



Faith in development: Transcript

Season 2: Gender and protection

Summary keywords

women, norms, church, gender-based violence, survivors, gender, gender equality, violence, faith, community, work, sexual, support, drc, men, lived, people, motivation, mom, conversation

Speakers

Sabine Nkusi, Francesca Quirke, Mary Thamari

Episode 6: Norms and gender transformation

Sabine Nkusi 0:10

Hello, welcome back to season two of the *Faith in development* podcast brought to you by Tearfund. My name is Sabine Nkusi. Today you will hear a conversation between two of my colleagues here at Tearfund. Francesca Quirke is our Sexual and Gender Based Violence Programs Manager and is based in the UK. Mary Thamari is the Gender and Inclusion specialist and is based in Kenya. In the conversation, they discuss social norms, especially in relation to gender, and how these impact our daily lives, I really hope you enjoyed the conversation.

Mary Thamari 1:02

Nairobi is the city under the sun, so it's nice and bright and warm? Today is about 25 degrees centigrade. So that's pretty warm, but something we're used to. I like it.

Francesca Quirke 1:17

I like that very much as well. Here in Brighton, it is grey. And yeah, not 24 degrees, as you might imagine! Well, good to be able to chat with you. We've been talking a lot on our podcast so far about SGBV interventions, and the work that we have been partnering with different communities and organisations on working with survivors and on transforming masculinities, looking at gender norms and the role of faith in

that and this session or this episode, it's great to be able to have a conversation just a bit more broadly about social norms. I know that we've been talking a lot about gender norms and how they're important in transplant masculinities. But I think we're aware that gender norms, something that impact all of us, right. And I know that that's something that you've got a lot of background in. And maybe you can just say a bit about the work that you've done in some of your research areas as well, and the role that you do at Tearfund.

Mary Thamari 2:18

I am, of course a team member in the general protection unit as the gender intuition specialist specialists. And really my role is to support the integration of gender lens into all the work that we do at Tearfund in the programs and in the advocacy to support really the awareness that gender affects everything we do even how we even how we make decisions, even how our interventions are received or even implemented. That's something that we can't afford to ignore. And so it's such a joy to be here to be sharing this with you. My previous experience has been leading development projects here in Kenya and in supporting other countries in Eastern Africa region, but also done extensive research in the areas of gender norms, particularly on how when there is a situation of prolonged livelihood difficulties, what do people do what had the gender power dynamics between people as they tried to cope with the period of prolonged like difficulties, one of the findings I found out is that gender norms or gender in practices play a big role on how people cope, sometimes in harmful ways, but also in ways that create opportunities and spaces for people to access resources, more business opportunities. I'm sure that can be a conversation for another day. But just to say that being aware of nodes that influence how people relate with each other, how resources are shared, how leadership is conducted, or even how you participate is very important. And so yeah, hope this will be useful to people who listen.

Francesca Quirke 4:11

I think, as you've talked about gender norms affect all of our work, and we've been talking about it, particularly in our SGBV interventions, transformed masculinity is but as you say, applicable for all of us and across all of our work. And I sometimes think, you know, we kind of use the terms gender norms, but we don't really know what, what they are. And so I think, you know, it can be helpful to think about norms as the unspoken rules that operate in society, right, that people tend to be aware of them, but at the same time, they can kind of be invisible, like if we think about, you know, there's lots of types of norms if we think about cultural norms, every culture, you know, there are different ways in different cultures that you might greet someone or that you might do hospitality or resolve conflict. And a lot of the time we're not aware of, of those norms as unspoken rules, until we kind of hit up against them, right? And then we're like, oh, okay, that's a different way of doing things. And so we think about these gender norms often, which are really about what are the ways that men and women should behave in society? How Should men be men? How should women be women? What's accepted? You know, in that particular community, or social network environment institution, there are kind of these assumptions about what is acceptable, right, but they're invisible a lot of the time. And so it's like, how do we become aware of them? And why do we need to become aware of them? I guess, is the big question.

Mary Thamari 5:47

So as you see, most of these rules are really unconscious and spoken because they are us, we are operating in that as well. And they can be unconscious, but sometimes it can be a conscious I mean, I'm for I'm for norms can be used to advantage some people or not, I'll give you some of the examples of some that we might be mean a bit more familiar with, I mean, a just a normal, like real men should not show emotions. Real men don't cry, Real men don't show vulnerability. And young people, young boys grew up thinking like that, and, and we see a lot of mental health risks associated with that man men, because then they don't reach out for help, because they're not supposed to show that vulnerability to show that emotion. And therefore, they don't deal with overwhelming situations by way of sharing like the women do. So men risk. Others say that real men should never be broken, unemployed. And that kind of pressure leads to some, you know, negative compensating behaviours, like even violence, when a man is completely feeling useless, and they feel the only thing they have left is that physical strength to hit somebody to feel something better or lead to crime, so that they can, they can be in that position to be who they're supposed to be, according to the normative foods in the community, we have the lead, that's, that's related to the one that says real men, providers, not caregivers, you know, and we have that affecting how family men take care of their children. So they think they, they mediate their love by giving, but not by being fair, I carry participating, and that can perpetuate you know, you know, parenting that to parents, especially men are distanced. But the women also there are norms about them, for example, some like that came out of my own research that I did on femininity, that things like body and looks markers of acceptable beauty, you know, the shape of somebody's body, the colour of their skin, the shape, you know, their height, you know, I mean, that kind of thing. And, and these markers kind of dictate or influence what people feel about themselves, you know, and in some cases, they don't determine who is included and excluded in what opportunities, you know, normal, who is acceptable, other norms, that kind of belief that women's value is in their sexual appeal, you know, like object of sexual pleasure. And when that is pervasive among men or even women themselves, they end up in exploitative relationships, you know, sexual, you know, our transactions, because they think, or they believe, because that's what, that's what the moments that the object of sexual desire by men, other people, others that we met do not have clear judgment and therefore cannot be trusted with leadership or decision making. And, and, again, these norms, it's not just the people perpetuating them or using them or even the women themselves believing and therefore there'll be quiet, they will not give their opinion, they will not volunteer to lead, you know, they will not lead confidently because they believe, and the people around them believe that well, clear judgment not to show.

And then this other norm even shows up in institutional like policies or even I mean, the way laws are made or, or how institutions disable what happens to what, take something for example, maternity leaves, you know, or childcare policies. And I tend to think, to some extent, the leaves given to women who have children, sometimes can be very short, and this isn't believed that women's biological responsibilities or reproductive responsibilities are checked like childbearing, are a liability to the economy, which is not the case and all it is 'quickly, have your baby, go back to work without taking enough time to care for that', because really humans that a child is a human resource that a woman produces. So in every sense, this is an economic contribution. But why our laws, you know, the laws are operating under data that not to the extent that they don't see that value of that contribution. So these are some of them, we could sit here all day long, and talk about the norms, like the ones that women appreciated for their role as mother for

motherhood. And if you're childless, or in some cases, if you have no sun, like in the context of, like, in a part of Africa, even in my own country, like out of the research I did, they are invalidated for not producing children, apparently, for the men are not producing a sun, that is clued, from owning property, or resources or accessing slightly wood, because of the VAT from that norm. Yeah, so those, those are some of the examples from key. And there's much more really, that is there.

Francesca Quirke 11:13

Yeah, it's interesting that there can be also seems like operating almost contradictory norms or norms for complying with motherhood norms for spending too much time on caring. There's all these kinds of complex web of them, I think was also what you're saying was really interesting about norms that operate at a communal level, community level institutions are made up out of people, they're not set from the people that make up the institutions. So obviously, there's that those norms circulating. And then those institutions also serve to reinforce the norms. So you've got these feedback loops that are ongoing, I think that's important to think about it, we're in all of our work, because what she, you know, norms aren't, you know, necessarily negative, but when we gender norms, a lot of them do uphold male superiority. And so there are a lot of gender norms that do perpetuate inequality. And so if our aim is to get to gender equality, like it's a look at these norms, because I think, you know, it's also interesting, if we're looking at, like, behaviour change, or like, you 'can have' attitude, right, you as an individual, yeah, you can believe that women should be in leadership, that women should work outside the home, that women should be economically independent, whatever that might be. But if the norms around you are very strong in an opposite way, if you perceive that, you know, it's not common for women to practice leadership, in your context or on your network, and perceive that that's not going to be okay, like that your parents might disagree that your spouse, your siblings, your faith leader, then it's going to be very hard, even if it's something you believe in actually put that into practice. Right. And that's kind of the power of norms.

Mary Thamari 13:07

Yeah. Yeah. And it's really because we are it again, I'm seeing that even in education spaces, in schools, in religious traditions, in politics, in media, in health, we see representation that sometimes pits women as victims Not, not all holders have their own agency or influence as of their own interests and needs. And sometimes it's because of the way things are and women get fair, those who managed to get them and end up just, I mean, following the game of that. And, and yeah, it can be very passive. And so when we think about gender norms in development work in our advocacy work, we need to be asking the questions even beyond the numbers, you know, numbers, what do I mean? When we say some type of gender equality, I think the most, the simplest way of thinking about it is do we have equal numbers Frankie, do we have equal numbers, but equal numbers is one level, it is within those numbers.

Francesca Quirke 14:14

Participating? Right, right.

Mary Thamari 14:17

The agenda that comes from that table where there are equal numbers, right, whose interests whose needs present in pair are the needs of men and their interests and abilities on the table? And the same thing between and in most cases because historical tradition, is it historical Yeah, historically, women's have been marginalised in a lot of leadership and decision making positions. We even now we have more women, I mean, less women in most of these places and because of that norm also that defines a good woman and mean good femininity, as you know, quiet and unquestioning, agreeable submissive. We can find women in different angles, but they're not speaking and are participating can or giving opinions. So when we are designing a project or having community dialogues to understand people's interests and needs, we also need to know what exists behind that what exists behind who speaks, who doesn't speak, who questions who can question Who, okay, and even among women themselves, to decide to actually be aware that there are differences, younger women and older women in the same space, definitely you guess who's, whose voice will be heard, right? Maybe your context might be different from mine, but to other women have more, more voice, of course, in the presence of younger women, and therefore, I mean, just being aware of those things and not being blind to them.

Francesca Quirke 15:55

Yeah, sorry. I got distracted. I was thinking about in my Yeah, I suppose. Yeah, age is a different one. Maybe in the UK. And maybe as women get older, you have less voice they kind of really disappear a bit. Mm hmm. Oh.

Mary Thamari 16:11

I mean, here gray hair is powerful.

Francesca Quirke 16:15

Okay, yeah. This edge here is more for men than women, I think in the UK.

Mary Thamari 16:22

But when we look at the example of Jesus, right, and the way he treats the way he operates within norms, he is born among a people called Jews, right. And these people are not nameless, right. They have their own norms. They have their way that they have rules, our relationships and everything else. But there's one example that really amazes me at how Jesus just navigates that space of norms to give us a different way of looking at what we should be looking at, as far as gender equality is concerned. In Luke chapter 10, verse 38-42, where the story of Mary and Martha and Mary is busy sitting at the feet of Jesus having this conversation. And mother is busy. Working the kitchen, doing a wonderful thing that supports the thriving

of a family, every flourishing home must have someone who could write a very important rule. And it's a rule that is within the norms of a lot of a lot of places. So she was doing something useful. And Mary was also doing something else. She was not in the kitchen, but she was listening and having a conversation with Jesus Christ. So how Jesus interacts with the with these two women, when mother comes and says, you know, I'm on working alone, or alone in the kitchen, cooking for everywhere, and I'm really just sitting and doing nothing. So Jesus kind of operates in a countercultural way to respond to matter, countercultural in the fact that he does not join mother in condemning married, but it does not also condemn mother in being in the kitchen affirms them as humans of value both of them in what they have chosen for that particular time. It doesn't even rebuke mother, it just adds value, it gives mother another idea of what else you could possibly do. In addition, you're ready to you could sit here like Mary, and he says, Mary has chosen that good part by sitting and listening. Okay, so what he does, he does not stop and say Mother, you can't cook any more. From now on, you guys sit under my feet and listen to me. No, he expands your horizon of what a woman can possibly do, by demonstrating that you can as well cook. But this is also something that is of value. Now in the Jewish culture 10 Women won't believe not to be intellectually capacitated to have deep religious or spiritual conversations, at least not with men, you know, but by Jesus accepting to have a conversation with Mary it is saying no, you are included. Right, the sessions that are of value to you, and just as it is to men. So he is not only affirming Mary, he is showing Martha more, more possibilities. He does not condemn her, but commends Mary for her desire to learn the word of God so Mary's desire to engage in dialogue Actually and spiritually for that much was affirmed by Jesus. And really acknowledging, and I'm sure this was in the presence of men is in the presence of people. I mean, this was complete advocacy and influencing happening here by his action. But also the other very interesting thing Jesus does as part of this journey in another story is referring to the woman in Luke chapter that teen that in verse 16, the woman who was bent over and he calls her daughter off her program. Yeah, by calling our daughter of Abraham is positioning her as part of the story of God. You know, Abraham is the father of positioning is telling her you know what, your quarter spiritual status equal to that of men by calling her that? Look here, in most of the norms, women are seen through victim lens. Jesus does not see this woman as the bad woman. He sees through the lens of 'you belong, daughter of Abraham', spiritual status included, you know, not in the lens of a victim. And that's the same thing he does the woman who had a bleeding problem, because her daughter, and this really speaks to a lot of norms, especially norms that mischaracterise women. For example, when a woman is strong and assertive, and well, you know, confidently spoken, Frankie, you know what that what they will be called, there'll be called weird.

Francesca Quirke 21:14

Bossy!

Mary Thamari 21:43

Bossy, they're seen as bossy, stubborn, she, you know, so this positive thing, above a woman is completely turned in on most of our norms. As No, a character that is not acceptable. But Jesus does. Opposite.

Francesca Quirke 22:01

Yeah, I love that. I was just going to say, yeah, there were so many things to think about and what you were saying, I love that picture. Because with Mary and Martha, because I feel like often Martha gets a bit of a raw deal. Like almost she's often used as this example of being distracted or not kind of discerning what Jesus had for her, or sometimes getting too caught up in practical matters, and being busy and everything. But as you say, my mother was conforming with what was expected of her. She was doing her duty, she was caring for others. And I love what you said about Jesus recognising that and affirming it and not. Yeah, like not taking that away from her, but at the same time, space for Mary. Yeah, I really love what you're saying about like, it's not only to be a fan, Mary, not only did he make education, spiritual knowledge open to men, but he modelled that he drew attention to it, they modelled it, both for other women, Martha and also other women who were there helping and cooking, but also, as you say, to the men, and so he recognises the norms, he doesn't he doesn't shame either of the women. But he opens up space for other possibilities, other expressions of, I guess not even like being a woman, but just being a follower of Jesus. Right? And then even just, I love that that even though speaking to that specific woman even just opens up the concept, oh, yeah, there are waters of Abraham, as well as sons of Abraham. All women are included in this story.

Mary Thamari 23:33

Yeah, I can't just imagine how a family that would have been, it's possible, you know, when you had a disease that deformed your body. In most cases, like the lepers were called the lepers. They were not called John, or Frankie or Mary or whatever. They were called the lepers people. But this is only naming somebody by giving her a position that is a recognised spiritual status, even among men. And really, I think the men may have just if this, I mean, when Jesus was calling him Torah, Barbara, it's possible the men turned and they're like, Jesus. Yeah. You know, they may not have, but it was a shock. You mean? So really, and I think this is what we need to be recognising, as we work with people has we prevent the exploitation or encourage their intuition and empower them? We need to be looking at who they are in what they what we want of them. I mean, we need to be labelling them with the end in mind. You know, not just this poor people. I think that's not a good label. Not this beneficiary, but pipeline, or, you know, businesswomen.

Francesca Quirke 24:56

Mm. Yeah.

Mary Thamari 23:33

I mean, you call a bad woman. But she already knows. So you call a poor person per person they already know. So by just the way we speak, we can start changing our thinking about the people we work with, or even the people around us even, it can help us think about how we design how we strategise. Yeah, in

intervening whatever different situations people are in, not ignoring that the people, people have more than just the face of the problem that you've just seen. But when we talk about gender equality, and this is the beginning point of it, really understanding gender norms, what are we really aiming for, and we're aiming for us to move from being gender blind, there's a whole spectrum of how a completely integrated gender programming should be. And that spectrum is from gender blind level, to gender aware to gender specific, gender sensitive, and then gender transformative. Our aim is to be a gender transformative level. But what are all these others, and let me just quickly share that lowest level is gender blind. And this is a level where we ignore the power dynamics between men and women, between boys and girls. And often this might lead to ignoring also social, economic, political and spiritual opportunities, rights and entitlements associated with being a man or a woman. It's complete, it's really ignoring. But being as just as the name suggests being blind. It is, in most cases, people who are gender blind, construct this idea from saying, or having a principle of it's being fair, you know, we're treating everyone the same people are not the same to be treated. Because this completely ignores even gender differences in the rules, and the needs and the risks and the vulnerabilities completely seeing everyone the same. And often, this reinforces harmful practices that violence, it leads to exploitation, gender based discrimination, and even exclusion from say, economic opportunities, leadership and decision making. So we this is where we don't want to be.

That's what the next stage is, really gender aware, and gender aware is, as the name suggests, is being aware of needs, differences in needs, interests, roles for dynamics, etc, we'll be talking about here, but what an organisation like ours does with our gender awareness is what really determines how useful this becomes. So we can either with our awareness be gender sensitive, which is considered those differences as important for consideration. But you know, just know that they are there, but we do not omit your action. And this is what gender sensitivity is, you're aware, you consider the differences, but there's no remedial action that is done or developed to address that, or to navigate that towards change. The next level of the gender sensitive, sensitive is gender specific or gender responsive. So this considers those differences in norms in roles in interests, needs and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, and also considers how they affect access to and control over resources, or economic opportunities, or healthy opportunities, you know, all the things that cause humans to thrive or to flourish. Gender specific agenda responsive also intentionally targets and benefits a specific group of women or men to achieve a certain program goal, if that's a group that has been seen to be disadvantaged in that situation. So for example, in some places we might find street boys are more vulnerable to being recruited into crime and guns. And now target them specifically, because of that vulnerability. They have been another case you find this, it is girls who are spending too much fetching water, and therefore they need specific or responsive prompt that takes care of that. So that's being gender responsive. And this gentle responsiveness makes it easier for men and women to fulfil duties, ascribe to them based on their gender roles, but also to grow and to be empowered in that than to push away the exploitation to prevent violation, other kind of thing. So I think that the continuous application of gender responsiveness is what leads to our main ethnic code, which is gender transformative levels. But how does gender transformative level look like? Gender transformative level addresses the root causes of this issue? Just the differences, the risks, Why are men more prone to risk taking? Why are women more exploited sexually, we are asking why level, right. And this is because the behaviour is what we see, we see the violent behaviour. But the violent behaviour is based on some values behind it. And so I'll give an example. I think something like addressing sexual and gender based violence and supporting for example, survivors of sexual and gender based violence can be seen as a gender responsive action, you know, we are responding to that particular issue balance, but when you go ahead to

deal with the root causes that balance through transforming masculinities, a program that deals with values and all that that way, then we can say TM is agenda transformative action. And then SGBV support to survivors is responsive, you know, and we need all these of all levels. It's like humanitarian response when there is emergency. The other one is like development, you're dealing with the issues to prevent the emergency of the disaster. And we need both at all times. So when we talk about things like gender responsive budgeting, gender responsive programming, it is because we want to target specific needs and interests and vulnerabilities and opportunities that are different for men and women poison pills, so that the end result can be transformative, because we will also be dealing with the root causes. And the main objective here is really gender equality, and the gender transformative programming, for example, we'll be even looking at what are the policies like? What are the laws, like in different places? For example, if it's violence, or exclusion from ownership of property, etc? And how do we influence an advocate for change at that level, because then that will affect more people, women who have something to lay claim, legally. So I think this, this gives them an understanding of what our aims are, at the end of the day is to be able to really in our targeting, designing of our project, we're thinking about all these things, so no one is left behind. So no issues are left behind. And just being aware that whatever we do, needs to be responsive, but it also needs to be transformative.

Francesca Quirke 32:32

Every project of a community has to have that awareness. Because, yeah, we are people, we are everywhere.

Mary Thamari 32:39

I know, it's not just meant to be aware, or women to be aware is all of us to be aware, because we are practising, practising it, you know, practising gender is actually when a woman or even a man just gets into the shoes of what is expected, even if sometimes it can be harmful. I mean, take for example, if you're in a boardroom, Frankie, at least maybe not in your context in mind you're in a boardroom, you're a woman, and there are men in that space across the discussion table. Anytime a woman, for example, gives their opinion, a man takes it in their own voice and explains it again.

Francesca Quirke 33:20

I think that same context, that happens.

Mary Thamari 33:25

Yeah, and they're doing it with all genuine love and care. And if you're a Christian, and it's a church, they really love the Lord just like you do. But they come from a norm that makes them feel or think that a woman's voice needs a man's voice to legitimise it, to strengthen it or to reinforce the idea. But you know,

that's really silencing. And sometimes that can make women not to speak. Because, you know, what, for?

Francesca Quirke 33:58

Yeah, and I get trainings, I'd say something, and there'll be like, a kind of silence. And then, like a male co-facilitator, say, and everyone be like, 'Oh, yeah. To see'.

Mary Thamari 34:09

So it's like, okay, let's take it let's let's manage that live, then it's, it's more powerful said by a man. And, and they'll tell you, this can be a lot of times very unconscious. So I'm a mom of boys. And I'm having these conversations with them. So that they see what's, what's that what's really happening. Are you how are you helping your female cousin or your classmate? By No, no, no, but they don't do that. But just to be aware that some of these can be very unconscious, but they perpetuate something.

Francesca Quirke 34:41

Hmm, maybe that's a good kind of point to wrap up our conversation. It's really encouraging to hear about the conversations you're having with your sons. How do we become aware of the norms and how do we interrupt them? Because I think it can when we talk about gender norms, it can feel a little bit overwhelming like How Will anything change? But I think, you know, if we're thinking about norms and messages that we're hearing constantly in society, right, norms are coming through teaching and preaching and the media and our relationships. It's like how, in all those different spaces, can we start bringing in positive messages, right? Like if yes, negative messages, how can we replace the positive?

Mary Thamari 35:23

It's really, it's a concept of pushing the darkness with the light. I think we can't even remove some of these gnomes. Now we can push them by the right ones we can replace, we can talk with the right thing. Because in culture building, you don't build a culture by eight and leaving, it's not there. Or taking it away. No, you build another culture, that it's like a weed growing, and then choke, choking. I mean, the crop growing and then shocking the crops, I think there's a parable to that effect, create new culture that is positive that causes flourishing of relationships between men, women, girls and boys. And then that becomes what replaces tax. The way we just decided the work we do, and this is part of it, what we're doing here today, we're having this conversation so that we, I mean, to reinforce the need for these things.

Francesca Quirke 36:23

Amazing. Thank you, Mary, thank you so much for all of your insights and all of your sharing. It was fascinating to be able to talk to you about this and I'm sure we'll keep talking about it. Thanks again for your time.

Mary Thamari 36:36

Always my joy Frankie.

Sabine Nkusi 36:38

Thank you. Thank you for listening. I hope you have enjoyed the conversation between Francesca and Mary and that he has awakened your appetite to examine how gnomes also play in your daily lives. Please join us again. And if you want to know more about our work, or catch up on previous episodes of the *Faith and development* podcast, please visit learn.tearfund.org. See you next time.

Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, United Kingdom.
☎ +44 (0)20 3906 3906 ✉ publications@tearfund.org learn.tearfund.org

Registered office: Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, United Kingdom.
Registered in England: 994339. A company limited by guarantee. Registered Charity No. 265464
(England & Wales) Registered Charity No. SC037624 (Scotland)

