

Abatangamuco

Abatangamuco is a social movement of men and women who speak out to their communities about their personal transformation that supports a more egalitarian society. The *Abatangamuco* approach, involving men as change agents, is one important part of CARE Burundi's program approach to social change for gender equality. CARE Burundi realized that their programs were just one of many elements contributing to positive change in Burundian society, so, they decided to document other elements of change. During CARE Burundi's gathering of positive change stories through an "appreciative inquiry" process, they discovered one man who was an activist against gender-based violence in his own household and community.. This man spoke out about his own experience, and more men were 'touched' by the stories of this *Abatangamuco* ('he who brings light'). 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.

Rationale

In Burundi, traditional gender roles have a devastating effect on women in particular. Cultural practices such as domestic violence, lack of decision-making power for women and full financial control by men can be harmful to a woman's health and limit her ability to contribute to family success. The attitudes towards women in Burundi can be described by the following proverb: "*Umukobwa ni akarago k'abaraye*," which means "Women and girls were created to provide pleasure to men." Harmful cultural practices and traditions prevent the vast majority of women in Burundi from achieving social and economic empowerment and living life with dignity.

Previous efforts to help women achieve their rights have not focused on men. CARE, which has worked in Burundi since 1994, has focused most of its women's empowerment efforts on two main levels – the individual level, which works to build the capacity of women, and the relational level, which works through groups and associations to promote the role of the woman in decision-making processes. At a third level of empowerment – the structural level – very little had been done to promote equality. 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.



Q & A with Jean Nimubona CARE Burundi

When did you start to realize that men could play an important part in women's equality?
We realized that the men could play an important role in women's empowerment when we began, in 2006, to document the rich life stories of the men who changed behavior and began to help their wives to achieve their dreams.

Why did you decide to support this program?

We decided to support the *Abatangamuco* because their life stories are based on what they experience every day, similar to what their neighbors experience, and they touch the sensitive issues of gender equality. The approach is based on community experiences, and it is more comfortable to see a man who dared to challenge the patriarchal norms and testify their change in front of their peers; instead of seeing a staff explain gender equality without evidence.

What challenges have you faced that are unique to this project?

Men fear losing their positions of power in their homes and communities and women's beliefs about gender relations also undermine their pathways.

What do you think the biggest successes are from this project?

One success reflecting the strength of this social movement is that many courageous men and women share their stories *spontaneously*, simply because they are truly inspired by their fellow community members.



Strategies

The aim of the *Abatangamuco* is to reduce violence against women and girls and promote gender equality. They challenge beliefs and practices that promote and sustain a culture of violence and discrimination against women and girls in Burundian society.

This movement of change agents travel throughout their communities, inviting others to come, listen, share and consider a better way of life. Through a process of appreciative inquiry and reflection activists share personal stories of positive change and encourage others to reflect on and question the beliefs and practices such as violence and lack of respect towards women that prevent women's empowerment. Through these discussions and debates others are touched and publicly commit to commence their journey of positive change.

Results

To be able to measure the impact of the change process, the *Abatangamuco* identify and communicate to project staff the people who have been touched by their stories and are now showing a change in behavior and or attitude/beliefs. The *Abatangamuco* create an opportunity for these people and the project staff to meet, usually in the presence of their spouse and/or family. It is during this meeting that their names and their stories are documented by the project staff if the *Abatangamuco* have not already done so (this depends on literacy levels). It is the stories and testimonies that indicate the quality of the behavior change.

The number of stories collected from different people will be the actual indicators of impact. Also worth considering as an impact indicator (behavior change in men) is the number of men who are willing to testify publicly. The willingness to tell their stories in public, and especially in front of other men who are their peers, is considered a significant act of courage and conviction, as they are openly challenging deeply rooted cultural traditions and practices of gender inequality.

Social Movement by Numbers

Number of Abatangamuco speaking out:

December 2007: **36 Abatangamuco.**

July 2009: **237 Abatangamuco**

Total attendance at the Abatangmuco talks:

First year of CARE support:

634 men

1600 women

Second year of CARE support:

1124 men

2132 women

Motivation

These committed *Abatangamuco* are not paid by the project. They are not agents paid to support an opinion, anything that is said comes from conviction. However, the project does provide compensation when people have to travel for project related meetings, and if there is the will to travel to other parts within the country to share their stories.

Testimony

A farmer who had come from a nearby hill of our township...related is life story, a story that perfectly resembled my own, except that he had changed his behavior and was now making decisions together with his wife. His history touched me very deeply and confirmed to me that my behavior was based on traditional customs; I also realized that my violent actions towards my wife were useless and did not make her respect me or my position as a man. This was the moment when I realized that I was a victim of ignorance based on stereotypes and lies, and it was then that I decided I had to change my behaviour. I decided to tell my story immediately to the whole group of men, and although we were neighbours for years, no one really knew what occurred in my household.

-Faustin Ntiranyibagira, Muremera Hill

