

Gender Assessment: Social Behavior Change Communication in Kyrgyzstan in the context of the McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program

Dr. Philipp Schröder, ISDC / University of Freiburg
LiK, 29 October 2020



1

Background

- Mercy Corps (MC): since 2003 implementing partner of USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition program
- Support 'National School Feeding Program' of MoES of Kyrgyz Republic
- 2003-2020: MC supported 510 public schools & over 800 kindergartens
 - rebuilding school kitchens & providing supplementary commodities to prepare hot meals
 - capacity-building through workshops/trainings
 - Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC): work with parents to improve nutrition & hygiene behaviors at home



2



3

Objectives of Gender Assessment

- SBCC: overall strong reception and interest; but: weak male participation (e.g. only 9% of local activists)
- Objectives:
 - Better understand complex dynamics of gender-based participation from micro-level qualitative data
 - Better understand reasons of higher or lower participation according to gender & other social identity categories
 - Develop evidence-based recommendations for actionable adjustments that increase participation levels of passive groups (esp. male caregivers)



4

Field Research (October 2019)



- 57 qualitative in-depth interviews; based on guideline of questions
- 5 village settings in northern Kyrgyzstan, 6 village settings in southern Kyrgyzstan
- 32 male respondents & 25 female respondents
- most respondents with program-experience &/or associated with school
- all research communities have participated in program



5

Finding 1: Gender-Sensitive Discourse



- Male & female caregivers agree: care for children's nutrition, education & social upbringing (*tarbiya*) should be a joint activity
- Quote:
"Both mother and father should have direct responsibility in the upbringing and development of the child. The father must know what the child wants, what it dreams about, what it needs, what kind of education it wants." (male activist)
- Recommendation: Draw on established, unchallenged local discourse on gender equity aspiring balanced & fair labor-sharing.



6

Finding 2: Gendered Labor-Sharing in Practice



- Everyday life: female caregivers with more responsibilities in domains of nutrition & education; especially if male is sole breadwinner
- Males are more participative if both caregivers work; but their involvement remains conditional and reactive ("filling in")
- Recommendation:
Utilize informal association between household, school, community = Convincing male caregivers towards more participation starting from school & local community institutions might increase their role in private household.



7

Finding 3: 'Different' Men



- Some non-mainstream males/male activists in every community; 'different' (*bashkacha*), because critical of conservative indifference & of shifting tasks of education & nutrition onto women's shoulders
- Such 'wider view' not related to level of education, but: personal experience made these males prioritize children's future over personal comfort (e.g. migration, orphan childhood, caring own father)
- Recommendation:
Promote alternative masculinities = Employ narrative approach to build-up non-mainstream male caregivers as graspable role-models & empower 'alternatives masculinities' (e.g. authorities endorsing 'different men')



8

ISDC

INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AND
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

9

Finding 4: 'No Time' as a Well-Known, but Powerful Pretext

ISDC

INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AND
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

- 'Men not having time' = no objective measure of time budgets, but subjective assessment assigning more value to male than to female time
- 21 of 44 respondents identify 'no interest' among males as 'real reason'; but: despite being known as a pretext, employing it has few consequences & respondents find it difficult to imagine feasible work-around
- Recommendation:
 - Deconstruct 'no time'-pretext (lack of moral justification) & highlight duty 'everything for the sake of one's children'
 - Adjust program to seasonal variation of male time budgets ('free during winters') as defined by agricultural cycles or international labor migration



10

Ways to Increase Male Caregivers' Involvement



- Empower male caregivers' intimate social surroundings: strengthen voices of children & female caregivers as social actors
- Increase male responsibility through community institutions: draw on local, collective notions of responsibility (mentioned: imam, self-administration, elders, village heads, businessmen, political deputies)
- Create opportunities for positive male inclusion: involve males in school-based events: e.g. competition 'My father and I'; or: 44% believe male caregivers would attend training labelled 'good father'



11

General Conclusions



- Enable men to take steps out of patriarchal comfort zones & experience positive fatherhood
- Strengthen notion of parental piety, complementing notion of 'fileal piety'
- Achieve balance between 'showing respect' & 'showing responsibility' (as guiding principles underlying social and other exchanges)
- Avoid 'doing harm':
 - Do not single out & ostracize larger groups of men in their local communities
 - Do not disregard secularity principle (separation between private religious representation & public domain of school education)
 - Do not unduly challenge role of female caregivers, which might be considered their key family contribution & thus worthwhile protecting vs. male encroachment



12



Thank You!

