



“I now realize that practices I once considered normal are so harmful to women and girls”

– how Protection Committees are collectively changing harmful gender norms in Nigeria

November, 2024

Background

In Northeast Nigeria, the protracted conflict instigated by Boko Haram insurgency has severely impacted the lives of people living in the region. Livelihoods are affected, people report feeling unsafe, and women and girls face increased risks of gender-based violence (GBV). Informed by evidence from around the globe, the project was prepared to face rising numbers of child, early and forced marriages, and female genital mutilation in the region.

The prevention component of the project works with communities to address harmful norms and support communities to define what positive shift means to them, and then own the shift. As part of this, the project set up a local resource – **Protection Committees**.

Martawa Zuromaye

People living in northeast Nigeria have endured varying levels of armed conflict since 2009. This has severely impacted their lives and exacerbated gender-based violence (GBV) in the region, including harmful practices such as Early and Forced Marriage (EFM) and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).

The five-year project – Martawa Zuromaye (‘Dignity and Security’ in the Kanuri language), implemented in Yobe state northeast Nigeria, is focused on addressing and reducing these different forms of GBV in the region. Through generous support from the US Department of State, Secretary’s Office for Global Women Affairs (S/GWI), CARE, in partnership with local organizations Trauma Healing Support Initiative (THSI) and African Youth for Peace Development and Empowerment Foundation (AFRYDEV) implemented this project to address the root causes of GBV and strengthen individuals’ capacity to address GBV, mobilize community action to challenge negative gender norms that perpetuate violence, and support advocacy at the state level to strengthen existing laws.

ACRONYMS USED

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| CEFM | Child, Early and Forced Marriage |
| FGM/C | Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting |
| PC | Protection Committee |

What is a Protection Committee?

It is a community-based group of people who have volunteered to lead and be champions for community engagement activities, that aim to speak to the harmful practices and norms and uproot them. The committee leads awareness around different forms of GBV, and its consequences, especially focusing on CEFM and FGM/C. Committee members are nominated from each community.

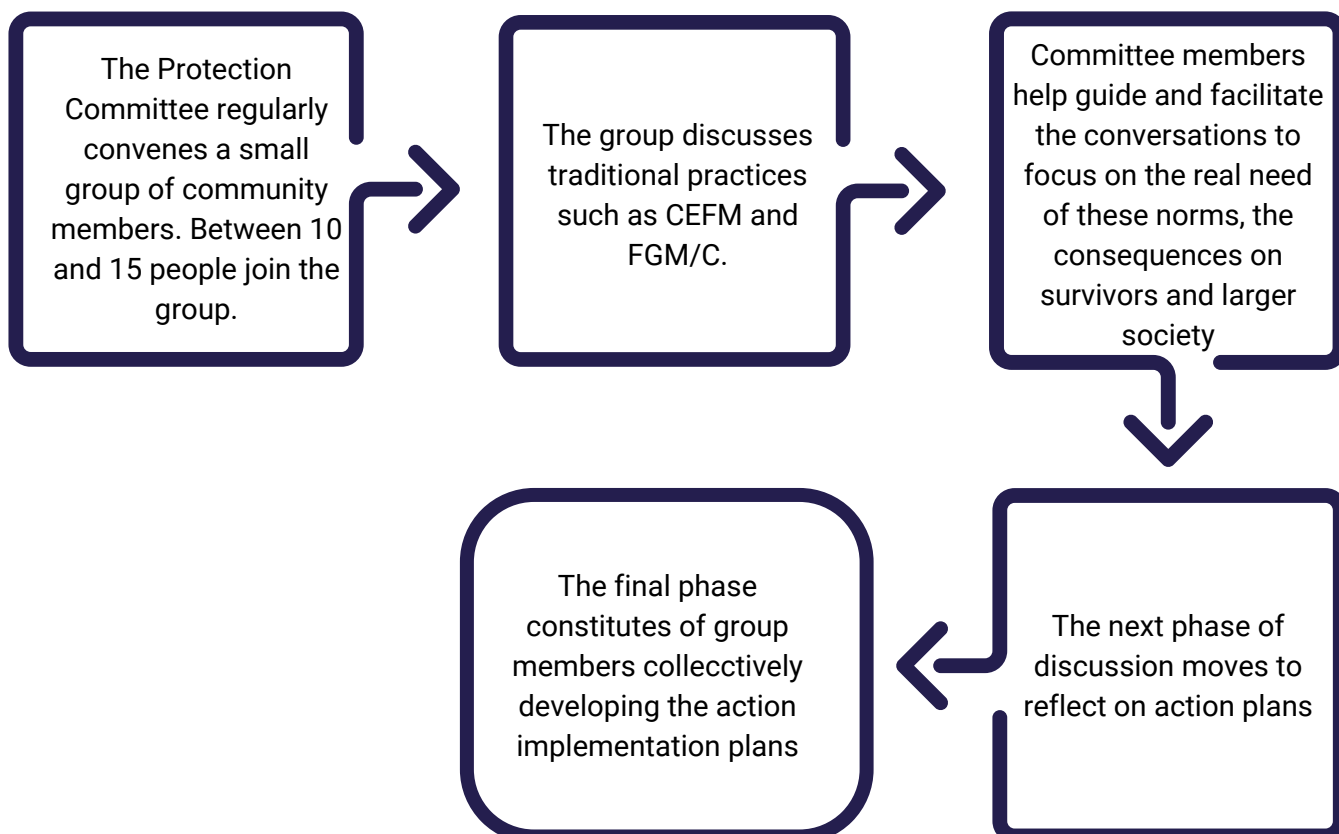
The project has 12 members per site, of whom 7 are women and 5 men. All committee members are trained by the project in a survivor centred approach. They are trained using CARE's Social Analysis and Action (SAA) model. Additional training and awareness are organized for the Protection Committee as required.

SAA: It is CARE's signature approach to gender transformation programming. CARE extensively uses SAA to facilitate individuals exploring and challenging social norms, beliefs, and practices that shapes their lives.



For instance, in early 2024 all Committee members were trained on the relevant national laws and other international legal frameworks that protect the interest of women and girls. The Committees focus on strengthening community-based protection mechanisms at grass root level since communities play a crucial role in creating a protective environment for children, women, and other vulnerable members.

What does a Protection Committee typically do?



The entire cycle usually takes up a few sessions, spanning over three months. Also, as per need and ask, they also connect women and girls with appropriate GBV referral services.

Secret of success of the Protection Committee

The main strength of the Protection Committee stems from the fact that they are part of the community. The other community people do not see them as outsiders, and thus acceptance is high. The Committee members are local and are thus positioned to identify key protection risks affecting the larger community. It knows when to prioritize some concern or issue and are able to respond to real issues on the ground. As they are aware of events and experiences within the community, they are able to successfully leverage the trust of fellow people.

The training I received as a Protection Committee member gave me the opportunity to understand, reflect on and disseminate the fundamental causes of GBV and how much it affected the people in our communities. ~Aisha, a 35-year-old woman.

How is the Protection Committee impacting the project outcomes?

- Committee members themselves have demonstrated positive shifts in knowledge and perception towards harmful gender norms.
- The Committee identified key protection risks for the community. They raised awareness on these issues and organized and led community dialogues aimed to tackle risks against women, girls and children.
- The Committee has shouldered the responsibility of connecting people facing protection concerns with appropriate services.
- Women from the community have reported feeling more confident than before to speak up against harmful norms, even talking about 'taboo' topics, because of the safer ecosystem set in place by the Committee.
- Committees systematically downstream their training and awareness to the fellow community members. The learnings of the legal awareness session soon became weaved into the weekly sensitization campaigns for the community members. This has helped the project increase its impact in a short time.
- The Committees have facilitated commitment for communities to take action on issues that impact on their development through local level advocacy against ingrained harmful norms through awareness raising, sensitization and accountability sessions with power holders.



For more information, contact:

Rakhi Ghoshal, Director, GBV, Gender Justice, CARE, Rakhi.Ghoshal@care.org
Ozigi Abdullahj, GBV Project Coordinator - Yobe State, CARE Nigeria, Ozigi.Abdullahi@care.org
Designed by: Mmabatho Oke, Knowledge Management and Communications Lead, Gender Justice, CARE mmabatho.motsamai@care.org

