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**POSITIVE MASCULINITIES IN A
REFUGEE CONTEXT**
A case study from Uganda

Introduction

At CARE we believe that a good humanitarian response should address the needs of all regardless of their gender. We know that women, men, boys and girls are affected differently by humanitarian crises.

We understand that **greater priority must be given to women and girls** due to entrenched gender inequalities.

We work with men and boys to **shift beliefs, behaviours and practices at household and community levels** in support of gender justice.

CARE believes that men and boys must become a greater part of the solution to the problem of gender-based violence. In Uganda and across the globe, we have evidence that shows men and boys can be allies and champions for change

Introduction

Our experience in the emergency/humanitarian response indicates that men and boys are key actors in GBV prevention and response (can be obstacles or allies). Engagement with men and boys reduces the barriers women and girls faces to building their own individual **agency**, addresses inequitable power **relations**, and ensures changes in power dynamics and social **structures** are sustained.

We know that it is important that humanitarian actors do not assume vulnerabilities belong to women and girls alone: Women and girl face immense challenges and protection risks and bear the bulk of gender-based discriminations. But men and boys can also face circumstances that render them vulnerable.

The exploratory qualitative case study was conducted by CARE International in Uganda in July 2018 with funding from ECHO.

The study was conducted to explore the acceptability, feasibility, sustainability and effectiveness of Engaging Men and Boys in Emergencies (EMBiE) approach in GBV prevention and promotion of gender equitable attitudes among the South Sudanese refugees in West-Nile.

This particular study focused on the adults.

The study was conducted in the three (3) settlements of Rhino (Ariwa zone, Ofua zone in Ofua 6, and Omugo zone in Omugo I, II and III including the host communities), Imvepi (Zone 2 & 3) and Bidibidi (Villages 9 & 5) in Arua and Yumbe districts of West-Nile.

1. Outreach and Organised Diffusion:

All Role Model Men interviewed in this study, in addition to making positive changes in their own lives after their engagement with CARE, also reached out to fellow men and boys, as expected under this approach, hence initiating the organised diffusion of the model. This was also confirmed by their neighbours and wives.



“Yes they have changed the way I am seeing and I am also copying from them (my neighbour) [...], nowadays I can help my wife to fetch water, sweeping the compound, cooking and bathing the children.” **Luete Richard, a male neighbour to a Role Model Man in Imvepi refugee settlement**

Findings



2. Changes in Gender Attitudes

The community members reported that the Male Action Groups including their neighbours/friends, reported that some men have started to respect women and they no longer treat them as property but as companions.

Negative Attitudes: Our study also revealed some negative attitudes amongst some members of the community. Some reported that the approach was trying to “*turn men into women*” and departing from the cultural norms that have shaped their community so far

Findings



3. Changes in Behaviour: The study showed that RMM have changed at least some of their previous practices. In particular, they appeared more willing to share household chores, previously the sole responsibility of women

Some respondents also reported that previously failure to do these very same chores by women and girls would trigger violent reactions from the men.

4. Selling the food ration by men: Some men reported to no longer selling of the food ration as one of the behaviours they changed.

Findings

5. Women's Perspectives: Women appreciated RMM's involvement in taking children to the health centres and supporting with domestic clothes.

Women also acknowledged the influence Role Models had on their neighbors and friends.

Majority of women interviewed also reported having some free time to socialize now and this extended beyond the immediate vicinity of the RMM.

6. Gossip and backlash: Interestingly the role models' wives reported much more gossip than their husbands. **This would suggest that the backlash against these changes might be felt more strongly by women rather than men**, particularly as some of the accusatory gossip points the finger directly at the women ("*She has bewitched him*" or directly addressed at the woman "*Why do you allow him to do work in the house?*").

Women were overwhelmingly positive about the changes experienced than the gossips

7. Reduced Conflict at Home and Community: The vast majority of the responses across settlements and all categories of respondents pointed to changes in both attitudes and behaviour, specifically a reduction of conflict.

The interventions of the role model men and boys also **strengthened ties and trust** between refugees and hosts community. They reported supporting each other when one of them has a problem for example during funerals, they gather around him and lift him up.

"My wife and I decided to offer six acres of land to six refugee households for personal use to farm and supplement to their diets. I also encourage my fellow host community members to support the refugees with farmland to grow food and reduce child malnutrition. Through this, I am happy to say 8 other families have offered farmland to refugees at no cost. This has helped in our relationships with the refugees and our interacting has increased, became positive, and starting new relationships"

Gabriel, a Role Model from the host community for Rhino Camp

"I take 4 cups of beans from my food rations so we can cook food for the family of our host community friend that has had a loss and other mourners. We also celebrate together. Some of our Ugandan brothers, share their land with us to grow food. Being Role Model Men has brought us together. It does not matter if we are Ugandan, South Sudanese from this tribe or that tribe. We learnt that we are all men who need to support our families, our wives, daughters, work together and resolve conflicts and problems peacefully." **Richard, Role Model from Omugo, Rhino Camp**

Findings



8. Gender Based Violence: Broadly the study points to a reduction of GBV cases mirroring some of the other changes described.

9. Shared Decision Making on Household Resources and Parenting

10. Managing Peer Pressure: The RMM reported feeling peer pressure to conform back to their more traditional behaviours, in the form of insults directed much more towards perceived masculinity and their “role” in the household as men/husbands.

Men recounted receiving comments like **“these men have been bewitched by their wives”**. At times the backlash against these newly acquired behaviour/changes was also felt by their spouses or female partners. Others simply pointed fingers at RMM’s wives and gossiping **“She has bewitched him”** or **“Why do you allow him to do work in the house?”**



Impact of EMB

Individual level

- Shifting views towards themselves (more self-esteem) and others (more respect and tolerance)
- Changing notions of masculinity
- Changing values toward gender equality
- Improved mental health, reduced levels of depression
- Increased self-respect as a result of self-motivated positive actions;
- Increased confidence to speak in public and facilitate meetings;
- Increased incomes;
- New social networks;
- Having become respected and trusted leaders in the community.

Household and intimate relations

- Household communication and mutual support
- Transforming dynamic of violence
- Changing household division of labor
- Enhanced trust and intimacy, many disputes are solved amicably, reduced intimate partner violence;
- Increased food and income security;
- Children are better cared for and increasingly access education and health care;
- More couples practice family planning, more pregnant women attend antenatal services accompanied by their husbands.

Peer and community relations

- Increased awareness of the risks of GBV and gender imbalances;
- Peaceful coexistence
- Reduced levels of alcoholism and fighting;
- Increased social responsibility;
- Some women in leadership positions;
- Fewer polygamous relationships;
- Women feel treated with more dignity, reduced womanizing.
- Acting as educators within their communities
- Reduces of risk of conflict with other male refugees and with hosting communities

Recommendations



The study confirms that an initial shift in gender norm can be achieved in the emergency context with short term projects and recommends more investment in gender norm change in emergency/humanitarian response.

This study focused only on older Men while the project also included boys. To further understand the organised diffusion and any ensuing behaviour changes, and challenges related to the model, it is recommended that future projects applying this model try to understand the specific needs of young men who embark on Engaging Men & Boys approaches.

The study recommends taking a deeper look at the gendered aspect of the backlash, how both sexes experience it and the potential of the backlash to impede the desired changes. We further recommend strengthening connection/support between the RMM and their peers to enable them manage the backlash, reduce the risk of RMM giving up and their wives being harassed.

There is a need to continuously engage religious, cultural, local leaders and elders as custodians of traditional gender norms. Sustained engagement with them has the potential to reduce some, if not all, of the backlash experienced by participants in this study.

Conclusion



Addressing social norms and behavioural change is a process which requires a long time. This study confirms that change can be initiated fast and that even short-term emergency projects should start to “plant the seeds of change” as immediate effects can be seen. Overall, this study found that Engaging Men and Boys (EMB) is a promising model capable of engendering positive results even within short-term projects in emergency settings, with gains by far outweighing associated challenges.

Engaging men and boys in emergencies was found to be relevant, acceptable and effective in reducing the risk of GBV and in promoting more gender equitable attitudes among the South Sudanese refugees in the refugee settlements in Imvepi, Rhino, Bidibidi and host communities. The model has contributed to change in gender attitudes and behaviour of men and boys. Changes in gender attitudes in turn has started to produce some gradual change in practices amongst the South Sudanese refugees and host communities beyond simply the Role Models’ households.

There are still some negative perceptions and resistance to these changes. Some men perceived these changes as shameful, contrary to their culture, making women lazy and prejudicial to men’s sense of self-respect. Furthermore, the particular connotations of the backlash in form of gossip reproaching women in particular for ‘allowing’ these changed behaviours, highlights the importance of sustaining these messages of transformation to foster the acceptance and internalization of new visions of femininity and masculinity.



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Thank you!