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**TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE  
AND RESILIENT WASH SERVICES**

## **County First Lady champions in transformative partnerships for MHM advocacy and integration**

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*Engaging influential individuals to promote change is an evidence-based advocacy strategy that is gaining tract in development initiatives. Through strategic partnerships with County first ladies (CFL) and county first ladies association (CFLA) in Kenya, WSSCC has leveraged the voices of champions at their points of influence to advancing menstrual hygiene management (MHM) advocacy efforts both at the policy and program levels. The office of County First Lady holds a unique position in Kenya, providing a platform to champion important social and development goals at the county level. WSSCC has partnered with County first ladies in Kenya since 2015 to profile MHM and advance its integration across different sectors and programs. This paper seeks to showcase the success and lessons from this model of MHM champions that can facilitate and institutionalize integration of initiatives such as MHM into policies and programs.*

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### **Introduction**

As with tradition, people look to the First Lady as the leading or most famous woman in the country. In the case of Kenya, the advent of devolution created two tier government that is national and county level consisting of 47 counties. Through this system, Kenyans do not only look up to the Office of the First Lady, but integrally, it has widely been recognized that County First Ladies are influential in promoting social and economic changes in their constituent counties. Many County First Ladies are renowned for supporting certain types of causes that resonate with the needs of their counties; albeit there are common causes championed by the County First Ladies such as the collective vision to improve the health status in their communities. Overarching, the County First Ladies commitment to place women and girls at the heart of development policies in their counties is an opportunity that WSSCC sought to explore in the ongoing discourse on Menstrual Hygiene Management, a trajectory that requires strong advocacy at different levels.

One of the lessons learnt from the MHM capacity building initiatives undertaken by WSSCC, in collaboration with the government of the different Countries WSSCC works in, is that MHM requires multiple categories of stakeholders and cross-sector collaboration for success. For the most part, the individual stakeholders will often choose one aspect of MHM to attend to for example, provide sanitation and water infrastructure, or provide menstrual products or provide education and training for girls or work on policies and guidelines. This is a reflection of the practices by a majority of the County First ladies in Kenya when it came to MHM strategies. The challenge however, is that many stakeholders do not address MHM holistically (breaking the silence, ensuring safe &hygienic management and safe disposal). In addition, they do not collaborate enough with others, leading sometimes to duplication of efforts. Even then, with lack of a systematic national and county strategy for intervening, most of these interventions are one off, or unsustainable.

The MHM champion model, is an initiative by WSSCC in collaboration with the government, which engages different influential groups at different levels e.g. members of parliament for national level advocacy and the County Frist ladies as MHM champions in counties. The County First Ladies MHM Champions model is spearheaded by the Kwale County first lady, her Excellency (H.E) Christine Mvurya,

crowned national MHM champion in Kenya and trained as one of the MHM National trainer of trainers in a TOT workshop organized and facilitated by WSSCC India. The model can be likened to Rogers EM (1995) ‘Diffusion of innovations’ model that theorizes how ideas spread and the need to seek out people who have adopted the new idea to address any uncertainties related to innovations. It identifies County first ladies as an influential cohort with the potential to promote MHM integration into all relevant planning processes, relevant sectors and systems to ensure that it is not only being addressed now when a lot of attention is being paid to it, but for years to come, even as new challenges emerge.

### How the model works

The process starts off with the identification of the likely County first ladies MHM champions informed by the individual County first ladies choice of causes they support and their passion. This is followed by capacity and skill development on holistic MHM and advocacy for MHM integration. The trained group or individual is crowned as an MHM champion once the buy-in is secured. The individual County first lady then develops a simplified strategy on MHM advocacy and integration in programs, starting with their existing initiatives. The MHM champion then reaches out to her network including strategic County government departments, supporters and benefactors to move the MHM integration agenda forward in the form of County plans, budgets and integrated programs.

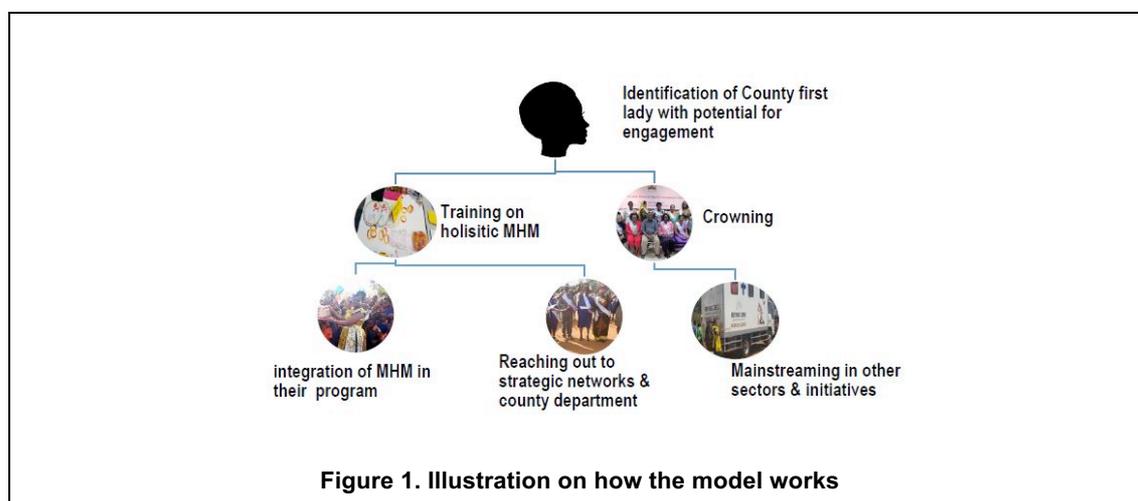


Figure 1. Illustration on how the model works

### Why the model works

Engaging the MHM champions provides a platform to reach pre-existing programs and relationships that increases chances of collective buy-in and prospects for uptake of commitments and replication. Through the experience in Kenya, the model has demonstrated to be one of the efficient ways of reaching the unreached and anchoring MHM agenda in county planning and budget allocation processes.

### How it works in practice

To demonstrate the gains made through the County First Ladies MHM Champion model, the outcomes from engagement with the County First Lady for Makueni, the principal author of this paper, is highlighted as a case example. Makueni County in Kenya is the pioneer county to cascade the Menstrual Hygiene Management training, a fete that has been attributed to Makueni County First Lady’s full attendance of the First National MHM TOT training held in August 2016. Being one of the 12 County First Ladies crowned as MHM Champions, Makueni County First Lady embarked on a new strategy to holistically address the three prongs of Menstrual Hygiene Management in her existing campaign of “Keep a girl in school” which involves distributing sanitary pads to girls in public schools and Psycho Education support project. Through these two projects, the County government initially supported the First lady to build capacity of 79 participants selected from the 6 Sub Counties within Makueni County. The group targeted with the MHM training consisted of 12 trained professional counsellors in the Counselling Unit under the County Health Department and Community Health Volunteers. Through this collaboration with the County government

departments, the County First Lady has made great strides on MHM outreach within the County as indicated in Table 1 and 2 below.

Through her foundation-Shina, The County First Lady has intensified MHM advocacy efforts in County budget processes by engaging with the County Budget and Appropriations Committee and the Health Committee of the Makueni County Assembly on reproductive health issues in the County. The foundation has also engaged the Women Members of the Makueni County Assembly and the Ward First Ladies (the spouses of the Members of the County Assembly (MCAs)) on reproductive health issues in the County. The leadership of the Makueni County Assembly and the committees cited above are greatly persuaded on the need for an enabling reproductive health policy in the County and increased budgetary allocation for reproductive health including MHM. The results of the advocacy efforts should therefore be evident in the 2018/19 Financial Year Budget.

| <b>Program</b>   | <b>County Department(s) in collaboration</b>   | <b>Outcome</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| Keeping Girls in School, Ending the Period of Shame: Provision of Sanitary Towels and Panties, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Psycho-Education | Youth, Gender, Culture, Sports and Social Services; Education and ICT; and Health Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over 5,692 young girls reached</li> <li>- Over 60 Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) trained on Menstrual Hygiene Management</li> <li>- Established a pool of Menstrual Hygiene Management Champions in the County</li> </ul> |

Source: Shina Foundation report

| <b>Type of initiative</b>                                | <b>Specific activity</b>  | <b>Outcomes</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Capacity Building-Cascading MHM training at County level | MHM Training for Community Health Volunteers  | 51 women and 21 men trained out of which 51 were Community Health Volunteers<br>5 were Social Development Officers;7 were Counselling Psychologists;2 were Youth Development Officer;1 was a Children's Officer;1 was a Health Promotion Officer;1 counselling unit head;1 principle gender officer |
|  | MHM Sensitization Training for Community Members  | 41 participants drawn from all 6 Sub Counties   |
|  | Holistic MHM Training for Women Groups in Kaiti Sub County and distribution of pads   | 14 women groups reached   |
|  | Holistic MHM Training for Women Groups in Kilome Sub County and distribution of pads  | Women groups and Officers from the Department of Youth, Gender, Culture, Sports and Social Services reached   |
| Integration of MHM with other initiatives /programs      | MHM Sensitization during the County Youth Mentorship Programme 2017   | 5,260 Form Four leavers reached   |
|  | MHM Sensitization during the Youth Mentorship Programme 2018  | Over 10,000 Form Four leavers reached   |
|  | Sensitization of adolescents and youth on MHM and reproductive health during the Adolescent and Youth Camp organized by the Utangwa Catholic Church Parish, Kithungo/Kitundu Ward, Makueni. | 3 Priests; 201 Adolescents & 6 Parents reached  |

|                         |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| MHM in schools outreach | Sensitization on MHM in Prof. Kaloki Muthunguue Secondary School        | 321 students: 180 boys and 141 girls reached   |
|                         | Sensitization on MHM in Yindundu Primary School                         | 503 pupils reached   |
| MHM advocacy            | National Menstrual Health Day 2017 Celebration hosted by Makueni County | 1,000 people attended including 15 schools County Governor alongside the Deputy Governor and select County leadership crowned as champions |

### **Makueni County First Lady future plans for strategic MHM mainstreaming**

- Advocate for MHM hygiene and disposal strategy development with the County Department of Water, Irrigation and Environment;
- Breaking the silence on menstruation targeting large scale sensitization through media-radio talk shows and print media;
- Advocate for Border Counties communication strategy on MHM covering: Kajiado; Taita Taveta, Kitui and Machakos Counties; and
- Mapping stakeholders in Makueni County for sensitization and involvement in MHM.

### **Lessons learned from the County First Ladies MHM Champion model**

The last two years since WSSCC piloted this model of engagement and cascading MHM work have been informative on areas of improvement for better impact. Some of the lessons include:

- Levels of individual influence vary and have impact limits. When possible, multiple champions should be engaged at multiple points of influence e.g. at national and sub-national levels for greater impact;
- Important to diverse type of support to the MHM Champions for impact e.g. through technical, capacity building assistance and mentorship support;
- Ensure that the champion feels supported and recognized, examples of incentives could include formal recognition and acknowledgment, capacity-building opportunities, exposure to networking and peer-learning opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Capitalizing on individual strengths and opportunities, including networks, that strategically positioned champions such as County First Ladies bring on board, is one model towards meeting the needs of the last mile first, especially when in the hope of making WASH services more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women and girls. Nonetheless, there is need to further explore through research for better documentation of the overall efficacy of the MHM Champions model.

**Photos of County First Ladies MHM Champions at work**



**Photograph 1. Crowned champions; County First Ladies & 2 Tanzania Members of Parliament**

Source: WSSCC County First Ladies MHM Training report 2017



**Photograph 2. Makueni County First Lady conducting MHM school outreach**



**Photograph 3. Breaking silence on MHM Kwale and Makueni CFLs in action**

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## References

Rogers, Everett M. 2003 *Diffusion of innovations*. New York: Free Press print

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## Notes

The paper highlights the County First Ladies MHM Champion model from Kenya, however WSSCC has a network of MHM champions drawn Members of parliament, sectoral Ministers, local administrators in many countries in Asia and Africa including India, Nepal, Kenya, Senegal, Cameroon, Niger and Tanzania where WSSCC works on MHM policy and practice for women and girls (and men and boys).

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## Contact details

*H.E Nazi Kivutha is the County First Lady for Makueni County and also the Chair Lady of the County First Ladies Association, renowned for championing the needs of women, adolescent boys and girls and youth through the different programs initiated by her foundation called Shina. Notably her contribution in the MHM landscape has been through 'Keeping Girls in school', initiative. H.E Christine Mvurya is the County First Lady for Kwale County and also the Kenya National MHM Champion; she's renowned for championing MHM agenda both nationally and regionally including her work with vulnerable girls and people living with disabilities. Dr. Virginia Kamowa is a Senior Programme Officer-Global Advocacy for WSSCC with a specific interest in advancing the needs of women and girls in vulnerable situations using MHM as an entry point.*

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