



## Moving beyond data disaggregation: utilizing evaluation systems to promote gender equality in sports development for youth at scale

### 1. Background

This brief provides lessons learned by South African non-government organization, Waves for Change (W4C), with specific reference to promoting gender equality in the sport for development sector<sup>1</sup>. By fusing the rush of surfing with evidence-based mind/body therapy, W4C provides a child-friendly mental health service to vulnerable and differently-abled children and youth living in under-resourced communities. The surf therapy program provides children with a safe space (both physical and emotional), caring mentors and weekly surf sessions; helping children to develop skills to cope with life's challenges and make positive life choices. Established in 2011, W4C has grown from reaching a handful of children to engaging over 800 vulnerable children and young people weekly. W4C continues to prioritize organisational learning to improve the quality of program delivery and share meaningful recommendations with organizations working in the sport for development space.

W4C realized inclusion of females in a male-dominated sports program is a positive step, but not enough to transform gender norms, even with female coaches and role models. In 2015/16 W4C embarked on understanding the effect of its program on male and female child participants. Through disaggregating program attendance data by sex, they found female drop-out rates were consistently higher than male rates; and despite growing girl participation from 18% to 28% from 2015 to 2016, drop-out rates of girl participants remained high. It appeared that girls were not included as meaningfully as boys in the surf therapy program. Wanting to understand how to engage and retain female children more effectively, W4C accessed funding in early 2017 to explore how responsive the program was to gender, and to develop meaningful recommendations. Through a grant provided by YouthPower Learning, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), W4C conducted a 12-month research and learning project to move beyond data disaggregation by exploring if the surf therapy program was meaningfully influencing gender norms of coaches and children, and if a short gender sensitization training process could influence children in the program's gender norms and improve girls' experiences within the program.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information, see the full report titled by the same name at <https://www.youthpower.org/yp-grants-under-contract#Waves%20for%20Change>

## 2. Purpose and Approach

### ***Project Purpose***

The purpose of this grant was to develop a framework for a gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation and learning system, for W4C to provide a gender-responsive surf therapy program to all its child participants. With gender data that moves beyond sex disaggregation, W4C endeavoured to promote meaningful experiences for girl participants, as well as ultimately challenge gender norms and stereotypes held by W4C participants, staff and community members.

### ***Project Setting***

The project was conducted across three W4C sites in Cape Town, South Africa: Masiphumelele, Khayelitsha, and Lavender Hill. Masiphumelele and Khayelitsha have a predominantly black population, while Lavender Hill has a predominantly colored population. All three sites have females in leadership positions (including Site Managers/Senior Coaches).

### ***Main Project Activities***

Three activities completed during the research and learning project were:

- A. Sensitization of W4C staff and coaches to the concept of gender and its critical role in positive youth development (PYD) outcomes, focused on encouraging self-awareness of gender opinions and biases, and to begin analyzing W4C as a program.
- B. Adaptation of MEL tools to capture changes in gender norms among child participants, as well as monitor gender sensitive program implementation.
- C. Design and implementation of participatory action research (PAR) to better understand gender norms among child participants, the role of the program in changing norms, and barriers and opportunities to transforming norms. The PAR involved three main components:
  1. training a sub-set of coaches as Peer Youth Researchers (PYRs),
  2. collecting and analyzing qualitative data from participants and key stakeholders, and
  3. adjusting and analyzing quantitative program data to capture gender specific measures.

Qualitative data collection included focus group discussions (FGDs) with program participants and key informant interviews (KIIs) with coaches and other staff designed to answer questions around why and how the W4C program design influences gender equality related outcomes. Narrative storytelling, a theater-based activity ('act like a boy, act like a girl'), and illustrations ('river of life') were selected as tools appropriate for use with child participants. KIIs explored similar themes as the FGDs from the staff perspective and aimed to further unpack the influence of sensitization activities undertaken earlier in the grant cycle.

Quantitative data utilized in this grant included a series of existing MEL data sources, including attendance registers, child pre- and post-program surveys, and site assessments (which is a tool used to monitor program fidelity and quality).

## 3. Key Project Results

### ***Gender sensitization and coach capacity to understand and address gender equity***

Gender sensitization training provided W4C coaches with a better understanding of gender and programming and how to model gender transforming roles. For example, before the training 33% of coaches did not feel adequately trained to understand how gender limits W4C programming and 17% did not feel prepared to model gender equality. After the training, all coaches felt they could understand how gender limits W4C and a greater proportion felt they could recognize inequitable gender norms within W4C and were sufficiently prepared to model gender equality.

Coaches felt the gender trainings brought initial awareness of gender roles where there was none, helped them challenge assumptions, and notice power differentials that they felt they could change. While coaches initially identified basic male and female roles (e.g. cooking for women, carrying things for men), they later identified more nuanced ways in which gender was impacting the program. These included things like the fact that male coaches still weren't as comfortable in sharing emotions and leading psychosocial curriculum (i.e. not modeling emotional openness for boys in the program) as female coaches in the program.

*“This training made me more aware of myself, how I interact with the children, and how my culture influences me. I feel like I’m seeing people as humans, not just as men or women.” - W4C coach.*

The sense, however, was also that male coaches were particularly open and receptive to change on account of the training whereas the female coaches were described as already strong and open-minded. One participant felt while there is some continued joking about the issue, there was change and she's also seen male coaches demonstrate more emotional openness and vulnerability. Also demonstrating change, another participant described how he changed his interactions with kids. Prior to the training, he said he used to push girls to learn to surf by asking them one time if they wanted him to teach them. If they said no, he would move on and never ask them again. He stated he now realizes they may be embarrassed, and he responds with more patience.

While coaches often cited the training as the first time they were consciously becoming aware of gender norms, some coaches shared stories describing how their views of girls and boys had shifted throughout their involvement with W4C. Many of these coaches started their involvement with W4C as participants and therefore were involved with the organization for many years. One of these coaches explained how his involvement with Waves for Change and exposure to female surfers over time shifted his view of girls. When he was initially involved as a participant, girls were a source of competition - competing for resources and surf time, but over time as he came to coach them, he realized how they simply respond differently and ultimately came to be more invested in the success of female participants saying that it “touches his heart.”

### ***Inequitable gender norms at home***

Understanding existing gender norms is a prerequisite to changing them. Through this grant, Waves for Change set out to measure gender norms held by their participants. Measuring revealed strong inequitable norms and roles, entrenched in participants' and coaches' home lives and reinforced by the community. These norms were expressed in terms of decision-making powers, freedom of mobility, and discipline practices, including use of violence towards women and girls.

Survey responses showed that a large proportion of participants hold inequitable attitudes. Less than half of boys and girls reported believing that girls should always be allowed to do everything that boys can do (40% of boys and 44% of girls).

Situated in their home contexts, children's stories in the FGDs revealed how inequitable gender roles may be perpetrated from parents and community members. Stereotypical norms around male decision-making were present in these stories as were associated levels of respect. Narratives of family life often displayed fathers/men making decisions and receiving more respect in the household. Norms around specific parental concerns for children and discipline were also gendered. For example, boys were often described as getting into trouble with drugs, gangs and exhibiting bullying behaviors, whereas the only trouble girls were reported as having was complaining. The latter was often linked to expectations that girls do household chores while boys were allowed freedom to play when at home (i.e. when girls pushed back about a lack of fairness regarding these expectations, they were viewed as complaining). This also represented a norm of greater freedom of mobility for boys since boys were less tied to the house following school.

Seemingly contrary to norms around trouble-making, girls were more often the ones described as being disciplined by parents. In a couple of instances this was described as both verbal and physical discipline and among several coaches there was also an acceptance of the use of violence towards women. One female coach said, *“Sometimes a woman pushes and pushes a man, and she is so annoying, that he has to hit her just once to shut her up.”*

### ***Gender norms influence mental health***

Several findings also pointed towards a connection between inequitable gender roles and differences in mental health among participants. Linking the greater propensity of girls to be afraid and have less self-esteem, one participant explained that because girls are more often physically disciplined by their parents than boys, they learn to be more hesitant in other spaces. There was also acknowledgement among both key informants and focus group participants that inequitable treatment at home leads to resentment among girls and aggression among boys. Relatedly, the stories told by children in the FGDs displayed both anger and fear connected to the roles that boys and girls are meant to fulfill. This included anger around a need to be strong and to be in gangs for boys and a sense of rejection and feeling unloved among girls due to unequal treatment by their parents.

Several important learnings centered on the role of gender norms in mental health. These findings came from training the coaches, as well as qualitative data collection with child participants and coaches. Although the coaches have often worked for W4C for several years, male coaches were still uncomfortable expressing emotions and thus modeling positive mental health behaviors, particularly gender transformative ones to the program participants. Some female (and male) coaches also held beliefs that violence could be used against women and girls, which is not currently addressed in programming. Furthermore, boys and girls described experiencing differing types of violence that impacted their mental health needs. For instance, girls experienced a sense of parental neglect and fear of rape, while boys were exposed to gangsterism and other community violence. These experiences not only affected the perceived need of program for boys vs. girls among teachers and parents who seem to view the program as being of value to keep boys out of ‘trouble’ (i.e. gangs), they also may affect engagement once enrolled. The coaches, for example, continue to report greater fear among female participants and female participants reported feeling neglected, both of which likely stem from a context where they are taught to be afraid and less valued than their male peers.

### ***Engaging staff and coaches in norm changes is critical to success***

Although the initial research project was not designed to use a participatory action research framework, the



subsequent involvement of the PYRs, the early engagement of all Cape Town coaches and staff in the gender sensitization training, and the choice to use qualitative data collection techniques grounded in Theater of the Oppressed all shifted the research approach towards action. There was great enthusiasm for addressing the issue of gender among coaches and staff in initial trainings, which led to shifts in how groups of children were organized (i.e. mixed vs. single sex groups) and immediate shifts in how coaches were divided their roles at the beach. In addition, the PYRs were highly engaged in the process and went beyond their ‘call of duty’ to run theater activities with other

groups of participants outside of a data collection context. This included running the activity with surf club groups (i.e. older groups of participants who have graduated from the main program) and with other coaches and staff at a general orientation.

### ***Surfing***

The role of surfing in the W4C model is multifaceted. It’s viewed as a risky activity that attracts children who may engage in riskier behavior, it’s also intricately woven into the psychosocial curriculum, and used to enhance mental health outcomes such as self-confidence, trust, and respect. Perhaps given its many-sided contributions, surfing

and the role of surfing in the program model was a challenging topic for participants to unpack in relation to gender.

Female coaches and staff had strong narratives of the role of surfing in their development and how it connects to the principles in the psychosocial program in building things like self-confidence. For example, one coach talked about how it took her three months to stand on the board, but once she did *“it was the craziest feeling”* and one that she wanted to continue to feel. She went on to connect achievements in surfing to achievements in life. For example, getting to the back line (i.e. paddling past where the waves are breaking, which can be physically and mentally challenging) relates to not giving up.

Many discussed girls being able to surf as well as boys, and the challenge of girls overcoming their fear to use surfing for personal growth. This led to the recognition that coaches were allowing girls to sit on the beach, generating debate about whether that was appropriate. Key informants felt they should push the girls more, while others felt surfing and getting in the water is not critical for Waves for Change’s mission. KI’s acknowledged the way the girls were encouraged may need to be different than the boys. For example, one coach recognized a need to be more creative with helping the girls get over their fear. He talked about when a male coach took out a big board and brought girls on the board with him to the back line one at a time to show what it’s like to be there. The first girl didn’t immediately stand, but when she did, she described the experience as motivating to her and the other girls.



***Transformative change requires more explicit attention to support existing positive norms and to address lingering negative norms***

While it was anticipated that Waves for Change as a program may shift gender norms on its own, this grant aimed to further unpack if and how that was the case and how it could be improved. It was not designed to be a comprehensive intervention to change gender norms. While there was no significant change around gender norms, findings indicated some change among coaches and opportunities for greater change among stakeholders and participants. Prior to this grant, the predominant feeling was that low female participation was driven by a view that girls themselves were a large part of the problem (e.g. they didn’t like their hair wet.). However, coaches quickly showed progress in moving beyond this idea to a greater understanding of more nuanced ways in which gender impacts Waves for Change and both female and male participants. There continued to be some tension around shifting norms of the coaches as demonstrated by continued participant perceptions of inequitable treatment, as well as some tension around the idea of equity vs. equality. The latter of which included a valuable suggestion to promote pride in being a woman/man (i.e. positive masculinity). And finally, while the program participants felt a strong sense of anger, sadness and resentment at the inequitable gender roles they must play in their communities, and don’t explicitly see lots of opportunity for change, there were some signs that suggest shifts (e.g. mother surf coach, not too many alcoholic/non-working fathers in narratives) and coach narratives also indicated opportunities to shift norms through their examples of changing their personal norms and attitudes at home and on the beach.

**4. Recommendations for W4C and wider sport for development programs**

W4C found that female participation in a male dominated sport is not in itself enough to challenge gender norms, and that gender sensitization training with coaches was also not enough in itself to meaningfully influence children’s gender norms within sessions. W4C has identified several next steps for continuing progress on improving gender equality within its program.

***Institutionalize gender awareness into all coach trainings***

Institutionalizing gender awareness into coach training, program implementation and the psycho-social curriculum are critical next steps in ensuring the consistency of gender awareness and change across the Cape Town sites and for scale-up to other W4C sites across South Africa and beyond. This should include reviewing organizational Normal Operating Procedures (NOPs), which guide how sessions are run, and institutionalizing behaviors such as the equitable distribution of responsibilities between male and female coaches. Beyond this, continued greater understanding among the coaches of the role of community norms and their impact on the baseline behaviors of male and female participants must be prioritized and consensus developed around what equitable treatment of male and female participants looks like. For example, how can greater patience or attention be shown to female participant fears around surfing in a way that continues to model gender transformation and empowerment of all participants?

***Mainstream and consider gender at every stage of the program***

To ensure the W4C surf therapy program is gender-responsive, gender should be mainstreamed throughout the program.

**Recruitment** of children and young people. Findings and secondary sources show trauma and other adverse childhood experiences influence girls and boys differently, commonly leading boys to display violent or aggressive behavior, while girls often internalize and withdraw. This has significant implications for how referral contacts identify and prioritize the children they send to W4C, and explains why many schools see boys as needing the program more than girls. This finding allows W4C to better orient referral partners and support them to identify girls in need of the program.

**Implementation** of the program. Findings show W4C participants' gender norms are influenced by parents, caregivers and experiences in their community. Although the W4C program does not challenge these norms in a home or community level, investigating participants experiences helped the W4C team to understand entrenched values children bring to the beach. This understanding enabled W4C to challenge them appropriately within the safe space of surf therapy sessions. Discussing how girls feel less valued in their community or the expectation that boys should not share emotions or be vulnerable gives children a space to reflect on expectations. Safe discussion also encourages children to explore where these values come from and enables both coaches and children to challenge these, set their own agendas and push boundaries. W4C then works with children to take their own positive self-identities back to their communities.



**Evaluation** - Girls and boys wanted to share their feelings and emotions in different ways and in different forums. W4C is therefore developing spaces for boys and girls to share to either male or female adults they trust, as well as in group and individual settings, to encourage both boys and girls to identify and feel comfortable to talk about their feelings.