

# ***Why CARE engages men and boys for gender equality***

**Jean Nimubona**  
**CARE Burundi**  
**May 2012**

## **I. Why engage men within CAREs work?**

CARE has put gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of its programming, as reflected in CARE's *Vision 2020*. Working with women's empowerment implies working to shift gender norms, which necessarily involves men. CARE's commitment to work with women's empowerment and gender, is also reflected in the CARE International Gender Policy approved by the CI Board in 2009.

Gender refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. 'Gender', along with class and race, determines the roles, power and resources for females and males in any culture. Historically, attention to gender relations has been driven by the need to address women's needs and circumstances as they are typically more disadvantaged than men. Increasingly, however, the actors for social change and the humanitarian community are recognizing the need to know more about discrimination that men and boys face in society, in poverty and in crisis situations.

Working for women's empowerment cannot be a question of directing resources *to* women and girls only, but in a broader sense, *to the needs of* women and girls and their empowerment. Hence, resources must also be directed to addressing the underlying social structures, institutions, and relationships on which this inequality is based. Men are inevitably a part of those social structures, and the gate keepers of current gender orders. Hence, there needs to be systematic and systemic efforts to change the lives of men and boys if we are to redress power relations at their root<sup>1</sup>.

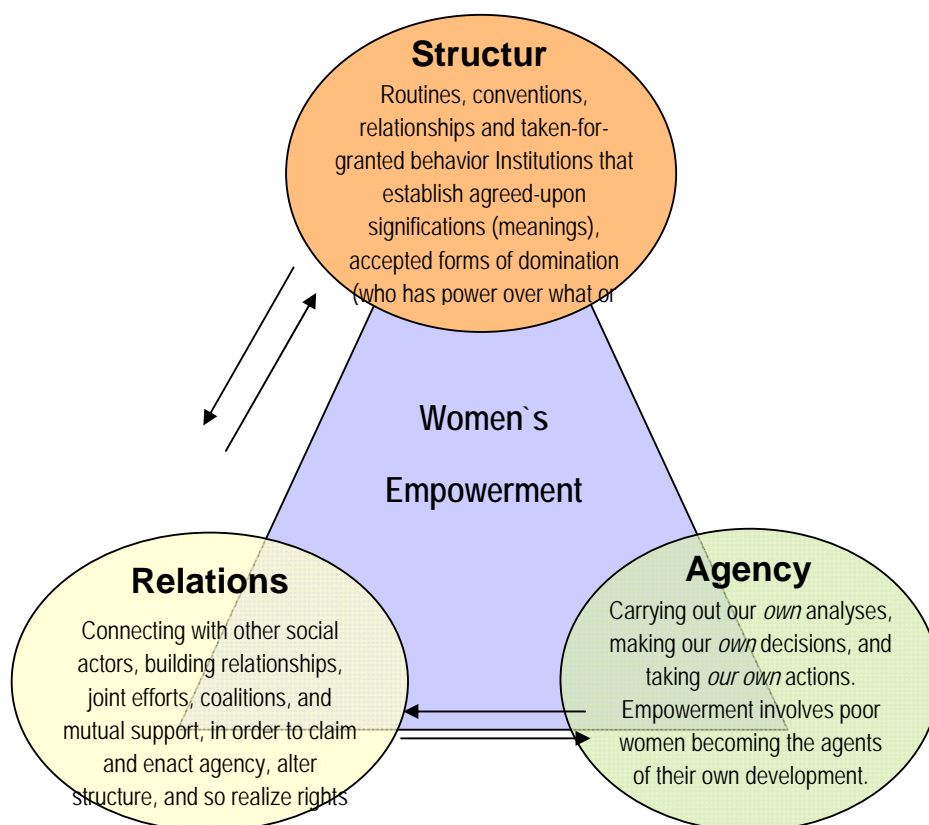
In order to shift gender norms, CARE has to work with men and boys as clients, partners and allies. We seek to involve men and boys as part of solution to gender inequality. . We need to address men as allies who benefit from improved gender relations, not only as target group

CARE understands empowerment as the sum of total changes needed for a woman to realize her full human rights; the interplay of changes in her own aspirations and capabilities (*agency*), the environment that surrounds and conditions choices (*structure*) and the power relations through which she must negotiate her path (*relations*). Any individual indicator of progress can only be properly assessed and valued in the context of how it advances the whole; a holistic approach to empowerment which ultimately must involve and engage men.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kaufman, Michael (2003) *The AIM Framework* URL: [www.michaelkaufman.com/articles/](http://www.michaelkaufman.com/articles/)

## CARE's empowerment work



CARE's *Strategic Impact Inquiry* (SII) put a clear and intentional focus on women, and yet, one of the SII's messages is that lasting empowerment for women requires a more serious and honest effort to understand and support change among the men who are so integral to their lives. The SII clearly highlights the importance of engaging men for a dramatically deeper impact on women's empowerment and gender equality. The SII also reminds us that it is our responsibility to make sure that we do no harm in our gender work; without changing the norms of masculinities, as women expand their abilities and confidence it can threaten the position of men and their ability to fulfill the demands of manhood, and this in turn can lead to backlash against women. For example, without transformative change in gender roles, the SII found that some women became more vulnerable to violence in the home as public awareness raising placed pressure on men to stop violence, but household dynamics remained oppressive toward women.<sup>2</sup>

CARE is increasingly working to engage men and boys as equal partners with women and girls to challenge power imbalances that limit full enjoyment of rights. This programmatic focus, that integrates focus on gender expansively, leads to the most sustainable gains. CARE recognizes the importance of changing attitudes and fostering interdependent, mutually supportive relationships. Engaging men and boys in programs that empower women and girls is often the best way to prevent or reduce harmful backlash that can result from challenging status quo gender roles and norms. Additionally, the benefits of women's empowerment are not limited to women.

<sup>2</sup> CARE (2009) *Strategic Impact Inquiry: Women's Empowerment and Engaging Men* URL: [www.pgdl.care.org/sii](http://www.pgdl.care.org/sii)

Global evidence suggests that female and male citizens of more equitable societies are, on average, wealthier, healthier, and better educated than in countries where women are most marginalized<sup>3</sup>.

In order to work efficiently and effectively with women's empowerment, engaging men is a crucial component to bring about sustainable behavior and attitude change in relation to harmful gender stereotypes and norms.

## **II. Evidence globally**

The global debates about and emphasis on engaging boys and men in programs are not new - many projects and programs have been running for a decade or more. But there is a renewed interest in this approach globally, as more evidence has been gathered on its fundamental importance<sup>4</sup>. A review undertaken by the WHO, analyzing 58 evaluation studies of interventions with men and boys revealed that well-designed programs with men and boys show compelling evidence of leading to change in behavior and attitudes. The evidence from this research confirms that men and boys have changed behavior and attitudes as a result of program interventions, with positive results for men, their partners, their children and their families<sup>5</sup>. This research underscores the importance of working on women's empowerment holistically, recognizing the social structures which women are a part of. Changing traditional gender stereotypes demands a consistent and committed effort. Examples from engaging men work effectively demonstrate how important men and boys' behavioral change is in order to have an impact beyond the individual level at relational and structural levels.<sup>6</sup> In India, men and boys started to break the violence against women with a simple, effective action: when they heard a man abusing a woman inside a nearby home, they rang the doorbell or found another way to interrupt the violence. They had gotten this idea from a series of powerful print, radio and television public service announcements that told true stories of men and boys stopping violence in their neighborhoods with one ring of a bell. This campaign produced by the organization *Breakthrough* has now touched 130 million people, and initiated a conversation about violence against women which was groundbreaking at the time<sup>7</sup>. Jordan's *together for a Happy Family* was a campaign that sought to mobilize males to support shared and informed decision-making about family planning with their wives. Campaign messages were disseminated via the mass media, community mobilization and a national contest. Religious leaders also discussed campaign themes during family programs on TV and radio. A subsequent evaluation showed that Jordanian men and women reported improved knowledge regarding specific modern family planning methods and greater support for shared family planning responsibility<sup>8</sup>.

## **III. Where and how does CARE work with boys & men?**

Since adopting women's empowerment as a strategic approach to poverty reduction, we have learnt that keeping women at the heart of CARE's community-level efforts does not only mean designing projects for women and girls. CARE's *Strategic Impact Inquiry* pointed out the engaging men component as a gap in CARE's women's empowerment work, one which resulted in less sustainable results.

Today, several country offices actively include men and boys in their programmatic efforts to fight against social injustices and gender inequality. The way CARE's various offices are engaging men varies, but they all work through the *agency*, *structure* and *relationship* framework to women's empowerment. In some places men and boys represent the target group in our work, in others they are considered a part of the impact group; some focus on men and boys at the *relationship* level only; others work to address structural issues. CARE also engages male employees in discussions about gender roles. This helps CARE's employees have a deeper understanding

---

<sup>3</sup> CARE (2010) *Strong women, strong communities: CARE's holistic approach to empowering women and girls in the fight against poverty*  
URL: [www.care.org/downloads/womens-empowerment-report-201005.pdf](http://www.care.org/downloads/womens-empowerment-report-201005.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Van Der Gaag, Nikki (2011, pages 12-15) *Because I am a Girl*, Plan International, New Internationalist Publications, Italy

<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Barker, Gary, Ricardo, Christine, Nascimento, Marcos (2007:5) *Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from program interventions*, WHO publications, Switzerland

<sup>7</sup> Van Der Gaag, Nikki (2011, page 23) *Because I am a Girl*, Plan International, New Internationalist Publications, Italy

<sup>8</sup> UNFPA, PROMUNDO, MenEngage (2010:page 45) *Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality and Health*, Published in Brazil

of gender stereotypes and how this affects their own everyday life, in relation to partners, as well as their professional work. Some important examples to mention are:

### **CARE Balkans: Young Men Initiative**

The Yugoslavian wars of 1991-2001 were based on national and ethnic tensions that resulted in numerous cases of gender-based violence, including mass rapes of women and sexual abuse against men and boys in prison camps. The program that started in 2007 targeted boys and young men between 13 – 19 years old in Serbia, Bosnia Hercegovina and Croatia. With a goal to reduce gender-based violence (GBV), CARE implemented a ground-breaking program that worked with young men aged 13-19 to deconstruct masculinity in their cultures and determine how gender norms and male socialization lead to inequitable attitudes and behaviors. The program was successful in changing attitudes in a more gender equitable way.

### **CARE Burundi: Abatangamuco**

The *Abatangamuco* approach is an important part of CARE Burundi's program approach to social change towards gender equality. *Abatangamuco* ("those who bring light"). CARE is supporting the *Abatangamuco* to convince more men in Burundi to challenge traditional practices and influence others to change their harmful behavior against women.

Abatangamuco is a social movement of men who speak out to their communities about their personal transformation that supports a more egalitarian society. CARE is now supporting a growing number of Abatangamuco to convince more men and women in Burundi to challenge traditional practices and influence others to change their harmful behavior against women.

CARE Burundi is currently focusing attention on addressing the foundation of gender inequity and supporting the Abatangamuco is an important element of this strategy. At this level, existing harmful cultural norms and attitudes by men prevent women's empowerment.

### **CARE Bangladesh: Promoting Leaders Empowering Youth**

This program from the CARE Bangladesh office used multiple tactics to address gender inequity in its poorest communities. Boys and men joined advocacy efforts with women and girls, to address structural gender inequality. Male youth groups advocated to community leaders to end early marriages and stop sexual harassment. Older men participated in demonstrations for women's rights. Mobilizing men to support these movements was much easier than asking men to create their own movements around women's rights. The addition of men and boys to these women's advocacy efforts may have tipped the critical mass needed for change in some of these communities.