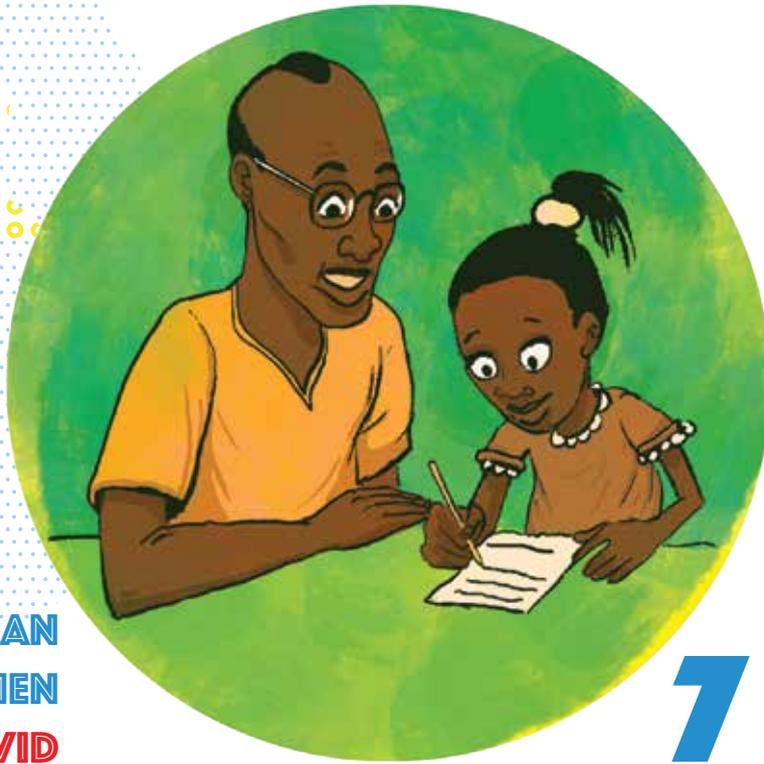


WEST AFRICAN
WOMEN
FACING COVID



7 FACTS
SOLUTIONS

7 WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE THE BURDEN OF SOCIAL NORMS

Existing social norms, which are the reason why women and girls are in charge of domestic tasks and the primary caregivers to the family are increasing the risk women and girls are facing of being contaminated during a pandemic. Additionally, it decreases their free time, preventing them to meaningfully engage in participation within the decision making processes. Women are also more at risk of losing their jobs and income during a crisis because they are mostly in precarious jobs, where they are dependent of bosses or because they do not own land, these situations also resulting from social norms. Social norms are making women and girls more vulnerable to the virus because they are based on customs that create inequalities (for example the marriage age is 16 for girls but 18 for boys) and because they often impose the idea that women and girls should come after men and boys in accessing healthcare, education and food. Social

norms are fueling inequalities between men and women when facing the pandemic.

But for the first time, men found themselves at home, in a world where the house is often the exclusive area of women. Even though men's forced presence in the house did not always translate into a greater involvement in domestic tasks, some women noted their husbands were more involved into their children's education. In some cases, this situation also led to more awareness about inequalities and to a redistribution of responsibilities within the household such as taking jointly decisions about resources management. However, achievements in this area remains hard to assess and if some testimonies can represent hopes that the situation could change, some other worrying elements (such as the increase in domestic violence) cannot be ignored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Deconstructing social norms rooted in society and often considered as a given rather than social construction that could evolve is a long-term process. The new situation that lockdown created for many, which is the more significant presence of men within the house, led in some cases to a better understanding of women realities and existing inequalities and represent an opportunity that need to be capitalized on. In order to do that, it is important to raise awareness of men and women about equality and women rights through educational programs that will try to deconstruct social norms preventing women from developing.

“ If you do not have a boy, you do not have children yet. Men who have been raised in this mindset are claiming they are superior to women because they are the one perpetuating the generation”.
Jordi Megnibeto, young men involved in Oxfam “Enough” campaign in Benin

