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Deep Dive:

A Country-Specific Exploration of Evidence Addressing Gender Norms through Programming with Men and Boys in Kenya

Deep Dive Report on Social Norms Evidence Review (Kenya)

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List of Interventions

Faith and Cultural Champion Programmes				
Programme/ Organisation Name	Type of Initiative	Organisation Name	Primary Outcome Area	Description
Koota Injena	Intervention	African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF)	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Mobilised community champions to end child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation among pastoralist communities in northern Kenya through public declarations and intergenerational dialogues
Nitasimama Imara Initiative	Programme	United Nations Population Fund	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Conducted public rallies and peer-led campaigns to end female genital mutilation and promote gender equality among adolescents in Elgeyo Marakwet County
Plan International - Tharaka Nithi	Initiative	Plan International	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Implemented alternative rites of passage in Tharaka Nithi to replace female genital mutilation with community-sanctioned, non-harmful coming-of-age ceremonies
Unesco Rallying Faith Social Media Campaign	Campaign	UNESCO	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Brought together Christian and Muslim faith councils and congregations to publicly affirm girls' autonomy and safety through coordinated messaging
Save the Children Islamic Leader Engagement	Initiative	Save the Children	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Convened respected Islamic scholars to reinterpret religious texts through tafsir sessions and public forums to challenge justifications for child marriage
Msichana Empowerment Initiative - Child, Early and Forced Marriage Programming	Programme	Msichana Empowerment Kuria (MEK)	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Prevented female genital mutilation and child marriage by combining community education, legal support, and faith engagement to protect girl survivors
Msichana Empowerment Initiative - Gender Based Violence	Programme	Msichana Empowerment Initiative	Gender-Based Violence	Organised community-led sessions to challenge gender-based violence, especially targeting the safety and dignity of girls in Kuria

Nyanza Initiative for Girls Education and Empowerment	Organisation	Nyanza Initiative	Gender-Based Violence	Community engagement to challenge gender-based violence and child, early and forced marriage through education and empowerment
Channels of Hope	Intervention	World Vision	Gender-Based Violence	Promoted child protection and norm-shifting around harmful practices through storytelling and community mobilisation
Positive Masculinity Program	Programme	Institute for Faith and Gender Empowerment (IFAGE)	Gender-Based Violence	Faith and community-based dialogues engaging men and boys to end gender-based violence and promote empathy and care
Islamic Relief Kenya	Organisation	Islamic Relief Services	Gender-Based Violence	Used Islamic teachings to integrate gender-based violence prevention in humanitarian settings while advancing women's economic resilience
Inter-Religious Council of Kenya - Gender- Based Violence initiative	Initiative	Interreligious Council of Kenya	Gender-Based Violence	Facilitated interfaith dialogues across Christian and Muslim leaders to challenge gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage in diverse counties
Inter-Religious Council of Kenya - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Initiative	Initiative	Interreligious Council of Kenya	Gender-Based Violence	Brought together multi-faith actors to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and prevent gender-based violence and early marriage through local and national convenings
Kenyan Religious Leaders Meeting	Initiative	UNESCO	Gender-Based Violence	Brought together Catholic, Protestant, and interfaith leaders, supported by UNESCO and UN partners, to unite against HIV, gender-based violence, and adolescent pregnancy through coordinated advocacy and community action
Transforming Maternal and Child Health Through Faith Leadership	Programme	ACT Alliance	Gender-Based Violence	Mobilised regional faith-based organisations and civil society actors to address gender-based violence and HIV using shared advocacy and transformative masculinities
Man Enough	Programme	Man Enough	Gender-Based Violence	Used storytelling and workshops in Christian communities to promote co-leadership and redefine masculinity around partnership and care

Kilifi Boy Child Initiative	Organisation	Kilifi Boy Child Initiative	Gender-Based Violence	Trained men and boys from boda boda riders to elders to become positive masculinity champions and promote gender-based violence prevention
Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action	Initiative	Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action	Gender-Based Violence	Engaged Christian and Muslim leaders to lead advocacy on gender equality and reproductive rights within faith institutions
Kenya Voluntary Service Organisation	Organisation	Kenya Voluntary Service Organisation	Gender-Based Violence	Supported adolescent girls and young women through psychosocial support, community prevention, and survivor services targeting female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and child, early and forced marriage
Gender and Development Programme	Programme	Caritas	Gender-Based Violence	Ran mentorship programmes with Catholic Men's Association and Beacon Boys Programme to promote respectful, responsible masculinities and family care
Channels of Hope	Organisation	World Vision	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Used scripture-based reflections and training of religious leaders to integrate gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights messaging in faith spaces
Faith to Action Network	Organisation	Faith to Action Network	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Engaged faith leaders to support adolescent and reproductive health rights through advocacy, research, and joint mobilisation
Health and Leadership Training Program	Programme	Kakenya's Dream	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Combined sexual and reproductive health and rights with faith-informed community norms and practices, supporting education and advocacy to reduce harmful practices
Bread For the World Project	Project	Christian Health Association of Kenya	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Strengthened reproductive health and nutrition services across 60 health facilities in 15 counties through church-linked health advocacy and male engagement
RHNK Advocacy Approaches	Programmes	Reproductive Health Network Kenya	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Strengthened community awareness and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services among youth through faith-driven campaigns and interfaith collaboration

Zamara Foundation	Organisation	Zamara Foundation	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Advocated for adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence prevention using faith networks to legitimize and scale gender-transformative messaging
Youth for Health	Programme	MSI Reproductive Choices	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Expanded sexual and reproductive health and rights access for adolescent girls in hard-to-reach areas, promoting policy reform and youth-led advocacy with faith-based framing
GROOTS Kenya	Organisation	Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS)	Women's Economic Empowerment	Worked with rural women farmers, male elders, and local chiefs to challenge norms limiting women's economic roles using cooperatives and indigenous knowledge
Gender Roundtable Discussions	Initiative	Buildher	Women's Economic Empowerment	Equipped young women with technical construction skills and engaged employers and male allies to promote gender inclusion in trades
Entertainment Media Programmes				
Programme/ Organisation Name	Type of Initiative	Organisation Name	Primary Outcome Area	Description
Community Radio Stories	Organisation	Association of Media Women in Kenya	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	This intervention by the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) uses community radio storytelling and participatory media production to highlight the lived experiences of girls and communities affected by child marriage and female genital mutilation. The trained journalists and youth correspondents, the programme amplifies survivor voices, challenges silence and cultural acceptance of harmful practices, and promotes community dialogue through broadcast and interactive platforms. It targets hard-to-reach and rural areas, using accessible language and culturally sensitive storytelling to shift norms and elevate protective attitudes."

Nawi: Dear Future Me	Film, Media	Baobab Pictures, Learning Lions, Malao	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	Nawi is a national short film and dialogue initiative that engages fathers and male caregivers in rethinking child marriage. Through emotional storytelling and reflection, the programme reframes masculinity around care, support, and education, encouraging men to see fatherhood as a source of protection through empowerment, not control.
FilmAid Kenya Media Hubs	Intervention	FilmAid	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	FilmAid's Media Hubs empower youth in Kakuma, Dadaab, and rural Kenya to create and share participatory stories that challenge harmful gender norms. By equipping young creators with tools and platforms, the programme fosters narrative ownership, peer accountability, and youth-led rejection of early marriage and male complicity.
The Cut	Film	Jackson Odiaga & Peter Wangugi Gitau	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	The Cut: Directed with input from child protection groups, this Swahili-language feature dramatizes a boy's effort to save his sister from female genital mutilation and early marriage. It positions boyhood as a space for protective agency, featuring male protagonists who reject harmful traditions in favour of education and freedom.
Women's Radio Listening Groups	Initiative	Unknown	Gender-Based Violence	This intervention engages women through local radio listening groups that create safe spaces for dialogue on gender equality, economic inclusion, and women's rights. The programmes raise awareness on issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive health, and livelihoods while also providing practical solutions and community resources.

Safer Campus Initiative	Intervention	UNESCO	Gender-Based Violence	The Safer Campus Initiative is a gender-transformative programme designed to combat gender-based violence (gender-based violence) in Kenyan universities by targeting male students and their peer networks. Centred around the Respectful Peer and Responsible Bystander approach, the initiative empowers young men to move beyond passive observation and become vocal challengers of harmful behaviours such as sexual entitlement and normalised peer misconduct. Through participatory media, storytelling, and campus dialogues, the programme fosters peer accountability, encourages reflective masculinity, and strengthens reporting pathways.
Serian Radio Station	Film, Media	RetoWomen Association; Samburu Chapter	Gender-Based Violence	Serian Radio is a local-language drama and call-in programme in Northern Kenya that engages fathers and elders in rethinking masculinity and legacy. Through relatable storytelling and public dialogue, it reframes strength as supporting education and care, sparking intergenerational reflection on gender roles and community wellbeing.
STaRS	Research Intervention	AMREF & U-Tena	Gender-Based Violence	A seven-Women's Economic Empowerment participatory radio drama in Nairobi's informal settlements, STaRS uses skits, expert interviews, and community dialogues to break the silence around adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and gender norms. By modelling respectful parent-teen communication and peer reflection, it has increased knowledge, improved dialogue, and shifted expectations around consent and gender equity.

Your Voice Matters	Film, Media	Equality Now & Capital FM	Gender-Based Violence	A national talk-series broadcast across radio, TV, and online platforms, Your Voice Matters features youth and influencers debating sexual and reproductive health and rights, campus harassment, gender-based violence, and women's economic rights. By showcasing male and female voices calling out silence, demand accountability, and endorse progressive masculinities, the programme elevates peer-led norm disruption across digital and public spaces.
MTV Shuga	Intervention	MTV Staying Alive Foundation	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Through the award-winning drama series MTV Shuga, the MTV Staying Alive Foundation uses entertainment-education to equip young people with accurate, relatable, and culturally sensitive information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. The multimedia campaign comprising TV episodes, radio dramas, digital content, and peer outreach tackles issues such as HIV prevention, contraception, consent, transactional sex, and healthy relationships.
Shujaaz	Intervention	Shujaaz	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Shujaaz is a multimedia youth platform in Kenya that blends comic books, radio shows, and digital media to spark conversations and inspire young people to make positive life choices. Through relatable characters and storylines, it addresses topics like sexual and reproductive health, financial literacy, relationships, and gender equality, encouraging agency and open dialogue among adolescents.
Tukisonga	Social Media	Girl Effect	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Tukisonga is a multimedia youth campaign by Girl Effect that uses TV drama, podcasts, and digital storytelling to address sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic inclusion, and gender equality. Centred on youth voice and peer-led content, the campaign encourages agency, dialogue, and collective action among adolescents, particularly girls.

Legally Clueless	Podcast/Social Media	Adelle Onyango	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	Launched in 2019 by media personality Adelle Onyango, this audio (and video) podcast series invites candid conversations on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, consent, and economic empowerment, featuring guests across genders. By centring youth voice and encouraging men to share reflections, the podcast normalises peer-led accountability, open dialogue, and collective reflection, advancing a culture of respectful masculinity.
Filamu Dada	Initiative	Media Focus on Africa	Women's Economic Empowerment	Addresses gender equality by examining how stereotypical portrayals and gender segregation influence preferences for gendered media, toys, and roles, reinforcing traditional views on occupations, traits, and life aspirations.
Makutano Junction	Film, Media	Mediae Trust	Women's Economic Empowerment	Makutano Junction was a Kenyan educational TV drama that used engaging storylines to address real-life social issues. It focused on themes such as women's empowerment, household planning, gender and land rights, and food safety, influencing positive shifts in attitudes and behaviours among its viewers.
Creative Economy Practice	Initiative	Africa No Filter	Women's Economic Empowerment	The programme, delivered in partnership with Africa No Filter, is designed to empower African storytellers by equipping them with gender-equitable storytelling skills, shifting harmful gender norms around the roles of men and women in and outside the home, with the long-term goal of creating better health and economic outcomes for adolescent girls and young women.

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a country-specific deep dive conducted in Kenya by the Eastern Africa Gender, Social Norms and Agency Learning Collaborative, in partnership with the Center on Gender Equity and Health at the University of California San Diego. Developed in support of the Gates Foundation's Adolescent and Youth Learning Agenda, this deep dive explores how programming with men and boys is shifting social norms around masculinity to improve health and well-being outcomes for adolescent girls and young women. The review focuses on interventions that engage faith and cultural champions and use entertainment media to influence social expectations and behaviours across four key domains: women's economic empowerment, child, early, and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Our analysis draws on 44 norms-shifting interventions implemented across Kenya that engaged men and boys as influencers, reference groups, and allies in challenging harmful gender norms; of those, 29 focused on engaging faith and cultural champions and 15 focused on entertainment media. These interventions were identified through a desk review of grey literature, programme evaluations, internal reports, and community assessments. To contextualise findings and capture practice-based knowledge, the review also included a follow-up consultation with programme implementers and gender experts. Four participatory workshops further augmented the analysis process.

Findings from this deep dive indicate that faith and cultural champion interventions were most prevalent in gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights programming. These interventions typically engaged religious and cultural leaders to reinterpret scripture, promote moral legitimacy for alternative masculinities, and model equitable behaviours through public platforms. Entertainment media interventions, more commonly targeting youth in urban and peri-urban areas, used relatable storytelling, character identification, and repeated exposure across multimedia formats to disrupt dominant masculine ideals and promote care, accountability, and relational equity. Across both types of interventions, those that were the most effective positioned men not simply as participants, but as norm holders and potential co-creators of change.

Evidence from this deep dive also revealed several important implementation gaps. For example, many interventions did not clearly distinguish between engaging men, shifting masculine norms, and transforming gendered power relations, often conflating participation with norm change. Monitoring systems also lacked standardised indicators to assess social norm dynamics, and few interventions captured how changes in beliefs and behaviours can co-evolve. Notably, norms related to economic empowerment and control remain under-addressed, with women's economic empowerment emerging as the least targeted outcome area across interventions.

To strengthen the evidence base on norms-shifting work with men and boys in Kenya, we recommend:

- Clarifying intervention typologies and intent, distinguishing between engagement, norm-shifting, and structural transformation;
- Investing in norm-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks that are capable of tracking shifts in attitudes, behaviour change, and social norms reinforcement;
- Training and positioning male reference groups consisting of faith leaders and other community figures as norm stewards who can reinforce alternative masculinities within trusted environments;
- Using storytelling and media platforms to normalize and de-stigmatize emotionally open and equity-based masculine roles;
- Intentionally developing interventions focused on women's economic empowerment, including those that analyse provider-based masculine identities and financial control mechanisms; and
- Strategically integrating faith and cultural champions alongside entertainment media approaches, acknowledging the legitimacy of trusted community institutions while leveraging media for broad reach, emotional resonance, and generational relevance.

Introduction

Background

Across Kenya, adolescent girls and young women continue to face persistent barriers to health, safety, and economic opportunity (Langat et al., 2024). While the country has made progress through legal reforms and global commitments, social norms—**particularly those that shape expectations around masculinity and acceptable gender roles**—persist (World Bank Group, 2024; Oduor & Odhiambo, 2010). These norms (see **Box 1**) are ingrained early and reinforced by families, peers, institutions, and media. They govern what it means to be a man, and by extension, what it means to be in control, often at the expense of young girls and women’s autonomy (Decker et al., 2021). In many households and communities, men are expected to make major decisions, manage household resources, and protect family reputation. These expectations can restrict girls’ access to education, contraception, and income and often justify practices such as child marriage, gender-based violence or economic exclusion (Mekuno Project, n.d.).

Yet, norms which define and dictate appropriate masculine traits and expressions are not fixed. Indeed, evidence suggests that norms around masculine identity are dynamic and expectations that men have of themselves and of other men can change through targeted male engagement and transformative interventions (Generation Gender [Equimundo], 2024; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). Cultural, religious and community-based leaders as well as the media are playing an increasingly visible role in shaping public narratives around gender (Khalaf-Elledge, 2021). And while their influence makes them powerful agents in sustaining these norms, they can also be at the forefront of shifting the norms that govern gender roles, relationships, and expectations, and contribute to improved health and well-being outcomes for men, women, and families.

In Kenya, interventions are increasingly engaging men and boys as part of broader efforts to advance gender equality and improve health and well-being. Some of these operate within a narrow frame, centring individual change or allyship, while others push further, seeking to disrupt entrenched norms and power dynamics that affect both women and men. For example, some interventions emphasize raising awareness and fostering supportive attitudes among men and boys, what is often categorized as male engagement. These efforts might include encouraging men to accompany partners to health clinics or participate in parenting classes, helping to normalize shared responsibility for family health and well-being. Other interventions go further by interrogating and reshaping the beliefs and behaviours tied to harmful gender norms. These norms-shifting interventions might involve peer group education or community dialogues that challenge the idea that emotional stoicism, dominance, or control are intrinsic to being a man, expanding the space for alternative expressions of masculinity. Still others adopt a more explicitly transformative lens, directly confronting patriarchal power structures and working to redefine male identity around care, equity, and mutual accountability. The latter initiatives may organize men as allies in movements against gender-based violence

What are masculinity norms?

Box 1

“Norms of Masculinity” refer to socially shared expectations about how men and boys are “supposed” to behave, relate to others, and express themselves (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These norms are shaped through repeated socialization across families, peer groups, religious spaces, schools, and media and upheld by community and institutional structures (Kågesten et al., 2016; Makonnen & Njage, 2020; Addis & Mahalik, (2003). While local expressions of masculinity differ, common trends often include:

Control and decision-making: Men are expected to lead and make final decisions in households and communities.

Provision as identity: A man’s value is tied to his ability to provide materially.

Emotional stoicism: Expressing emotion is discouraged; vulnerability is seen as weakness.

Honour and protection: A man’s reputation is linked to his ability to “protect” the women in his family—often through control.

Spiritual or moral authority: Male leaders are often seen as custodians of cultural or religious values.

or build collective action models that position men as co-creators of equitable social change alongside women. To deepen understanding of interventions in Kenya, we undertook a country-level deep dive focused on evidence that is often under-documented, particularly grey literature and practitioner insights.

This deep dive complements a broader global review conducted by the Center on Gender Equity and Health at the University of California San Diego, in partnership with the Eastern Africa Gender, Social Norms and Agency Learning Collaborative. **Unlike traditional reviews that rely heavily on peer-reviewed publications, our analysis prioritized internal intervention documentation, local evaluations, community feedback, and practice-based knowledge, with the intention of demonstrating the various approaches interventions are taking with regard to social norms and masculinity programming.** Drawing upon 44 interventions implemented between 2014 and 2024, this deep-dive focuses on efforts targeting outcomes related to sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, child and forced marriage, as well as women’s economic empowerment.

This review explores how normative expectations about masculinity are being challenged, reinterpreted, or reinforced across different approaches, including a focus on faith and cultural champions and entertainment media. It also examines the design features of interventions, and asks: What kinds of reference groups are engaged? Are men positioned as gatekeepers, allies, or co-beneficiaries? Do interventions focus on reflection, modelling, or public commitment? How do they navigate backlash, resistance, or contradictory expectations?

Findings highlight how the distinct approaches—male engagement, gender norm-shifting, and gender transformation—manifest in practice. While some interventions focused exclusively on one of these approaches, most tended to blur the lines, combining approaches in response to contextual needs. Mapping these intersections revealed not only design trade-offs but also strategic opportunities to deepen impact at scale.

Rather than presenting definitive conclusions on effectiveness and rigor, this review surfaces the contextual realities, tensions, and possibilities shaping efforts to engage men within a landscape of shifting masculinities in Kenya. It brings visibility to the strategies used on the ground, the trade-offs involved, and the practical design lessons for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to support norm change in ways that are accountable, locally resonant, and equity-driven. At its core, this review asks a practical yet pressing question: How can efforts to engage men and shift expectations around masculinity support, rather than inhibit, the health, safety, and self-determination of adolescent girls and young women?



Snapshot of the Global Evidence Review

The Global Evidence Review conducted by the Center on Gender Equity and Health used a scoping approach to identify interventions aiming to shift social norms to improve outcomes for adolescent girls and young women in the areas of women’s economic empowerment, gender-based violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and sexual and reproductive health in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The review involved a systematic search of both peer-reviewed and grey literature. Interventions were included in the analysis if they self-identified as social norms interventions and measured attitudes, behaviours, or norms.

Only five interventions were identified in Kenya—two focused on entertainment media and three on faith and cultural champions—indicating that a more targeted country-level search might reveal additional evidence.

Methodology and Analytical Approach

The review and analysis were guided by two intersecting questions to identify interventions for inclusion. These explored the roles of faith and cultural leaders in reinforcing or challenging gender norms, and how entertainment media is used to redefine what it means to be a man or a woman in Kenyan society. These questions are answered in two subsequent sections that present study findings.

Scope and Data Sources: The primary sources of data were grey literature, including programme evaluations, internal reports, learning briefs, and policy documents (see **Box 2**). These were complemented by peer-reviewed studies and further triangulated through 11 stakeholder interviews with programme implementers, local gender specialists, and researchers.

Inclusion Criteria: The inclusion criteria required that programmes or activities implicitly or explicitly involved men and boys as actors and influencers of adolescent girls' and young women's outcomes, addressed norms related to masculinity and gender roles, or sought to disrupt unequal power dynamics. The aim was to capture both direct and indirect efforts that shift the normative environment affecting the health and well-being of young women in Kenya, as opposed to applying a narrow lens which may exclude some approaches. As such, this review includes collaborations, initiatives, public and social media campaigns, formal research interventions, and organizations who have dedicated efforts to this area.

Analysis: The analysis combined descriptive coding with interpretive synthesis to understand how different strategies for shifting social norms are being applied in practice. This layered approach made it possible to examine not only the types of interventions being implemented but also the social dynamics surrounding them, specifically which male actors are engaged as reference groups, how their influence is mobilised, and under what conditions change appears to take root. The analysis also focused on the pathways through which normative change unfolds. Anchoring the analysis in Kenya's cultural and programmatic context and drawing from multiple forms of evidence, the review offers a grounded perspective on how expectations of masculinity are being reinforced, challenged, or reimagined and what this means for adolescent girls' and young women's health and well-being.

Box 2

Why focus on grey literature?

Much of the learning from norm-shifting work in Kenya exists outside of academic journals. Faith declarations, youth-led storytelling initiatives, men's discussion groups, and community dialogues are often evaluated internally or reflected in unpublished briefs.

These materials offer rich insight into how social norms around masculinity are navigated and negotiated in real-life contexts. They allow us to understand how change is happening, who is driving it, and under what conditions it becomes possible.

Faith and Cultural Champion Intervention Review by Outcome Area

A total of 29 interventions engaged faith and cultural champions to shift norms to address outcomes related to gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, child, early, and forced marriage, and women’s economic empowerment. As shown in **Figure 1**, the majority of interventions focused on gender-based violence, with 11 explicitly addressing violence prevention or the transformation of harmful masculinities that perpetuate gender inequalities. Nine interventions focused on sexual and reproductive health, in particular in supporting family planning and shared reproductive health decision-making. Seven interventions addressed child, early, and forced marriage by challenging norms around male guardianship, protection, and family honour. Only two focused on women’s economic empowerment, although many others addressed women’s economic empowerment as a secondary component within broader interventions. Because this review prioritized interventions with women’s economic empowerment as a core mandate, this small number of interventions reflects a gap in interventions explicitly centred on shifting economic power and norms. This distribution also indicates that faith and cultural leaders are primarily engaged in areas traditionally framed as moral or protective concerns, such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. The relative absence of interventions focused on women’s economic empowerment suggests an underexplored opportunity to address how norms of masculinity reinforce economic exclusion. Below, we provide programmatic insights by outcome area.

Distribution of Faith and Cultural Champion Interventions by Outcome Area (n=29)

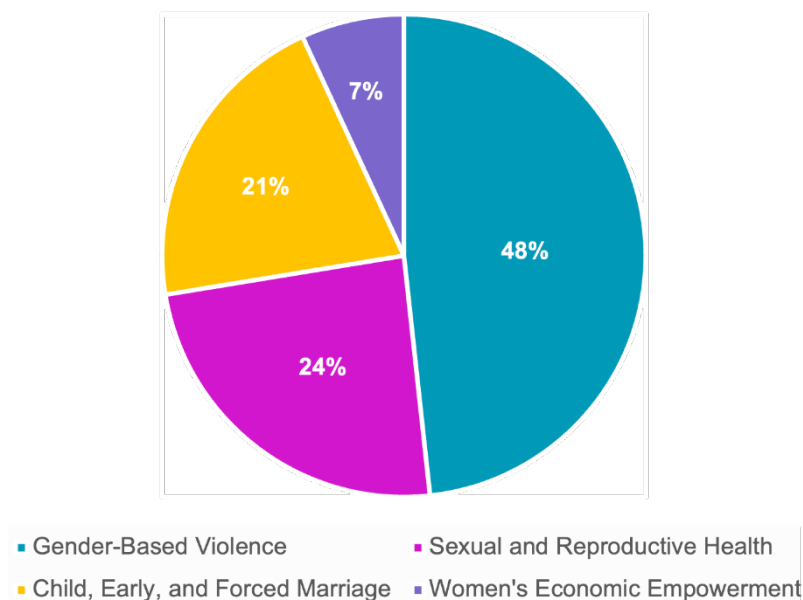


Figure 1. Distribution of Faith and Cultural Champion Interventions (n=29) by Primary Outcome Area

Gender-Based Violence

In Kenya, gender-based violence is reinforced by deeply embedded norms around masculinity that equate manhood with control, emotional stoicism, and the right to discipline (Perrin et al., 2019). These expectations are often socially reinforced through silence, religious misinterpretation, and the moral authority of community leaders (Zinyentertainment Media ba & Hlongwana, 2022; Michau et al., 2015). As a result, violence is not always perceived as harmful, it is often justified as part of being a “strong” or “responsible” man. However, in Kenya, interventions engaging faith and cultural champions are beginning to challenge these norms, not simply by involving men, but by targeting and reshaping the social expectations that define masculinity itself.

From the 11 reviewed interventions, many engaged religious leaders, elders, and male mentors as key reference groups not just as outreach channels, but as central actors who hold, model, and reinforce norms of masculinity in their communities. Through scripture-based training, public declarations, and routine community messaging, these leaders sought to reframe masculinity around care, empathy, and nonviolence. Within programming, this shift was often framed not as a departure from culture or faith but as a deeper, truer expression of spiritual and moral responsibility of men, to uplift and support those around them.

Table 1 outlines select interventions which addressed gender-based violence in engaging faith and cultural champions. Through strategies like scriptural reinterpretation, public advocacy, and community dialogues, the interventions redefine male roles in ways that support safety, dignity, and gender equity for adolescent girls and young women. Often the interventions sought to actively reshape existing norms defining masculinity by targeting both beliefs and behaviours, reinforcing new expectations in trusted spaces, and making norm change visible and sustainable over time.

Table 1. Selected Norms-Shifting Interventions Engaging Faith and Cultural Champions to Reduce Gender-Based Violence

Intervention	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Faith and Cultural Champions
Islamic Relief Kenya ¹	Garissa and Wajir counties	Imams and Islamic scholars	Theological reinterpretation to integrate anti-violence messages in sermons and community forums	Spiritual responsibility rooted in compassion, care, and nonviolence	Spiritual authority, gendered silence on violence	Improved anti-violence messaging in mosques	Religious interpreters and public messengers
Faith Leader Dialogues on Gender-based Violence ²	Multi-denominational, national scope	Male religious leaders across denominations	Scripture workshops and moral leadership dialogue to model nonviolent masculinities	Partnership, empathy, and shared moral accountability	Emotional stoicism, male dominance	Increased interfaith collaboration on violence	Moral leaders and scriptural advocates
Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action “JISRA” ³	Multiple counties across Kenya	Faith leaders and interfaith networks	Community interventions led by faith leaders to address violence and promote reproductive rights	Faith-led protection of adolescents and youth and community safety	Control, reproductive rights exclusion	Strengthened community responses to reproductive health	Faith mobilisers and coalition builders

¹Inclusive Education and Protection <https://islamic-relief.or.ke/inclusive-education-and-protection/>

² Kenya Faith Leaders Unite to End entertainment media and All forms of GBV, <https://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/kenyan-faith-leaders-unite-end-fentertainment-media-icide-and-all-forms-gbv>

³JISR, <https://www.sfcg.org/project/joint-initiative-for-strategic-religious-action-jisra-2021-2025/>

Kilifi Boy Child Empowerment Initiative⁴	Kilifi County	Cultural elders, teachers, church leaders	Community barazas and school programmes to reframe strength as care and emotional regulation	Strength through emotional honesty and nonviolence	Aggression, emotional suppression	Improved emotional expression among boys	Cultural gatekeepers and education partners
Man Enough Program⁵	National (faith-based urban and rural reach)	Christian male congregants and pastors	Faith-integrated masculinity workshops on godly partnership and shared responsibilities	Christian values promoting co-leadership in families	Patriarchal household leadership	Greater male participation in family care roles	Faith teachers and masculinities mentors

Sexual and Reproductive Health

For adolescent girls and young women, access to sexual and reproductive health services is limited not only by structural barriers, but also by deeply entrenched norms such as those related to purity, chastity, and fertility. While fertility is seen as a woman’s domain, men are still regarded as moral authorities and final decision-makers in matters related to contraception, and sexual health (Mochache et al., 2020). In Kenya, masculinity is closely linked to control, silence, and unilateral responsibility, leaving adolescent girls and young women with limited say in decisions that directly affect their bodies and futures. Contraceptive use offers a clear example of how these dynamics play out. Access to contraceptive information and services may be available, but if prevailing norms frame such use as inappropriate, unnecessary, or dishonourable, uptake remains low (Newmann et al., 2021). Within this context, it’s not simply awareness, but the moral and relational environment in which sexual and reproductive health decisions are made.

Table 2 presents selected interventions where faith and cultural champions have been mobilised to advance sexual and reproductive health. These interventions engaged religious leaders and male faith actors to promote alternative masculinities grounded in care, moral responsibility, and shared decision-making. Through strategies such as theological reflection, faith-based counselling, and public messaging, the interventions reframed male roles in ways that support autonomy, partnership, and equitable sexual and reproductive health outcomes for adolescent girls and young women.

Table 2. Selected Norms-Shifting Interventions Engaging Faith and Cultural Champions to Improve Sexual and Reproductive Health of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Intervention	Region	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Faith and Cultural Champions
Channels of Hope (World Vision)⁶	Kenya and Ghana	Pastors, Imams, and Lay Religious Leaders	Scripture-based workshops promoting shared decision-making and family health	Spiritual leadership grounded in care, health stewardship, and shared responsibility	Male dominance in sexual and reproductive health decisions, spiritual silence on contraception	Increased inclusion of sexual and reproductive health messaging in sermons and premarital counselling	Moral influencers and public messengers legitimizing shared reproductive roles

⁴Ssewanyana D, van Baar A, Mwangala PN, Newton CR, Abubakar A. Inter-relatedness of underlying factors for injury and violence among adolescents in rural coastal Kenya: A qualitative study. *Health Psychol Open*. 2019 May 13;6(1):2055102919849399. doi: [10.1177/2055102919849399](https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102919849399). PMID: 31205735; PMCID: PMC6537266

⁵Man Enough, Building a Movement around Healthy Manhood, <https://manenough.com/>

⁶Channels of Hope, <https://www.wvi.org/faith-and-development/channels-hope>

Faith to Action Network⁷	National and interfaith coverage	Interfaith Religious Leaders and faith-based networks	Multi-pronged strategy combining advocacy, capacity building, service delivery, and research	Community guardianship that aligns faith with rights-based reproductive decision-making	Faith-based resistance to shared sexual and reproductive health responsibilities	Greater community acceptance of faith-aligned sexual and reproductive health practices	Network builders, advocates, and cross-faith validators of sexual and reproductive health
Caritas – Promoting Positive Masculinity⁸	Catholic dioceses across Kenya	Catholic Clergy and Parish Lay Leaders	Structured theological reflection to reframe family planning within moral and spiritual obligations	Shared moral accountability and partnership in reproductive health decisions	Male entitlement to reproductive control and moral stigma around contraception	Younger male congregants adopted more open attitudes toward contraception	Scriptural interpreters creating moral legitimacy for shared reproductive decisions

Most of the nine interventions challenged the underlying assumptions about male roles in reproductive decision-making. They sought to shift the social expectations placed on men and boys, moving away from control and toward shared responsibility and mutual care. A notable example is the initiative led by **Caritas**, a global Catholic network operating in Kenya. In many communities where family planning is seen as morally suspect or spiritually forbidden, Caritas convened male religious leaders for structured theological reflection. These sessions invited clergy to revisit foundational religious values such as compassion, justice, and stewardship and to interrogate whether opposition to contraception aligned with those values. The aim was not to secularize the conversation, but to re-anchor sexual and reproductive health within trusted moral frameworks. This intervention followed a “belief-first pathway of change”, targeting how spiritual leaders conceptualized masculinity and responsibility within relationships. Over time, participating clergy began reframing family planning as a joint moral obligation, consistent with protecting health and building equitable partnerships. This reframing appeared in sermons, marriage counselling, and public teachings. As these messages became more common, the broader discourse began to shift where contraception was no longer framed as an individual woman’s burden but a shared behaviour. These norm shifts also became visible among younger male congregants. In communities where leaders consistently reinforced this new framing, young men reported increased openness to discussing contraception, and greater willingness to involve their partners in decision-making.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Child, early, and forced marriage is upheld by norms of masculinity which cast men as protectors and moral authorities responsible for regulating adolescent girls’ sexuality, education, and marital timing (Ngidi, Bhana, & Dube, 2025). In parts of Kenya where this practice is upheld, norms are reinforced through cultural rites and faith-based teachings that equate control with honour and early marriage with protection (of girls). Faith and cultural champions such as religious scholars, elders, and male heads of household thus serve as key reference groups in either perpetuating or transforming these norms, which often link a man’s honour to his daughter’s conformity (Walk Free, 2023). **Figure 2** illustrates how norms of masculinity are deeply embedded in the social logic that justifies the practice. Interventions which seek to shift norms upholding the practice should therefore not only confront these norms but also leverage men’s existing roles as influencers, protectors, and decision-makers to offer alternative masculinities that support adolescent girls’ right to delay marriage.

⁷Advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights through faith-based approaches: A mapping study, <http://f2an.faithtoactionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Advancing-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-through-faith-based-approaches-a-mapping-study.pdf>

⁸Promoting positive Masculinity, <https://www.caritasnairobi.org/promoting-positive-masculinity-in-our-communities/#>

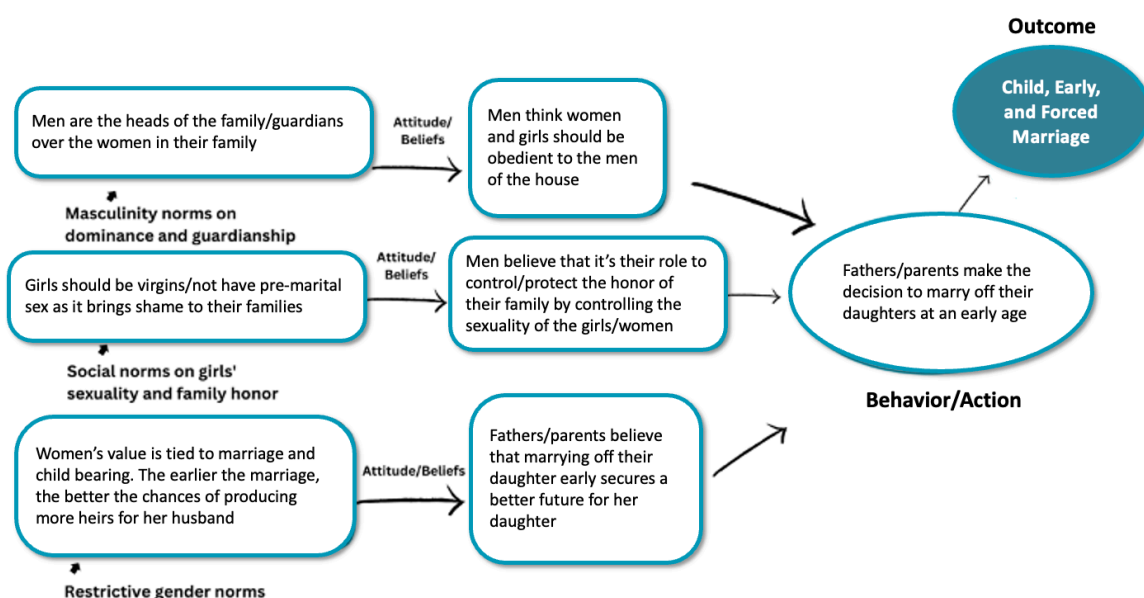


Figure 2. Masculinity’s Role in Shaping Norms Which Uphold Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Kenya

Seven interventions emerged in this outcome area, working directly with faith and cultural champions to support more gender-equitable understandings of masculinity. **Table 3** presents selected interventions aimed at disrupting child, early, and forced marriage through shifts in norms of masculinity.

Table 3. Selected Norms-Shifting Interventions Engaging Faith and Cultural Champions to Reduce Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Intervention	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Faith and Cultural Champions
AMREF Koota Injena Project ⁹	Marsabit and Samburu	Male elders	Public declaration (Kisima), redefinition of legacy and protection	Legacy and community protection, not control	Male control, decision-making, family honour	Increased intergenerational dialogue	Targeted as norm holders and influencers
Plan International – Tharaka Nithi ¹⁰	Tharaka Nithi	Elders and former circumcisers	Dialogue, alternative rites, and economic transition for circumcisers	Cultural continuity through care, not harm	Men as providers, family honour, rites of passage	Economic reintegration of former circumcisers	Engaged to transition harmful practices
Msichana Empowerment Kuria (MEK) ¹¹	Kuria Region	Young men (boda boda riders)	Training and public advocacy to shift youth norms	Allyship and public support for girls' rights	Male dominance, youth risk behaviour	Reduced harassment of girls by boda boda riders	Targeted as peer influencers
Nitasimama Imara Initiative ¹²	West Pokot and Elgeyo Marakwet	Adolescent boys	Peer-led norm change and role modelling	Respectful relationships	Early marriage pressure,	Improved peer norms around	Both role models and change agents

⁹AMREF, Can community dialogue be used to end FGM and child marriage, <https://amrefusa.org/what-we-do/koota-injena/>

¹⁰Plan International, Kenya Impact Report, https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/26/2022/07/pik_annual_report_final_single_-_2015_0.pdf

¹¹Msichana Empowerment Kuria, <https://civskkenya.org/mtv-msichana-empowerment-kuria/#:~:text=Msichana%20Empowerment%20Kuriam%20project%20was,community%20in%20South%20Western%20Kenya.>

¹² UNFPA, Engaging men and boys: Nitasimama Imara anti-FGM champion working to change negative social norms, <https://kenya.unfpa.org/en/news/engaging-men-and-boys-nitasimama-imara-anti-fgm-champion-working-change-negative-social-norms>

				and delayed marriage	relational violence	consent and respect	
World Vision – Channels of Hope¹³	Arid and Semi-Arid counties	Religious leaders	Scriptural reinterpretation and faith-based messaging	Spiritual leadership aligned with girls' education	Spiritual authority, honour	Sustained messaging on girls' education	Key messengers and scriptural interpreters
UNESCO Rallying Faith Campaign¹⁴	National (Christian and Muslim faith councils)	Interfaith councils and congregations	Coordinated interfaith communication and public declarations	Religious unity in affirming girls' safety and autonomy	Religious endorsement of protection through marriage	Cross-faith alliances promoting girls' autonomy	Mobilisers and endorsers of interfaith declarations

One notable example is World Vision's **Channels of Hope**, which trained Christian and Muslim religious leaders to interpret sacred texts through a gender-equitable lens. Rather than confronting religion as a barrier, the intervention engaged pastors and imams as moral stewards capable of guiding social transformation. Leaders were encouraged to view the delay of marriage and the promotion of girls' education not as modern or Western interventions, but as legitimate expressions of spiritual responsibility. While the evaluation was largely descriptive, it documented sustained attitudinal change towards early marriage over 12–18 months. This reframing created space for new narratives to emerge; ones in which fathers no longer saw education as a threat to family honour, but as a source of pride. The study report indicated that internal monitoring recorded increased references to girls' education across at least 20 congregations, while follow-up discussions with fathers and religious leaders showed a normative shift from viewing honour through early marriage to honour through education.

Women's Economic Empowerment

While investments in women's economic empowerment continue to grow in Kenya, many interventions fail to contend with a deeper structural constraint: entrenched norms around masculinity that position men as exclusive providers, decision-makers, and economic gatekeepers. Provision, control over household finances, and resistance to female autonomy are embedded in masculine identity in Kenya, often reinforced by fathers, peers, religious leaders, and media. Men are expected to control household finances, dictate whether women can work, and determine how resources are allocated (Kawarazuka, Locke, & Seeley, 2019).

For adolescent girls and young women, these norms translate into delayed entry into work, limited mobility, and restricted access to resources or business ownership. Only two interventions met the inclusion criteria, which sought to engage faith and cultural champions to shift norms around women's economic empowerment for adolescents and youth. **Table 4** presents the two interventions. Across both, they engaged men not merely as supporters, but as strategic actors in redefining how economic power and provision are understood within masculinities, making space for adolescent girls and young women to participate meaningfully in economic life.

¹³World Vision, <https://www.wvi.org/church-and-interfaith-engagement/channels-hope-child-protection#:~:text=Channels%20of%20Hope%20is%20a,key%20child%20well%2Dbeing%20issues>.

¹⁴100 Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious leaders join the fight against new HIV infections, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence, <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/100-christian-muslim-and-hindu-religious-leaders-join-fight-against-new-hiv-infections-teenage-pregnancies-and-gender-based-violence>

Table 4. Two Norms-Shifting Interventions Engaging Faith and Cultural Champions to Support Women’s Economic Empowerment

Intervention	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Faith and Cultural Champions
Buildher ¹⁵	Nairobi	Adolescent girls and young women trainees, male employers, community leaders	Technical training, public works, visibility campaigns	Shared economic leadership	Men as providers	Increased Adolescent girls and young women income and visibility	Industry leaders as allies, public framing agents
GROOTS ¹⁶	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) in Kenya – including Kajiado County and other rural regions	Rural women farmers, male elders, household decision-makers, local chiefs, community climate planning committees	Community-led agriculture cooperatives, indigenous knowledge systems, structured male engagement through public dialogues and climate governance participation	Stewardship, protection, and shared responsibility in sustaining household and community economies— rather than control or sole provision	-Men as exclusive economic decision-makers - Women’s economic work as secondary or informal - Male control over land and market access	- Increased visibility of women in local governance and trade spaces - Male endorsement of women-led cooperatives - Greater household income diversity - Women’s financial autonomy and leadership in climate dialogues	While not directly faith-based, cultural leaders such as male elders and local chiefs were instrumental in legitimizing women’s roles. These figures acted as cultural validators, endorsing women’s economic agency and framing it as aligned with traditional community values.

The first, the **Buildher** intervention, operating in Kenya’s male-dominated construction sector, was primarily designed to equip adolescents and youth with technical skills, as well as to disrupt gendered expectations by positioning young women in visible roles on infrastructure projects. Through industry roundtables, employer engagement, and strategic media visibility, **Buildher** fostered broader shifts in workplace culture, encouraging hiring practices and peer expectations that support women’s participation. At the same time, participating adolescents and youth reported growing confidence, increased financial decision-making power, and aspirations that extend beyond traditional gender roles. Importantly, male employers and community members, many initially resistant, began to adjust their expectations in response to these new realities.

The second, **GROOTS Kenya**, a grassroots women-led civil society organization, is reshaping the economic landscape for rural women by directly confronting norms surrounding masculinity that limit their participation in household and community economies. Operating in arid and semi-arid regions, the intervention engaged male leaders, elders, and household decision-makers to reposition rural women not only as economic actors but as custodians of community resilience (University of Nairobi – WEE Hub, 2023). At the heart of **GROOTS Kenya’s** model is the strategic use of climate-resilient agriculture as an entry point to women’s economic empowerment. While most economic interventions focus on women’s skills or microcredit, this model targets norms that determine who controls land, seeds, and market access. Traditionally, these roles are male-dominated. Men are expected to own land, make financial decisions, and lead in public spaces. Through women-led agricultural cooperatives, training in seed banking and organic methods, and participation in local climate planning dialogues, the intervention engaged women and men together. By reframing masculine roles around stewardship, protection, and climate responsibility, **GROOTS Kenya** sought to shift entrenched attitudes that see economic leadership as a male domain. For instance, in Kajiado County, women cultivating indigenous vegetables were initially dismissed as performing subsistence roles. But after structured dialogues with local chiefs and public demonstrations of women’s earnings and climate innovations, male leaders began endorsing their work as economically and environmentally strategic. This public recognition marked a turning point, redefining masculinity not through control over land, but through shared guardianship of community resources.

¹⁵Buildher, ‘The buildher model.’ <https://www.buildher.org/about>

¹⁶Social Protection For Economic Empowerment, <https://weehub.uonbi.ac.ke/sites/default/files/2023-08/SOCIAL%20PROTECTION%20FOR%20WOMEN%E2%80%99S%20ECONOMIC%20EMPOWERMENT-15TH-AUGUST-2023.pdf>

Faith and Cultural Champion Cross-Cutting Insights

What implementation strategies were used across outcomes?

Across outcomes, faith-based interventions consistently leveraged trusted religious platforms to shift masculinities and reshape social norms. Scriptural reinterpretation emerged as a foundational strategy, used to challenge dominant narratives and reframe care, equity, and nonviolence as spiritually legitimate expressions of manhood (e.g., [Channels of Hope](#) and [Islamic Relief](#)). In northern Kenya, for example, tafsir sessions (Qur’anic exegesis) were used to publicly reject religious justifications for child marriage. Sermons, marriage counselling, and routine religious instruction served as ways to share new messages, reinforcing consistency and credibility over time. Public modelling by male faith leaders helped legitimize alternative masculine behaviours, whether related to joint contraceptive decision-making or rejecting violence. Peer support among religious leaders also created feedback loops, reinforcing messaging shifts from within the clerical community. While the thematic focus varied, from reproductive autonomy to economic support for women, underlying mechanisms of change often centred on reinterpretation, repetition, modelling, and validation. Key differences arose in framing across outcome areas, whereby interventions addressed different elements of masculine identities to promote new values and messaging; for instance, contraception use was linked to being a “partner” or “supportive provider”, while economic support for women was framed as dignity-affirming and a form of responsible leadership. **These insights suggest that similar strategies are clearly used across outcome areas within intervention design and implementation, but messaging varies, and different outcomes address different types of norms of masculinity.**

How were faith and cultural champions supporting shifts in masculinity norms?

Evidence from the 29 faith and cultural interventions demonstrate that masculinity norms shift through multiple, often overlapping, entry points and pathways. Below, we outline key elements identified across interventions as essential for working with these groups to shift these deep-seated norms, often by addressing core beliefs, making change visible by modelling behaviours, and working hand-in-hand with communities.

- **Beliefs need to change before behaviour:** In several interventions, particularly those rooted in faith-based reinterpretation as a core tenant, change began with a shift in values and moral beliefs. Interventions such as [Channels of Hope](#) and [Islamic Relief Kenya](#) used theological reflection to create space for men to reconsider what it means to be a man. Scriptural reinterpretation framed care, dignity, and justice as spiritually valid expressions of masculinity. These belief shifts were gradually followed by changes in how men behaved in families and communities—often taking six months to one year to manifest.
- **Visible action precedes norm shifts:** Other programmes triggered shifts in masculinity norms through visible individual behaviours, especially among male champions and public figures. These actions, such as escorting daughters to school or publicly rejecting female genital mutilation/cutting often preceded widespread belief change. However, as community members witnessed respected men behaving differently, norms began to realign.
- **Beliefs and behaviours reinforce each other:** In most enduring cases, beliefs and behaviours shifted together in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Interventions like [Nitasimama Imara](#) and [Msichana Empowerment](#) exemplify this. Fathers and elders validated boys’ care-based behaviours, while public declarations reinforced internal value shifts. This co-evolution was especially effective when interventions integrated multi-generational engagement and created safe spaces for reflection, visibility, and affirmation.

Stakeholder Perspectives: The Role of External Drivers in Engaging Faith and Cultural Champions to Shift Masculinity Norms

Through key informant interviews and stakeholder workshops, participants highlighted how law, health services, economic opportunity, education, urbanisation, and crisis either entrench patriarchal expectations or unlock space for alternative masculinities to emerge in Kenya. While personal belief and behaviour change is important, norm transformation is sustainable only when supported by enabling environments that reward equitable actions and challenge harmful power dynamics. Legal reform can help reshape masculinities, but its impact depends on how well it's embedded in trusted social and religious systems. Interventions such as **Interfaith Action Against Child, Early, and Forced Marriage** and the **Catholic Justice and Peace Commission** illustrate this alignment. **By linking legal principles, such as bans on early marriage or dowry reform, with moral teachings, faith leaders became key translators of policy into practice.** Their engagement turned abstract laws into socially reinforced expectations, showing that legal change is most powerful when accompanied by credible community-led messaging.

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“Laws may establish the ‘what’—but it is faith and cultural leaders who often determine the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ in reshaping masculine responsibility.”
– Male, Program Officer, 33

”

Access to gender-transformative health systems is another way to redefine masculine roles, particularly in reproductive and family health. The **Christian Health Association of Kenya’s Reproductive Maternal Neonatal Child Health Initiative** exemplifies this by engaging men through church-led forums and male health champions to promote care, partnership, and shared responsibility in gender-equitable ways. In the **Faith to Action Network**, member organisations used sexual and reproductive health programming to train men as health educators, spiritual counsellors, and contraceptive advocates within interfaith settings. These platforms not only shifted individual knowledge but also changed what was socially expected of men in their families and congregations.

Interventions like **Channels of Hope** and **Islamic Relief Kenya** demonstrated that when reinterpretation of scripture is facilitated through respected religious platforms, men and boys are more likely to *internalize new ideals of masculinity centred on dignity, justice, and care* (ACT Alliance, 2025; (Onyango, 2016). These value shifts often preceded observable behaviour change, emerging over 6 to 12 months through repeated spiritual engagement, public declarations, and moral reinforcement in religious settings (Parsitau & Aura, 2020).

Youth-led and sport-based programmes like **Reset–End Gender-based Violence Kenya** and **Kilifi Boy Child** combined role-modelling with participatory dialogue, creating feedback loops in which behaviour and norms shifted in tandem. Male athletes and mentors repeatedly modelled empathy, consent, and nonviolent behaviours rarely associated with masculinity in traditional settings. Over time, these visible actions normalised new expectations among peers and community members.

“

“When men are equipped with accurate health knowledge and supported by faith communities to act on it, they begin to adopt new norms of care, shared decision-making, and emotional presence—norms that were previously excluded from dominant models of masculinity.”
-Female, Faith Programme Manager, 41

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Case Study

AMREF's Koota Injena Project: Reframing Masculinity to End Child Marriage in Northern Kenya

The **Koota Injena** project, implemented by AMREF in Marsabit and Samburu counties, aimed to shift entrenched masculinity norms among pastoralist communities to reduce child, early, and forced marriage. It strategically engaged male elders—traditionally seen as custodians of cultural norms—as agents of change. Rather than opposing tradition, the intervention worked within community structures, positioning elders as protectors of legacy and well-being. Through public declarations known as *Kisima*, elders formally denounced harmful practices such as early marriage and female genital cutting/mutilation, while endorsing girls' education as a source of honour and continuity.

Historically, masculinity in these communities was tied to control over girls' sexuality and marriage decisions. **Koota Injena** reframed this by promoting a model of masculinity grounded in care, cultural preservation, and protection. Elders who once upheld early marriage began advocating for delayed marriage and girls' education—not as a break from tradition, but as a way to strengthen it.

Evidence from this project shows that when change is rooted in cultural pride and moral authority, it is possible to transform harmful gender norms from within.

Takeaways and Implications

Evidence from this deep dive points to several clear implications for designing masculinity-focused interventions that move beyond inclusion toward transformation. These interventions engage with the underlying reference groups, collective expectations, and moral reasoning that sustain dominant masculinities. Below, we share five key takeaways and their implications for future programming:



Design for Multiple Pathways, Not Linear Models

Faith and cultural champion interventions approached behaviour change as cyclical and adaptive. Norms were not addressed in isolation, but through reinforcing mechanisms: theological reflection, visible leadership, community dialogue, and moral framing. Effective interventions used these loops to make norms observable, open to questioning, and eventually modifiable within familiar moral worlds.



Implication: Design should reflect the elasticity of the norm and integrate layered pathways, addressing beliefs, behaviours, and reference group influence simultaneously.



Leverage Trusted Moral Authorities as Cultural Translators

Faith leaders, elders, and intergenerational mentors were central to legitimizing norm change, not simply as message carriers, but as moral interpreters who made unfamiliar behaviours (e.g., shared caregiving, joint decision-making) socially and spiritually acceptable. Their public role modelling gave permission for men and boys to adopt new masculinities without penalty.



Implication: Invest in building interpretive capacity among moral authorities. Equip leaders to translate theological principles into new social expectations, reinforcing these shifts through repeated engagement.



Embed Positive Masculinities in Daily Practice

Programme content was perceived as more authentic and widely accepted when grounded in everyday social roles such as fatherhood, marriage, resource sharing, and health decision-making, rather than being limited to programme specific intervention activities.



Implication: Interventions must go beyond raising awareness by embedding change within routine institutions and relational contexts that shape daily performance of manhood.



Adapt to Norm Rigidity Through Strategic Sequencing

Some norms around communication, decision-making, or control, proved to be more deeply entrenched. Where traditions are especially resistant, the programmes focused on moral framing, alongside community declarations, household-level engagement, and economic alternatives.



Implication: Sequencing should be context-driven, beginning where social permission is strongest and layering in additional components as trust builds.



Distinguish Between Engagement and Transformation

Not all faith and cultural champion programmes explicitly set out to challenge or name harmful masculinity norms, but many still contributed to normative shifts. For example, some led to changes from control to shared caregiving, or from authority to collaboration—shifts that often emerged subtly but meaningfully.



Implication: Programmes should be clear on their intent- are they engaging men, shifting gendered expectations, or actively transforming power relations? Each approach carries different design, implementation, and measurement implications.

Entertainment Media Intervention Review by Outcome Area

A total of 15 entertainment media interventions met the inclusion criteria for this deep dive review, each addressing how boys and men learn, internalize, and reproduce socially sanctioned ideas of manhood. These interventions targeted norms of masculinity linked to control, stoicism, dominance, and entitlement that negatively impacted adolescent girls’ and young women’s health and livelihood outcomes. As shown in **Figure 3**, most entertainment media interventions focused on gender-based violence, with six programmes explicitly addressing the normalisation of violence and reframing masculinity through empathy, accountability, and emotional expression. Five programmes targeted sexual and reproductive health, using media to disrupt male gatekeeping over contraceptive use and promote shared decision-making. Four interventions addressed child, early, and forced marriage by challenging protective masculinities and promoting alternative narratives of fatherhood and care. Similar to the faith and cultural champion interventions, women’s economic empowerment was the least addressed outcome, with only two programmes focused in this area. Notably, entertainment media interventions did not focus on a single theme, often they addressed multiple, overlapping issues that shape young people’s lives. For example, **Shujaaz** tackled a wide range of topics including contraceptive use, toxic masculinity, peer pressure, emotional expression, and romantic relationships.

Distribution of Entertainment Media Interventions by Outcome Area (n=15)

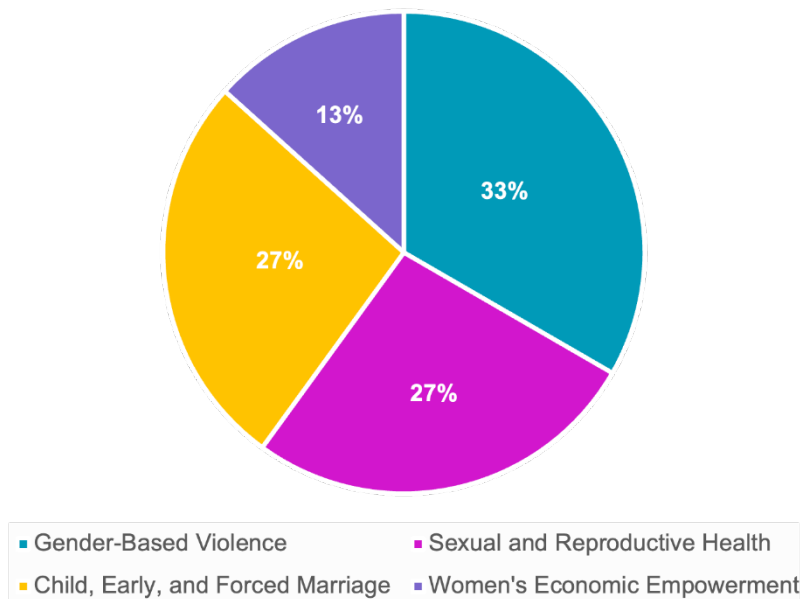


Figure 3. Distribution of Entertainment Media Interventions (n=15) by Primary Outcome Area

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is sustained not only by acts of violence, but by norms of masculinity embedded in everyday storytelling that validates control, silence, emotional detachment, and male entitlement. Dominant narratives across homes, media, and peer networks often reinforce these norms by portraying violence as a justified response to disobedience, jealousy, or dishonour. Among the six identified norms-shifting interventions that addressed gender-based violence through entertainment media, narrative tension, moral ambiguity, and public vulnerability were used to destabilise the quiet justifications of violence. Whether in a short film, a local radio show, or a participatory theatre forum, masculinity norms were challenged through the internal dilemmas men faced and the choices they made to condone or condemn violence.

Table 5 presents selected entertainment media interventions that aimed to disrupt gender-based violence by challenging and reframing norms of masculinity. These programmes leveraged a range of formats, including participatory filmmaking, serial drama, community theatre, and youth-led radio, to confront everyday justifications of violence.

Table 5. Selected Entertainment Media Interventions Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Intervention	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Entertainment Media
Filamu Dada – Media Focus on Africa ¹⁷	Multiple counties (community and peri-urban settings)	Youth filmmakers, local communities	Participatory filmmaking and storytelling	Accountability as emotional connection to harm	Control, justification of violence, silence	Youth reflection and co-production of anti-gender-based violence narratives	Visual storytelling and community screening
Shuga (MTV Staying Alive Foundation) ¹⁸	National (TV and digital platforms)	Young men and women viewers, school-based clubs	Television drama and school discussion guides	Non-violence as strength, consent as responsibility	Sexual entitlement, peer pressure, emotional suppression	School-based shifts in attitudes on consent and abuse	Serial drama and facilitated reflection
Women’s Radio Listening Groups ¹⁹	Rural and pastoralist households	Women radio listeners, husbands, adolescent boys (indirect)	Radio drama programming with intra-household dialogue	Supportive masculinity shaped through listening and caring	Household-level acceptance of gender-based violence	Greater dialogue between partners and sons	Indirect norm activation through exposure

For example, in **Filamu Dada**, participatory filmmaking invited youth to retell stories of gender-based violence not as isolated incidents, but as patterned behaviours shaped by masculine expectations. Boys and young men involved in the production were asked not just to act but to reflect: Why did this character stay silent? What made this act seem acceptable? By co-authoring and visualizing harm from within their own communities, they began to question the assumptions that made it possible. In another case, **Women’s Radio Listening Groups** reached men indirectly. Although designed for women, these groups sparked conversations within households, often prompting husbands or sons to overhear and then debate topics such as consent, power,

¹⁷Media Focus on Africa- Using Creative Media to support Gender Equality, <https://mediafocusafrica.org/?news=using-creative-media-to-support-realization-of-gender-equality-in-political-participation-and-representation-in-kenya>

¹⁸SHUGA, <https://thecompassforsbc.org/sbcc-spotlights/mtv-shuga>

¹⁹Women's Radio Listening Groups in Kenya, [https://participedia.net/case/womens-radio-listening-groups-in-kenya#:~:text=Serian%20Radio%20is%20a%20community,brien%20and%20Bennett%2C%202009\).](https://participedia.net/case/womens-radio-listening-groups-in-kenya#:~:text=Serian%20Radio%20is%20a%20community,brien%20and%20Bennett%2C%202009).)

and relational trust. In many instances, adolescent boys were exposed, perhaps for the first time, to language that reframed silence regarding gender-based violence not as strength, but as complicity. Without directly addressing them, the intervention seeded questions that opened space for quiet disruption.

Figure 4 illustrates how social media and activist engagement can be used to reach wider networks and openly challenge cultural and religious ideals that discourage separation, even in situations where one’s safety and well-being are at risk. The visual of a man with duct tape over his mouth and a rope around his neck symbolizes the silence, constraint, and emotional burden experienced by many—particularly women—in abusive relationships. The message also draws attention to the long-term impact of family violence on children, emphasizing that staying silent or enduring harm has generational consequences. Ultimately, the post calls for a more compassionate and honest conversation about abuse, choice, and the importance of creating safe environments for individuals and families.

Media interventions addressing gender-based violence often spanned one to two or more years, with some using serialized formats that allowed for adaptability and emotional resonance. Interventions like **MTV Shuga**, **Filamu Dada**, and **Women’s Radio Listening Groups** ran over extended cycles or seasons, enabling audiences, especially men, to build trust in characters and reflect over time on their own behaviours.



Figure 4. Kenyan Activist Boniface Mwangi Addresses the Often-Unspoken Emotional and Social Pressure to Remain in Violent Relationships

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Entertainment media interventions have proven uniquely equipped to offer emotionally resonant, culturally embedded, and youth driven reimagining of what it means to be a “responsible man” in matters of sex, consent, and reproductive decision-making (Mutumba, 2022). Five interventions met the inclusion criteria which directly used media strategies to tackle norms surrounding family planning, contraceptive use and open dialogue between partners about sexual and reproductive health. **Table 6** presents selected interventions using stories, drama, and digital content to change how men see their role in relationships and reproductive health.

Table 6. Selected Entertainment Media Interventions Addressing Sexual and Reproductive Health

Program	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Entertainment Media
Association of Media Women in Kenya Community Radio Stories ²⁰	Rural Kenya	Male radio listeners, peer groups	Storytelling on reproductive choices and contraceptive negotiation	Men being supportive partners and sharing decision-making	Male control over contraception, silence in partnerships	Increased partner dialogue on contraception and sexual and reproductive health	Radio as private entry-point into reflection and dialogue
Makutano Junction ²¹	National broadcast	Fathers, male partners, households	Serialized drama modelling co-parenting and joint decisions	Fatherhood as emotional maturity and co-responsibility	Decision-making dominance and emotional detachment	Normalized co-parenting and male emotional involvement	Long-term character development and audience immersion
Safer Campus Initiative ²²	University campuses	Male university students and peer groups	Narrative feedback loops tied to campus policy and reporting	The Respectful Peer and Responsible Bystander approach empowered male students to move from passive observers to vocal challengers of harmful practices.	Sexual entitlement and passivity around peer misconduct	Peer accountability and improved campus support structures	Peer-led content engagement and feedback integration
Shujaaz ²³	Urban and peri-urban Kenya	Urban male youth audiences	Comic-style storytelling and SMS engagement on youth relationships	Informed and caring masculinity	Emotional suppression and gendered blame	Youth-led conversations on masculinity and contraception	Multimedia narrative disruption of harmful peer norms

AMWIK Community Radio Stories featured serialized narratives on rural radio platforms in which male characters gradually shifted from suspicion and silence to collaborative decision-making with female partners. By grounding these stories in the domestic and social realities of their audience, the intervention reframed masculinity not as control, but as support and emotional availability. Listeners were often invited to discuss the stories via text messages or community listening groups, creating a reflective loop that reinforced change. For the programmes that focused on uptake of contraceptives, they did not simply encourage men to "*support family planning*"; they re-casted scripts that framed contraception as a threat to male control or pride. Instead of positioning men as gatekeepers or passive supporters, these narratives reflected a shared responsibility.

Makutano Junction, a mainstream TV drama, used serialized storylines to model co-parenting, emotional openness, and joint reproductive planning in marriage. What set this drama apart was its portrayal of masculinity norms not as static and controlling, but as capable of evolving or maturing over time. As male characters grappled with issues like infertility, birth spacing, and family pressures, viewers were presented with alternative narratives in which true strength was rooted in trust rather than dominance. In **Shujaaz**, masculinity was addressed through the language of youth culture. Storylines addressed coercion, ghosting, and suspicion in dating relationships normalising contraception not only as a practical tool, but as a shared act of care. Rather than oppose dominant norms directly, **Shujaaz** embedded alternative masculinities in humour, peer dynamics, and social media banter. Across all five interventions, efforts were made to reduce stigma and normalise discussions about contraception as part of everyday decision-making.

²⁰AMWIK, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1459/Using_the_media_to_address_FGM-C_and_child_marriage_-_AMWIK.pdf

²¹Makutano Junction Series, https://mediae.org/documents/37/Final_Report_on_MJ_Impact_v2.pdf

²²UNESCO Launches Safer Campuses Campaign and Wellness Centre at KMTCC, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-launches-safer-campuses-campaign-and-wellness-centre-kmtc>

²³Hutchinson, P., Mirzoyants, A., & Leyton, A. (2018). Empowering youth for social change through the Shujaaz multimedia platform in Kenya. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 24(1), 102–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2018.1475287>

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

In the context of child, early, and forced marriage, entertainment media interventions relied on moral appeals that grounded norm change within emotionally gripping stories that reflected, challenged, and reshaped perceptions of manhood, framing it as a role centred around protecting others. As indicated in **Table 7**, four interventions met the inclusion criteria, challenging and reframing norms of masculinity by shifting away from control, guardianship, and silence toward care and accountability for others.

Table 7. Selected Entertainment Media Interventions Addressing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Program	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Entertainment Media
Nawi: Dear Future Me ²⁴	National	Fathers, male caregivers	Short film and dialogue screening on forced marriage	Redemptive fatherhood through support and care	Control, family honour, protection through marriage	Fathers supporting girls' education	Emotional storytelling and reflection
FilmAid Media Hubs ²⁵	Kakuma, Dadaab, and rural settings	Youth content creators	Participatory storytelling and peer-led media production	Allyship and supportive of girls' futures	Peer pressure, silence, male complicity	Youth-led rejection of early marriage narratives	Youth ownership of narrative
Serian Radio ²⁶	Northern Kenya	Fathers, elders, community listeners	Local language radio dramas and interactive call-ins	Wisdom and strength were redefined as guiding through education and support, rather than asserting authority through control.	Guardianship, control, male legacy	Male reflection and shifts in intergenerational dialogue	Public airing of private doubts

In **Nawi: Dear Future Me**, a short film tells the story of a father torn between cultural pressure to marry off his daughter and his growing recognition of her agency. It portrays the father's hesitation, fear, pride, and eventual transformation in human terms, inviting viewers to empathise with his dilemma rather than judge it. The father's final decision to support his daughter's education is depicted not as a rejection of tradition, but as a reclamation of dignity. Entertainment media in this case exposes the emotional cost of control and offers relational courage. Likewise, **Serian Radio**, broadcast in northern Kenya, used local-language dramas and interactive segments to examine gender and family roles in pastoralist communities. One storyline followed a respected elder who begins to question whether marrying off his granddaughter truly constitutes protection. The program created space for reflection through call-in feedback and text message polls where mostly male listeners were invited to debate, question, and reflect on deeply rooted expectations. The intervention challenged norms of masculinity by allowing transformation to emerge communally, through dialogue and iteration.

The entertainment media interventions that addressed child, early, and forced marriage ran between six months to two years or longer, with several lacking precise documentation on their start and end dates. Programs like **FilmAid Kenya's Media Hubs** and **Serian Radio** operated over sustained periods, evolving with their audiences. These interventions allowed men and boys to return repeatedly to the same characters, themes, and emotional arcs.

²⁴ NAWI- Dear Future Me, https://www.instagram.com/entuzjastki_world/reel/DFws0lrOWvE/

²⁵ Film Aid, Media Hubs, <https://filmaidkenya.org/>

²⁶ Community Radio and Empowerment of Women among Pastoralist Communities in Northern Kenya, https://arastirmax.com/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/542.pdf

Women’s Economic Empowerment

In Kenya, entertainment media is strategically used to reframe economic empowerment for adolescent girls and young women, not just as access to income, but as a shift in social expectations and gendered power. Both the **Creative Economy Practice’s Entertainment Hub** and Girl Effect’s **Tukisonga Campaign** challenged traditional narratives positioning men as sole providers and women as dependent. They leveraged storytelling, through film, TV, digital content, and creator incubators, to normalise shared economic roles, highlight girl-led ambition, and model supportive masculinities. Gender-equitable storytelling in the **Creative Economy Practice’s Entertainment Hub** reimagined public narratives by showcasing men as enablers, not gatekeepers, of women’s economic success, while **Tukisonga’s** multimedia platforms depicted adolescent girls and young women navigating work, education, and autonomy in ways that challenged silence, control, and societal judgment. Together, these interventions expanded the realm of economic possibility for girls—not only by informing them, but by reshaping the social norms that define who gets to thrive economically and how.

Program	Location	Key Actors Engaged	Core Strategy	Masculinity or Power Norms Reframed As	Norm Domain Addressed	Other Outcomes Observed	Role of Entertainment Media
Creative Economy Practice Entertainment Hub ²⁷	Nairobi, Kenya	Storytellers in film, TV, social media, male and female content creators	Gender-equitable storytelling, digital media training, grant funding, creator incubators	From male-centred narratives to inclusive storytelling where men and women’s realities are valued equally	Gender roles in media, representation in public storytelling, male dominance in narrative creation	Greater male allyship in storytelling expanded public imagination of gender roles and supported adolescent girls’ and young women’s empowerment	Transformative cultural infrastructure reshaping social norms through the creative economy
Girl Effect – Tukisonga Campaign ²⁸	National (Kenya) – with community focus in Nairobi and Migori counties	Adolescent girls, young women, youth creators, digital audiences	Multimedia campaigns (TV, podcast, digital), youth-led narratives, and content on topics related to sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment	From silence and control to youth agency, peer-led support, and collective social change	Sexual and reproductive health access, gender expectations, economic inclusion, youth voice in public discourse	Improved sexual and reproductive health literacy, increased digital engagement, girl-led change movements	Multimedia mobilisation fostering peer connection, youth resilience, and inclusive community narratives

²⁷ Creative Economy for Economic Empowerment- <https://cchub.africa/cep-entertainment-hub-launch/>

²⁸ Girl Effect- Tukisonga Mbele <https://www.shapehistory.com/topics/tukisonga-girl-effect/>

Entertainment Media Cross-Cutting Insights

What implementation strategies were used across outcomes?

Across domains entertainment media interventions have relied on a shared core strategy: reconfiguring masculinity through emotionally resonant, narrative-driven storytelling. Central to all four outcome areas was the tactic of modelling alternative masculinities through admired characters who display vulnerability, shared decision-making, and relational accountability. For instance, in gender-based violence-focused programmes, men were portrayed confronting loss, guilt, or shame, as the emotional aftermath of violence perpetration, raising questions about the legitimacy of violence as a sign of strength. This was echoed in child early and forced marriage interventions, where male characters questioned early marriage as protective, instead linking care to delaying marriage and promoting girls' education. Similarly, sexual and reproductive health storylines reframed conversations about contraception and co-parenting as marks of maturity, portraying engaged men as aspirational. Women's economic empowerment interventions challenged control-based masculinity by showing male partners actively endorsing women's ventures and celebrating their success.

A key differentiator emerged in the extent of peer-to-peer or community validation. Child, early, and forced marriage and gender-based violence interventions more frequently included male peer pressure or solidarity as drivers of change, such as friends intervening to stop violence or men publicly rethinking child marriage. In contrast, sexual and reproductive health and women's economic empowerment interventions often leaned into private, internal transformation, using immersive formats like serialized dramas, call-in shows, or SMS dialogues to allow men to reflect without threat to status. The most common approach was to make new masculinities visible and compelling, to inspire adoption and diffusion, shifting the norms by redefining what it means to be a "real man."

Implementation factors: standalone, multimedia, interactive or not?

The vast majority—13 of the 15 interventions—were designed as multimedia initiatives, combining platforms such as comics, radio, TV, social media, and in-person events to engage audiences across multiple touchpoints. This layered approach not only broadened reach but also created opportunities for norm reinforcement through repeated exposure in familiar formats. Programs like **Shujaaz**, UNESCO's **Safer Campus**, and **FilmAid Kenya's Media Hubs** used this strategy to integrate consistent messages about gender, masculinity, and agency across digital and community settings. While not all interventions included rigorous outcome evaluations, qualitative feedback and programme reports suggest that multimedia programmes had greater potential for norm diffusion—especially when they combined narrative content with interactive forums like school clubs, peer groups, or radio call-ins. These touchpoints allowed communities to reflect on alternative masculinities and shift harmful social expectations.

By contrast, three standalone interventions (**Serian Radio**, **Filamu Dada**, and **Makutano Junction**) relied on the cultural resonance and narrative depth of a single medium. While these utilized fewer channels, they demonstrated strong emotional impact and storytelling integrity. **Makutano Junction**, for instance, was widely cited for improving knowledge around family planning and women's decision-making, while **Serian Radio** facilitated intergenerational dialogue in pastoralist communities. This suggests that while multimedia campaigns offer breadth and scalability, single-medium interventions can deliver depth—particularly when rooted in culturally trusted formats. In terms of effectiveness, the strongest results emerged from programmes that combined storytelling with participatory elements—such as radio call-ins, school clubs, or community dialogues—which helped audiences internalise and personalise messages. These interventions

were more likely to disrupt silence, encourage peer discussion, and sustain shifts in norms. However, not all of these programmes are evaluated, and more comparative, rigorous research is needed to determine whether multimedia approaches consistently outperform those using singular mediums in changing attitudes or behaviours over time.

How does entertainment media support shifts in masculinity norms?

Pathways of Norm Change via Entertainment Media

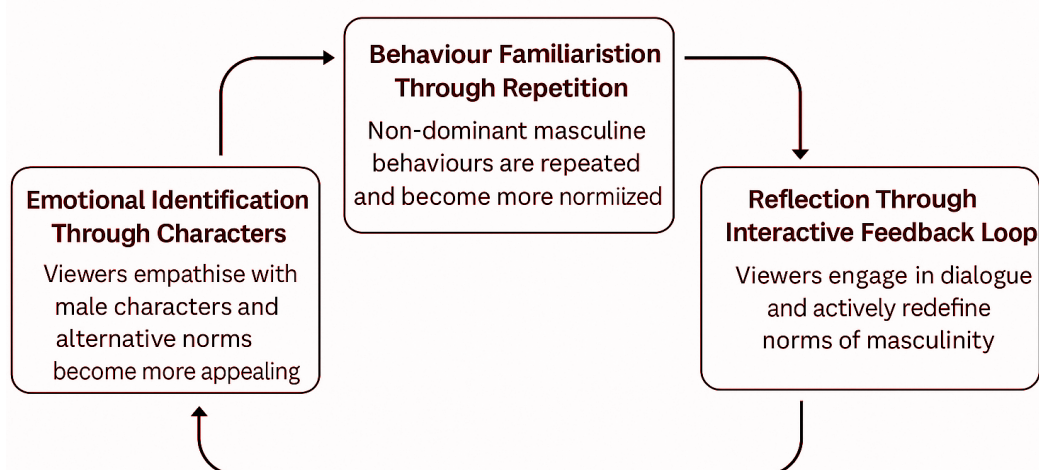


Figure 5. Pathways of Change for Entertainment Media Programming

Entertainment media interventions operate within a unique ecosystem of influence, leveraging story immersion, emotional identification, and repeated exposure, to allow boys and men to reflect, observe, and internalise new ideas. As shown in **Figure 5** and described in further detail below, three key pathways emerged as the most common ways masculinity norms were disrupted or reshaped:

- **Emotional identification through characters:** A primary pathway involved emotional connections with male characters navigating common tensions around relationships, pride, responsibility, and failure. Viewers followed these emotional journeys as characters confronted peer expectations, navigated partner disagreements, and learned from their mistakes. Through this lens, traditional masculine norms like control and dominance were portrayed as limiting or outdated. As viewers empathized with the characters' struggles, alternative norms of care, honesty, and mutual respect became more credible and desirable.
- **Behaviour familiarization through repetition:** A second pathway involved normalising non-dominant masculine behaviours, such as supporting girls' education, participating in family planning, and encouraging women's economic independence. These behaviours were repeated across episodes and formats. Over time, such portrayals disrupted the expectation that 'real men' should control decisions or remain emotionally detached. The repeated depiction of caring, collaborative male behaviour made alternative masculinities feel more familiar, socially accepted, and aspirational, especially for younger audiences.
- **Reflection through interactive feedback loops:** A third pathway operated through audience interaction and reflective dialogue. Programs with radio call-ins, text message polls, or youth-led digital storytelling invited boys and young men to voice their thoughts, test ideas, and hear from peers. These platforms encouraged reflection on the masculine norms in the stories they engaged with. Entertainment media interventions created spaces where masculine identities could be co-constructed through conversation, allowing viewers to question norms in real time.

Case Study

Shujaaz Multimedia Ecosystem: Reimagining Youth Identity and Masculinity Through Storytelling

The **Shujaaz** multimedia ecosystem, implemented across Kenya from 2015 to 2018, leveraged comics, radio, digital content, and community engagement to challenge and reshape dominant youth and masculinity norms. Rooted in the everyday lives of young people, the intervention worked within popular media channels to seed new narratives around decision-making, autonomy, and gendered expectations. Rather than lecturing or imposing messages, **Shujaaz** amplified peer voices and role models that young people could relate to, making positive deviance feel aspirational rather than deviant. **Shujaaz's** approach was grounded in the understanding that social norms, especially around masculinity, economic success, and sexual health, are shaped not only by beliefs, but by visibility, repetition, and shared language within peer groups. Through carefully designed storylines, the intervention subtly reframed masculinity away from control, dominance, and emotional detachment, toward openness, shared decision-making, and respect for girls' agency. These narratives were reinforced through group dialogues, community clubs, and interactive digital platforms, ensuring content didn't just inform, but sparked conversations that travelled within and across networks. In this way, **Shujaaz** didn't only communicate health or economic messages; it shifted reference points and rewrote the scripts that shape everyday behaviours, embedding new norms in familiar formats and trusted peer voices.

Takeaways and Implications

Interventions included in this deep dive worked by shifting what audiences saw, felt, and discussed, introducing new masculinities through emotional identification, narrative repetition, and interactive reflection. Below, we present five key takeaways and their implications for programming, drawn from an analysis of cross-cutting insights on designing masculinity-focused storytelling that moves beyond raising awareness to fostering sustained social norm transformation:



Masculinity Can Be Reconstructed Through Emotional Storytelling

Entertainment Media Programs implemented in Kenya approached norm change not through instruction, but through relatable characters and emotional resonance. Masculine transformation was modelled through vulnerability, shared decision-making, and care, which were positioned as aspirational traits not weaknesses. Norms were destabilised by showing the emotional costs of dominance (e.g., loss, guilt, isolation) and the personal growth enabled by alternative masculinities.



Implication: Program design should centre emotionally engaging storylines where male characters model positive deviance. Use character arcs to make visible the internal and relational tensions that allow for norm disruption and redefinition.



Reinforce Behaviour Change Through Multimedia Repetition

Multimedia programs used multiple formats including radio, social media, comics, TV, to expose audiences to the same messages across contexts. Repetition of specific behaviours (e.g., endorsing girls' education, supporting contraception, rejecting violence) increased familiarity and reduced the social risk of adopting non-dominant masculinities.



Implication: Strategic repetition across platforms should be used to make new masculine behaviours appear normal, expected, and collectively recognised, particularly among peer groups and youth audiences.



Enable Reflection Through Interactive Feedback Loops

Twelve of the fifteen interventions included mechanisms for audience interaction such as call-in shows, text message polls, or youth-led clubs, that allowed men and boys to test ideas, ask questions, and reflect on norms publicly or privately. These interactive moments acted as conversational bridges between fictional storylines and real-life beliefs.



Implication: Embed deliberate reflection points in storytelling design to facilitate norm internalisation. Feedback loops should allow audiences to explore identity shifts at their own pace, while surfacing new collective reference points through peer engagement.



Match Format to Context and Intent: Multimedia for Scale, Standalone for Depth

Multimedia campaigns expanded reach and sustained engagement across diverse settings, while standalone programs like **Makutano Junction** and **Serian Radio** delivered deep cultural relevance and emotional resonance through a single trusted medium. Both models contributed to norm change differently.



Implication: Choose storytelling formats based on program intent. Use multimedia to diffuse new norms broadly, and standalone formats where cultural specificity, trust, or narrative immersion are critical.



Link Masculine Transformation to the Well-Being of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

All entertainment media interventions ultimately tied norm change to improving outcomes for adolescent girls and young women—from rejecting early marriage to supporting economic autonomy. Masculinity was reframed not as dominance, but as allyship, care, and relational accountability.



Implication: Frame new masculinities in terms of their positive impact on others. Storylines should show how shifts in male behaviour improve the lives, agency, and well-being of adolescent girls and young women, reinforcing mutual benefit and shared responsibility.

Overall Limitations and Implications

Limitations

While this review intentionally foregrounded grey literature to surface under-documented innovations, the lack of external validation and peer-reviewed evaluation poses challenges for generalizability and causal attribution. Many program findings rely on internal monitoring or anecdotal community feedback, while contextually rich, are often not triangulated with independent data sources or systematically analysed. This limits the strength of claims around effectiveness, especially in distinguishing between male engagement (participation) and transformative norm-shifting (structural change). Moreover, several programmes conflated shifts in attitude with shifts in norms, without measuring broader social reinforcement or norm compliance.

Further, several interventions reviewed lacked clarity in distinguishing between norms around masculinity, male engagement strategies, and gender-transformative objectives. This conceptual drift makes it difficult to assess what type of change each intervention was targeting. For example, a program may have involved men in conversations around contraception (engagement), but without addressing the underlying norm that frames contraceptive decision-making as a male prerogative (norms shift), or without challenging the power asymmetry in sexual relationships (transformation). As a result, programming often reported success in terms of inclusion without evidencing norm change or structural disruption. While we included programmes generally which engaged men and boys within the design, and addressed norms related to masculinity, this underscores the need for clearer typologies and theories of change to guide design and evaluation.

Final Reflections for Programming

The number of interventions included in this deep dive reflects growing attention to addressing the norms underpinning masculinity as a strategy to improve outcomes related to gender-based violence, child, early, and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and women's economic empowerment in Kenya. Norms around male control, emotional stoicism, entitlement to female bodies, and provider roles cut across these outcome areas, directly impacting the health and well-being of adolescent girls and young women though their impact varied by context and the specific norms addressed. Evidence in this review also suggests that norms related to control, honour, and provision are often tightly linked, shifting one in isolation may unintentionally reinforce others. While some masculine norms were more prominent within specific outcome areas, their influence varied. Taken together, these insights suggest that future interventions in Kenya should identify which elements of masculinity are most relevant, most amenable to change, and which strategies have proven most effective. Below, we offer additional reflections for consideration:



Faith and cultural champion and entertainment media interventions influence masculine norms through distinct but complementary pathways. Champions operate within trusted moral institutions, using scriptural reinterpretation, public teaching, and spiritual legitimacy to catalyse change through belief-driven change. In contrast, entertainment media engages emotion and identification, reaching youth through relatable narratives, peer dynamics, and serialized story arcs. Combined, these two modalities offer layered, mutually reinforcing strategies that both reflect and reshape dominant masculinities.



Durable norm change occurs when beliefs and behaviours evolve together, rather than through rigid sequencing. Some interventions like [Channels of Hope](#), began with theological reinterpretation, while others, such as [MEK](#), catalysed change through visible male role models. Across interventions, a common success factor was the use of reinforcing feedback loops, combining personal reflection, peer validation, and public modelling, to sustain momentum and track progress.



Effective interventions identified and equipped context-specific male reference groups, such as fathers, religious leaders, boda boda drivers, teachers, and elders as norm holders, validators, and co-creators of alternative masculinities. Interventions that failed to differentiate these roles often struggled to move from participation to meaningful transformation.



Interventions must be aligned with local trust structures, social hierarchies, and resistance points. In contexts where faith institutions dominate moral discourse, deep theological engagement may be needed before visible behaviour change can occur. Conversely, urban youth exposed to diverse media may respond more readily to storytelling and peer-led norm disruption. Effective interventions tailored strategies to these contextual dynamics rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model.



Shifts in masculinity norms most effectively translated into improved outcomes within relationships between fathers and daughters, partners, peers, and faith communities. Given that masculinity is socially performed and validated, relational strategies such as joint decision-making, father-daughter dialogues, and peer accountability were critical for embedding new norms. Interventions that focused solely on individual attitudes often overlooked the relational structures that sustain masculine expectations.



Catalytic moments such as public declarations, scriptural reinterpretation, youth-led performances, and serialized character arcs offered socially legible evidence that change was both possible and permissible. These symbolic acts translated abstract shifts into public, repeatable, and socially endorsed norms. Their power lay not in symbolism alone, but in signalling collective permission to change.



Interventions effectively repurposed dominant masculine ideals such as protection, leadership, and provision toward more equitable ends. Care and consent were framed not as departures from masculinity, but rather as strong, honourable, and socially legitimate traits. This approach preserved cultural legitimacy while shifting norms away from control and dominance.

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