenia manual to work with men, women and youth in the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of prenatal sex selection](#). Promundo: Washington, DC, USA; World Vision Armenia: Yerevan, Armenia.

Organisations like Promundo, Plan International and World Vision⁸ consider co-facilitation by a man and a woman as an ideal practice to cope with the risks of single-sex programme delivery with boys. There is also an agreement that the facilitator's skills is a more important factor than their gender and that female facilitators can efficiently engage male participants.⁹ However, instances of programmes engaging adolescent boys resorting to female facilitators or co-facilitators are scarce. Nonetheless, the need to integrate women's experiences and women's figures in programme engaging men and boys is more and more highlighted as a matter of accountability.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that both grey and academic literature suggest that different models can be applied to different settings and be equally successful. However, the characteristics of the different settings and the different solutions that can be applied to each remain unclear.

Working with the partners on the Hummingbird Raise coalition provided ECF an opportunity to compare how do these two factors: delivery of the programme in single-sex groups, and sessions being facilitated by both male and female facilitators, affect its core programme - Action for Equality. Background information

Since 2009, ECF has been implementing Action for equality (AfE), an action-research group education programme engaging adolescent boys to prevent gender-based violence in 20 low-income communities of Pune, Maharashtra. AfE is a 15 session programme articulated around the following themes: human rights, gender norms, sexuality and the different forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. The programme aims at providing knowledge of gender equality and skills to identify and challenge inequitable gender norms. As the success of AfE requires to create an environment in which participants share personal experiences and reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours towards gender, the quality of the facilitation and the choice of the facilitators is a crucial factor to ensure the programme achieves its outcomes.

Until today, AfE has been implemented with single-sex groups of adolescent boys, and facilitated exclusively by male facilitators. In 2014, ECF along with the Hummingbird Foundation launched the Hummingbird Raise project with the goal to scale up the AfE model through partner organisations in West Bengal. Until now 12 partner organisations have been involved in this process. It is remarkable that the selected partner organisations have implemented AfE under various conditions: three organisations have worked with boys and male facilitators; five partners have worked with adolescent boys and relied on both female and male facilitators in different communities; three partners have worked only with female facilitators and single-sex groups of boys. These variations have been mostly due to organisational constraints, since most of the partners have been historically relying on female staff for their other programmes. One partner made a conscious choice to implement the programme with mixed-sex groups with a team of both male and female facilitators.

⁸ See the following manuals: *Yaari Dosti: Young Men redefine masculinity* published by Population Council, New Delhi, CORO for Literacy, Mumbai, MAMTA, New Delhi and Instituto Promundo, Rio de Janeiro, *Caring for Equality* published by Menengage, Promundo and World Vision; *Manual for facilitators 'Changing the world'* published by Plan.

⁹ "Our collective experience suggests that the qualities of the facilitator — the ability of a facilitator, man or woman, to engage a group, to listen to them, to inspire them — are far more important than the sex of the facilitator." page 17, Page 17, *Yaari Dosti Manual*, *ibid.*.

"However, other experiences suggest that a male or female facilitator's skills – their capacity for mobilising the group, for listening to the members and for motivating them – is much more important than their sex." Ppage 7, "Changing the world" Manual, *ibid.*

¹⁰ *Men as Allies in Preventing Violence against Women: Principles and Practices for Promoting Accountability*, Bob Pease, White Ribbon Research Series, March 2017

This situation has raised questions about the effects of working with female facilitators on the rapport built with participants and stakeholders, and more generally the delivery of Action for Equality. ECF has used the opportunity provided by Hummingbird Raise to investigate how the gender of the facilitator makes a difference when implementing its core programme.

Research questions

Considering the fact that majority of the organisations in the sector of gender equality currently have female staff at the grassroots, this research aims to investigate this comparison and provide recommendations on what organisations need to look at when engaging adolescents, particularly boys, in a gender transformative programme like Action for Equality.

It is based on two hypotheses:

- 1) First, existing gender norms are likely to create barriers when female facilitators engage male participants and community stakeholders. Therefore, we will investigate what are these barriers in the context of Action for Equality implementation under Hummingbird Raise.
- 2) Secondly, female facilitators can overcome these barriers partially as gender is not the sole factor that influences the rapport between the facilitator and participants. We can ask: Were the female facilitators able to overcome the barriers related to gender when building rapport with adolescent boys and community stakeholders? What are the factors that explain their success or failure in overcoming these barriers?

Methodology

Surveys

In order to collect experiences from the Hummingbird Raise coalition, a survey was developed and distributed during the 7th Peer-Learning Workshop lead by ECF on 6th February 2017. The survey included multiple choice and open questions. The survey questions were divided into four parts:

- 1) Basic information about the respondent's profile and experience
- 2) Challenges experienced by facilitators when implementing Hummingbird Raise and perception of facilitators by participants
- 3) Specific challenges related to the implementation of the Action for Equality curriculum
- 4) Specific challenges related to stakeholder engagement and perception of facilitators by stakeholders, with a focus on participants' parents

In total, 38 facilitators, 16 male and 21 female, have filled the survey.

Group discussions

During the workshop, facilitators, coordinators and managers were given the opportunity to discuss in small groups about their responses to the questionnaire. Groups summarized their discussions on flipcharts which have been included in the analysis.

A session on findings

The main conclusions were shared with the partners of Hummingbird Raise at the 8th Peer-Learning Workshop on 4th May 2017. On this occasion, partners had the opportunity to share their reactions to the findings. Their reflections have been included in the analysis.

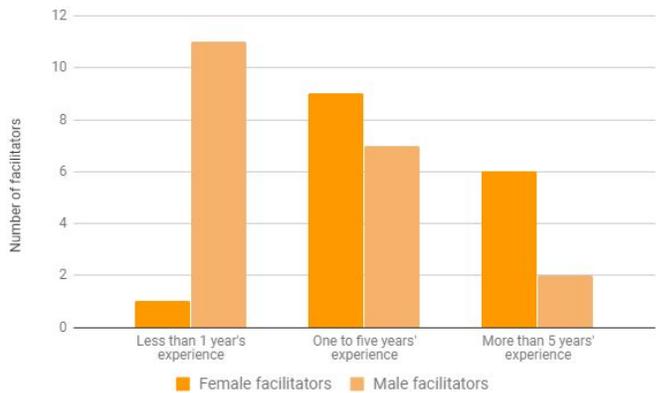
Key findings from the analysis

Difference between male and female facilitators

Finding 1: *Within the group, female facilitators were more experienced than male facilitators.*

Experience of facilitation

Among the respondents, female facilitators were more experienced than their male counterparts. Six female facilitators out of sixteen had more than five years experience in facilitation and nine had between 1 to 5 years experience. Only one female facilitator from the group had less than a year's experience. On the contrary, only two male facilitators had more than five years experience, seven had between 1 to 5 years experience and 11 had less than a year's experience, which means they had not implemented a programme similar to Action for Equality before. However, this gap in experience between male and female facilitators needs to be nuanced by the fact that only four female facilitators had at least three years of experience of working with adolescent boys.



Experience of programmes for prevention of gender-based violence

Similarly, while twelve female facilitators had already worked for programmes related to prevention of gender-based violence, only nine male facilitators out of 21 had a similar experience.

These differences in levels of experience of facilitation and in the field of prevention of gender-based violence has certainly been a major factor influencing survey responses, as explained throughout this report.

Finding 2: *Male and female facilitators faced similar challenges when implementing Action for Equality Programme.*

100% of male facilitators and 87.5% of female facilitators identified retaining the interest of participants throughout the session as the biggest challenge.

Overall female facilitators reported they faced less challenges than male facilitators throughout the programme: on average 60% of female facilitators and 80% of male facilitators said they faced challenges sometimes or often when facilitating the AfE sessions.

Overall male and female facilitators reported similar challenges. The biggest challenge

identified by both groups was to retain the interest of participants throughout a session - 100% of male facilitators and 87.5% of female facilitators. Debates and knowledge-based discussions were specifically seen as challenging and harder to facilitate in a lively manner. Maintaining control of the group was also a major challenge for both groups - 75% of male and female facilitators. The least challenging aspect was to facilitate fun activities for both groups - 60% of male facilitators and 25% of female facilitators.

These results are surprising, they contradict our assumption that female facilitators would face more challenges when engaging adolescent boys. Considering that female respondents had a longer experience of both facilitation and programmes related to prevention of gender-based violence as compared to male facilitator, we may assume that experience has enabled the female facilitators to overcome potential challenges related to their gender.

Finding 3: Collecting experiences from participants was a challenge specific to male facilitators

One interesting difference in the experience reported by facilitators is that collecting and discussing participants' personal experiences and observations was considered more challenging by male facilitators as compared to female facilitators - 56.25% of female facilitators and 80.95% of male facilitators.

Collecting and discussing participants' personal experiences and observations was considered more challenging by male facilitators as compared to female facilitators.

The fact that it has been easier for female facilitators to collect participants' experience may be interpreted as an effect of gender, women tending to be perceived as caring figures according to gender stereotypes. This reveals that gender can also be an advantage for female facilitators working with boys on specific objectives of the programme i.e. generate reflection on masculinity.

Finding 4: Facilitating sessions on sexuality was a common challenge for male and female facilitators

Facilitators were also asked to reflect on their experience of facilitating each module of the Action for Equality curriculum.

Overall, responses did not suggest a strong gender barrier for female facilitators. The modules that were identified as most challenging were the same for both male and female facilitators. The two modules which were identified as most challenging were the modules related to sexuality: 50% of female respondents and

Modules related to sexuality were identified as most challenging by both male and female facilitators.

43% of male respondents though the module on *Gendering of sexuality* was "Hard" or "Very hard" to implement. The module on *Adolescent changes* was considered challenging by 25% of female facilitators and 33% of male facilitators.

Sessions on sexuality were difficult to implement by both male and female facilitators. Based on the workshops conducted with the same group, we can say that this difficulty is partly due to a lack of knowledge and training on this issue, as workshop participants regularly mentioned the need for more training and information throughout the duration of the Hummingbird Raise project.

Results suggest that there is no specific disadvantage for female facilitators to talk about sexuality to adolescent boys. The fact that the group of female facilitators was formed mostly by experienced fieldworkers could explain this. However, it is still concerning that half of the facilitators consider talking on sexuality as challenging as it is one of the core issues of AfE. It is worth considering that based on the anecdotes shared by the programme team members who did frequent field visits, the facilitators' personal inhibitions acted as the biggest barrier when conducting sessions on adolescent changes.

“ ... the facilitators' personal inhibitions acted as the biggest barrier when conducting sessions on adolescent changes. ”

Finding 5: Encouraging participants to take action was an aspect that was more challenging for female facilitators

Female facilitators report a higher level of difficulty when implementing two modules that are both action oriented. The module “Taking action” which invites participants to reflect on the role they can take to prevent gender-based violence was considered “Hard” or “Very Hard” by 5 female facilitators (31%) and only 1 male facilitator (5%). The final Action Event during which participants talk about gender issues in front of their community members was also considered relatively more difficult by female facilitators as 3 female facilitators considered it was “Hard” or “Very Hard” to implement, whereas all male facilitators considered it was “Easy” or “Reasonably easy”.

We can assume that the gender factor has played a role in the delivery of these two modules. On one hand, suggesting actions to take, to male participants might be more difficult for a female facilitator. Thus, the actions that a woman or a man would take to challenge gender norms are likely to be different, considering they have endorsed different gender roles and power positions. A female facilitator suggesting actions that male participants can take might feel or be perceived as less credible than a male facilitator who can suggest actions he has already taken in the past as a man challenging gender norms. On the other hand, we can hypothesise that participants were less ready to follow actions suggested by a female facilitator, considering this existing power structure that does not place women in leading positions. Lastly, the reaction of community stakeholders to a female facilitator leading the organisation of a public event might also have been challenging, as women are not expected to leave the domestic sphere according to the gender norms that are prominent in these communities.

All the three above hypotheses would require to be verified either through in-depth interviews with male and female facilitators, and through additional inputs from participants and community stakeholders.

Finding 6: *Male and female facilitators did not report much difference in the way they think participants perceive them.*

Responses from multiple choice questions

Facilitators were asked how they think their participants in Hummingbird Raise perceive them. Female and male facilitators did not report drastically different rapport with their participants. Most male and female facilitators reported they were seen as a friendly and trustworthy figure, and around 50% of each group thought they were perceived as teachers.

However, the results to this question highlight differences that are important to analyse from a gender perspective. One contradiction is that while 95% of male facilitators thought the participants saw them as a person they can share their problems with and as a friend, 19% of female facilitators said they were not perceived in that manner, suggesting it was relatively harder for female facilitators to build close and equal relationships. A bigger proportion of male facilitators thought they were seen as someone who is respected

One contradiction is that while 95% of male facilitators thought the participants saw them as a person they can share their problems with and as a friend, 81% of female facilitators suggested that it was relatively harder for female facilitators to build close and equal relationships.

and obeyed: 71% of male facilitators and 56% of female participants. This difference can be explained by the social expectations towards women of both participants and facilitators themselves. On one hand, the adolescent boys might have been less ready to accept authority from a female facilitator. On the other hand, female facilitators may tend not to perceive themselves as authoritative or legitimate to resort to authority, and consequently use a different facilitation style.

Lastly, both male and female facilitators thought they were perceived as role models for participants, with a slightly higher proportion for female facilitators: 81% for female and 71% for male. It is surprising that female facilitators thought participants identify with them. However, it is possible that the way facilitators describe themselves is biased by the way they expect or would like participants to perceive them in the context of the programme. Open questions' responses need to be considered in order to analyze this point further.

Responses to open questions

Responses to the open questions in the survey provide qualitative data about how facilitators think participants perceive them. It is interesting to note that the comments provided by male and female facilitators suggest a different relationship with participants, which was not revealed by closed responses. Comments suggest that different social expectations from male and female facilitators have influenced the rapport built with the participants.

About role modeling, some male facilitators gave examples that suggest participants imitate them:

“They listen to whatever I say and they want to implement them in their own life. Example - if I say I have cooked at home before coming here, they also cook at their home on the next day.”

“They behave like me, whatever I do they try to copy that.”

Unlike male facilitators, female facilitators describe more hierarchical relationships and refer to love and respect as main aspects of their rapport with participants:

“They know that their didi (big sister) has all the answers to their questions.”

“They love me and they think they can get their answers from me.”

“They talk to me with respect.”

One female facilitator mentioned that being seen sometimes as a source of knowledge of information is a problem: *“So we share a relation like teacher and students.”*

The above comments given by female facilitators suggest a one-way relationship with participants. They are seen either as family members (i.e. mother or sister) or as persons who deserve a special treatment, which is likely to prevent them from developing an equal relationship with the participants. The word “love” can indicate a motherly relationship.

Open responses suggest that role modeling is much less obvious in the case of female facilitators. However, being a male facilitator does not mean being automatically considered as a model. Other factors like religion can limit the effect of having a male facilitator:

“I work in a Muslim belt but I am not a Muslim person. They like someone who has DAARI and ISLAMIC education (HULIA). A person who believe in 5 times NAMAZ.”

Overall, open responses indicate that it was easier for participants to identify with a male facilitator, providing that the male facilitator had also a social and cultural background which was close to the participant’s background.

Responses from group discussions

Results from the survey with facilitators can also be nuanced by other sources of information. Even though the survey responses show minor differences in the rapport of male or female facilitators with participants, group discussions which happened during the same Peer-Learning workshop reported challenges based on the gender of the facilitator.

Out of six groups who discussed the challenges of facilitators related to gender, three have mentioned challenges specific to female facilitators. Two groups reported that participants tend to ask more provocative (the groups used the words “excessive”, “irritating”, “irrelevant”) questions to female mentors, especially during sessions related to sexuality. This was confirmed by female facilitators during the discussion on findings. However, one must question whether the challenges expressed are due to the participants’ attitudes or the female facilitator’s confidence level and acceptance of gender norms. Comments from the groups indicate that both factors are important. On one hand the participant’s inequitable and stereotypical attitudes affect the credibility of the facilitator and the openness of participants towards female facilitators :

“Many times they [participants] feel that, if the facilitator talking about respecting women or equality is a woman, then they don’t pay attention to it.”

“Yes, they don’t want to talk openly in front of some female mentors.”

On the other hand, comments also indicate that the facilitator’s own beliefs and attitudes related to gender can be a barrier:

“As I am a woman, they sometimes ask irrelevant or excessive questions during the discussions of reproduction system or female organs.”

We may wonder what is meant by “irrelevant” or “excessive” as questions on female sexual organs do seem adapted to a session on bodily changes. It is likely that female facilitators have inhibitions to talk about reproductive health with young boys that can explain their embarrassment. However, a smaller proportion of male facilitators have mentioned participants asking invasive questions, even though it was a less prominent problem for them.

As suggested by the surveys, respondents reported in their group discussions that male facilitators develop friendly relationships with their participants more easily. One solution for female facilitators to build rapport with the participants is to make efforts to be perceived as a friend, which is not a given in their case. Several female facilitators have also mentioned being more friendly as a technique and a requirement to implement the programme successfully:

“I tried to become friendlier with those particular participants so that they start sharing about their personal issues.”

“After I tried to become friendlier, they started sharing their personal things with me, and I started talking with them accordingly. I understood and applied it in conducting the session through different kinds of games.”

Observations on field

Throughout the implementation of the Hummingbird Raise project, Equal Community Foundation has organised field visits on a monthly basis during which sessions facilitated by partner organisations were observed. ECF team reported that participants tend to perceive female facilitators as motherly figures rather than friendly figures. This is especially true for older facilitators in the group. They also reported cases of younger facilitators who managed to develop a close relationship with their participants, which led to some participants becoming intrusive in the facilitator's life including outside sessions.

Finding 7: Female facilitators being perceived as those who challenge patriarchal structure acted as a barrier.

The primary stakeholders identified by survey respondents in the context of Hummingbird Raise were parents and other family members, school teachers, members of local clubs, self-help groups, panchayat members, local politicians and other influential figures and representatives of child-oriented government schemes (i.e. Integrated Child Development Services, Child Protection Unit).

Generally speaking, facilitators described their rapport with stakeholders as positive. A great majority of both male and female facilitators reported they were seen by stakeholders as a nice person, a person who can be trusted, and a well-known person in the community. However, results for male and female facilitators vary for other aspects. More female facilitators declared they were perceived as a teacher figure by the stakeholders (62.5% female facilitators and 43% male facilitators), which confirms observations from the facilitators' comments and field visits.

Also, a higher proportion of female facilitators thought they were considered both as social leaders (69% female facilitators against 52% male facilitators) and as a person who creates disturbance in the community (44% for female respondents against only 19% for male respondents).

We can hypothesise that the gender of facilitators is an explanatory factor for these differences. The fact that a woman implements a programme aiming at changing gender norms, especially with adolescent boys, is likely to be considered as challenging or perceived as someone dismantling the patriarchal system. Therefore generating more reactions, favorable or unfavorable, by community stakeholders. The fact that female facilitators are more often seen as teachers could reflect their relationship with participants as explained previously. It could also result from the fact that female respondents were older than male respondents.

Interaction with parents

Survey responses related to the rapport with parents showed contradictions. Male facilitators reported they felt less comfortable engaging parents as compared to female facilitators: 66% of male facilitators and 56% of female facilitators said that they were not comfortable engaging parents either sometimes or often. Considering the fact that the parents engaged were mostly mothers, as fathers spend most of their time outside in the communities where the programme is implemented, it is likely that male facilitators found it more challenging to engage mothers, which was confirmed during the discussion of findings with respondents.

Another interesting element is that female facilitators reported more often to have encountered resistance from parents. This can be explained by the gender bias of both mothers and fathers, the same bias previously identified in participants, which makes a woman defending gender equality less credible than a man sharing the same ideas.

Conclusions

The findings from the present research are specific to the Action for Equality Programme.

Hypothesis 1: Existing gender norms are likely to create barriers when female facilitators engage male participants

Overall, this hypothesis has been challenged by the findings which showed that male and female facilitators faced similar challenges in their work. The main challenge identified by both groups was related to sessions on biological changes in adolescence and sexuality. Male and female facilitators reported a lack of knowledge to facilitate these sessions and embarrassment when discussing with participants, even though these sessions happen six weeks after the beginning of the programme. Considering that in the sample, female facilitators were more experienced in facilitation and programmes related to gender-based violence as compared to male facilitators, **we can assume that the experience factor has had more weight than the gender factor in the specific context of this programme.**

Nevertheless, the hypothesis has been partially verified as female facilitators have reported specific challenges and experiences that can be explained by the gender factor. Open responses suggested that the rapport built by facilitators was different for male and female facilitators and influenced by gender stereotypes as **it required more efforts for female facilitators to build close relationships with participants** and be considered as credible figure in front of participants and stakeholders.

It is interesting that being a female facilitator has also been an advantage for some aspects of the programme such as mothers' engagement. An important learning lesson that can be taken from this study is that **gender norms are not systematically barriers for women fieldworkers working for programmes on gender equality.**

Hypothesis 2 Female facilitators can overcome these barriers partially as gender is not the sole actor that influences the rapport between the facilitator and participants

This hypothesis has been partially verified by the study as the responses collected suggest that female facilitators have developed strategies to overcome gender-based barriers when engaging adolescent boys, such as making efforts to come out of their image of teacher and be more accessible.

However, evidence about these strategies has remained limited. Responses from both female and male facilitators, as well as the discussion on findings with representatives of all management levels, have revealed that partner organisations of the Hummingbird Raise programme have not had the opportunity to reflect on the implications of the facilitator's gender on their programme before the study. Therefore, the reflection of partners on this question has remained at the initial stage. This is probably due to the fact that most of them have been working with mixed groups of boys and girls for their other programmes. There is a need for partner organisations to build their awareness and identify specific training needs for female facilitators who work with young boys.

Recommendations for practitioners

ECF advocates that both male or female facilitators can implement Action for Equality successfully as it considers gender barriers can and should be overcome in order to challenge inequitable gender norms. We

also recognise that since gender is not the only component that affects effectiveness of programme and related activities; and merit and skills of the facilitators are more important. However, gender norms and stereotypes do have an impact on the rapport facilitators build with the participants, and ultimately on the outcomes brought by Action for Equality.

On the basis of this study, as well as on the lessons learnt throughout Hummingbird Raise, ECF makes the following recommendations for organisations implementing similar programmes with male and female facilitators in order to strengthen their capacity.

- Create an environment where facilitators can consistently challenge their own perception of gender and gender norms.
- Encourage both male and female facilitators to reflect on the impact of existing gender norms and stereotypes on the rapport they build with participants.
- To implement a gender transformative programme, all facilitators must be able to analyse and be conscious of how gender norms affect their own expectations and facilitation style, as well as the expectations and perceptions of participants. Such reflections and discussions can happen during internal workshops.
- Ensure the facilitation styles adopted by male and female facilitators do not perpetuate existing gender norms by organising regular field visits and self-assessment by facilitators. Specific questions to monitor this aspect might be addressed during professional reviews and added to field report templates.
- Methods used to engage adolescents and stakeholders, may need to be modified based on the gender of the facilitator.
- Conduct trainings on the basis of the challenges identified during field visits, workshops and professional reviews. These trainings will aim to build solutions to limit inhibitions related to gender within the team of facilitators and ensure they showcase gender equitable attitudes and behaviours during sessions.

Recommendations for further research

The findings that emerged from the data collected from facilitators require to be triangulated by inputs from programme participants and stakeholders.

It would also be interesting to put the present findings in perspective by conducting a survey on the facilitator's own attitudes towards gender and assessing whether these attitudes had an influence on responses to the survey of this study.

As the data collected for this research suggests that other factors than gender can have an influence on the delivery of the programme, it would be interesting to understand the weight of these other factors as compared to the gender factor. Factors that could be considered are the age of the facilitator, their religion and duration of their tenure in the same community.

