



**Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality Series:  
Stories of Engagement**

**BRIEF 1**





# STORIES OF ENGAGEMENT

**[At first], my fear about engaging men was about losing all of the power and privilege that the society offers to men based on their status. It is when I started working in gender domain that I was able to understand key concepts such as gender, masculinity, GBV, etc. and improve my mindset in this regards. Particularly, the “man box” exercise helped me to understand the social construction of masculinity and the consequences to men and women of upholding the box.**

**MALE STAFF, RWANDA**

*During the initial meetings the staff was very skeptical as how would they facilitate sessions on sexuality.... But as soon as they conducted the sessions around sexuality, they found that the men started responding better and they developed better bonding with the group while discussing sensitive issues. The staff now feels that these sessions offered them [opportunities] to ask questions that they were never allowed to ask and hence this gave confidence to the facilitators to facilitate more sensitive issues such as violence after these sessions.*

**FEMALE STAFF, INDIA**

CARE’s experience demonstrates that achieving real and lasting progress toward gender equality requires proactive work with men and boys across the lifecycle alongside work with women and girls. CARE sees gender equality as a fundamental requirement for social justice and poverty reduction, and the area in which we see the most pressing need for global change in order to reach our vision.

This brief draws from experiences reported across 20 offices – with representation across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East/North Africa and Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and the US to highlight CARE’s approach, change stories and new frontiers in this area of programming.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, CARE has worked with men and boys as allies for gender equality. This work has often been integrated into women’s empowerment programming, particularly in relation to women’s economic empowerment, HIV and AIDS, violence against women and girls (including child marriage and female genital mutilation) and family planning initiatives. Work has often focused on engaging key community gatekeepers in order to get their support for programming goals. Over the past two decades, within CARE as well as across the world, attention and support has grown for involving men as allies for a broader gender justice agenda. Where men were initially brought into conversations to enable women’s participation in programming, activities with men and boys began to encourage them to examine how patriarchy affects their own lives and opportunities, alongside deeper questions on what it means to stand as an ally for gender equality. Some staff reflect:



*I coordinated a workshop on masculinity and gender...and it was during this workshop that I began to view men differently. I came to realize that they are themselves struggling with the consequences and requirements of their own socialization and that they often do not even realize it.*

**FEMALE STAFF, WEST AFRICA**

*I was convinced if men are engaged it’s first for themselves and not just for women’s empowerment*

**FEMALE STAFF, NIGER**

*Burundi’s work started with research in coffee plantation, finding out that it was the worst time to be a woman because of the men, often drunk and with money in their pockets, found other women. Then we found a small movement of men who wanted change and we supported it.*

**FEMALE STAFF, CARE BURUNDI**



Today, [programming across CARE works with men and boys](#) to challenge power imbalances that limit human rights for women and men in different ways.

For a more detailed account of how engaging men and boys work has evolved in CARE, see Annex: *CARE’s Timeline of Engagement in Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality*

## Programming Elements in Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality

Similar to CARE's work on women's empowerment – which often fosters women's/girls' groups to build solidarity, reflect on gender relations and expectations they face as women/girls [femininities], and take action for women's empowerment and gender equality<sup>i</sup> – engaging men and boys often involves first coming together to reflect on gender relations and expectations men/boys face [masculinities] and taking action for transforming oppressive gender norms and promoting gender equality. CARE's approach to working with men and boys for gender equality is strongly grounded in local contexts and rights-based approaches. In review of programming portfolios, promising practices point to six key elements for engaging men and boys for gender equality:

### SYNCHRONIZATION

Integrated across each element, this involves coordinating engaging men and boys approaches with women's and girls' empowerment approaches – for separate and joint activities – to ensure work thoughtfully intersects with and complements one another to advance gender equality<sup>ii</sup>



#### 1. CONSCIENTIZATION

Structured spaces for men and boys to reflect on masculinities, gender, power and privilege in their lives,

#### 2. INTIMATE DIALOGUES

Conversations with intimate partners, and within families to promote more open communication, equitable relationships, non-violence, support and trust;

#### 3. BUILDING THE BASE

A mix of individual outreach and regular meetings to share testimonies and strengthen relationships among male allies to build and expand social support and solidarity;

#### 4. STEPPING OUT, STEPPING UP

Capacity building and support to men to facilitate discussions and campaign around gender and masculinities to transform social norms; and

#### 5. ALLIANCES FOR ADVOCACY

This element focuses on linking with advocacy efforts led by women's and feminist movements for social and policy change at local, regional and national levels

For a more detailed discussion on this framework and experiences across each of these elements, please see [Brief 2: Lessons Learnt on Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality](#).

# Stories of Change

In review of CARE's experiences working with men and boys for gender equality, CARE staff, partners<sup>iii</sup> and programming participants have shared remarkable stories of change.

**MULTIPLE TEAMS REPORT CHANGES AMONG HOUSEHOLDS** in terms of decision-making patterns at home, reductions in alcohol abuse and domestic violence, more cooperative and equitable divisions of labor and better communication. Men are not only reported sharing more responsibilities within their households and families, but are transforming in ways that fulfill themselves and their potential:

*Men often talk of their relief at being able to let go of the psychological burden of always being in control and laying down the law, and of the comfort and support they draw from a more equitable partnership with their wives. Children – boys and girls – of couples who have been on this journey often talk about reduced conflict and greater feelings of security at home. And both men and women often talk – sometimes with surprising frankness – about the improvements in their sex lives that has accompanied their commitment to an equal,*

*open and trusting relationship based on communication and negotiation, rather than command and control.*

MALE STAFF, EAST/CENTRAL AFRICA

*Through the men and boys engagement work that we have done so far, men have started to challenge their own perception of what it means to be a man and a woman in a particular community.*

FEMALE STAFF, ETHIOPIA

**STAFF AND PROJECT PARTICIPANTS ALSO REPORT PERSONAL CHANGES FOLLOWING ENGAGEMENT IN THIS WORK:**

*I have found that I am much more aware of my words and actions at home pertaining to gender roles, particularly as I interact with my daughters, sisters, mother, mother-in-law and wife."*

MALE STAFF, USA

*It is the work on gender at CARE that has deepened my understanding of masculinity and encouraged me to question certain personal relationships in a way I didn't before. I consciously open up the space to talk with my husband about the way we educate our five year old boy and our two year old daughter ...gender equality and within this engaging men and boys is for me one of the most exciting and valuable aspects of my work!*

FEMALE STAFF, UK

*I have two sons. I help them with the potty and I bathe them. We, the husband and wife, do the household together. The environment of the house has become good and neighbours have started copying us.*

MALE STAFF, NEPAL

*The changes I saw in Abatangamuco [male gender champions] shaped my behavior and the way I behave in my home and with my children. In my neighborhood, I have another title, "counselor", but [I am] also criticized by some peers, as "not behaving properly".*

MALE STAFF, BURUNDI

One staff in CARE Mali described her own husband's answer to those who questioned why he would allow her to work: *he replied that nothing would have made him happier than to keep his wife with him but that he had no right to prevent me from gaining experience for my future career. When he had been transferred to another country, his wife has no problem and let him go in confidence, and he said he has absolute confidence in me.*

**GIVEN THE IMPACT OF THIS WORK – PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY – MANY STAFF REPORT DEEPER CONVICTION AND COMMITMENTS AROUND THE POWER AND IMPACT OF THIS WORK.**



## New Frontiers

Building on lessons and experiences to date, CARE strives to deepen learning and practice engaging men and boys for gender equality. Four areas colleagues from across CARE view as critical for advancing engaging men and boys work for gender equality:

### 1. Clarify what we do and why we do it through exchanges across and beyond CARE to:

- a. broaden ownership of this work and clarify how masculinities programming can support women's empowerment, gender equality and development impact
- b. articulate how masculinities can be integrated across sectoral programming
- c. define a common language to describe the work we do with men and boys for gender equality

### 2. Scale-up capacity-building within CARE and partner organizations on engaging men and boys:

- a. develop further opportunities for personal reflections and dialogues in separate and mixed gender spaces among staff, male allies and community partners
- b. support "Men Engaged" staff groups for men to reflect on, discuss and take action around gender issues in their own lives, work and relationships
- c. strengthen facilitation and dialogue skills of staff and partners on politically sensitive topics related to masculinities, such as sexuality, gender-based violence, and LGBTQ+ rights.
- d. pay particular attention on how to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks that men and women may face in their communities by not conforming to norms around what men and women "should" be or do.
- e. foster learning and exchange of ideas around practical issues like how to do outreach to male change agents and considerations around organizing child care for couples meetings

### 3. Test and document ways of working effectively with different groups – and in different contexts – on masculinities programming.

- a. explore ways of working with boys, and intergenerational change. This includes working with boys clubs, engaging school management structures and working with households
- b. given research links between masculinities and armed conflict, integrate masculinities programming as a component of conflict prevention in humanitarian and development work,
- c. explore targeted program strategies to engage gatekeepers (e.g. service providers, government officials) and specific marginalized groups (e.g. migrant groups, out of school youth, etc.)
- d. explore how to network male allies effectively at local, regional, national and international levels
- e. explore ways to promote sustainable change at scale through local ownership, partnerships and lighter forms of engagement.

### 4. Develop effective strategies for measuring change.

- a. build understanding of CARE's contribution to change from its engaging men and boys strategies, alongside other activities for gender equality.

- b. explore effective methods and measures to capture the range and nature of change programming seeks to realize through engaging men and boys for gender equality (e.g. in social norms, in intimate relationships, etc.)
- c. unpack long-term impacts from this work, to deepen understanding on how change happens in long-standing norms that define a society's vision of the 'ideal man' and its acceptance of those who fall outside these expectations. This is especially important as CARE seeks to understand change beyond the limited duration of a project cycle<sup>v</sup>

Across many of these areas, offices across CARE are already working to deepen CARE's own learning and leverage impact of working with men and boys for gender equality. Continued learning and innovation across this work can inform practice across CARE's programming on how to effectively engage and support men and boys as allies for gender equality.

- i CARE's approach towards women's empowerment often supports women's groups – self-help groups, mothers groups, village savings and loans associations, REFLECT/ Popular Education Centers, etc. – to come together and collaborate for development, and social change.
- ii For more on Gender Synchronization, see: International Women's Development Agency, Inc. (2012). [Toward transformation: synchronizing work with women and men for gender equality](#); and the Interagency Gender Working Group (2010). [Synchronizing Gender Strategies: a cooperative model for improving reproductive health and transforming gender relations](#).
- iii CARE's programming works extensively in partnership with local civil society organizations, many of which represent the communities where programming takes place.
- iv Insights on measurement and masculinities programming include the WHO document: [Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health : evidence from programme interventions](#)

## ANNEX: TIMELINE AND LINKS ON CARE'S WORK ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS FOR GENDER EQUALITY





[www.care.org](http://www.care.org)

### Headquarters

**CARE International**  
7-9 chemin de Balexert  
1219 Châtelaine, Geneva  
Switzerland  
[www.care-international.org](http://www.care-international.org)

### Coordinating Offices

**CARE USA**  
151 Ellis Street NE  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
USA  
[www.care.org](http://www.care.org)

**CARE Österreich**  
A-1080 Vienna  
Lange Gasse 30/4  
Austria  
[www.care.at](http://www.care.at)

**CARE Norge**  
Universitetsgata 12  
Oslo, Norway  
[www.care.no](http://www.care.no)

### Contributing Offices

Australia  
Balkans  
Bangladesh  
Benin and Togo  
Burundi  
Cote d'Ivoire  
East/Central Africa Region  
Egypt  
Ethiopia  
India  
Mali  
Nepal  
Netherlands  
Niger  
Occupied Palestinian territory  
Papua New Guinea  
Rwanda  
South Africa and Lesotho  
Sri Lanka  
Uganda  
UK  
West Africa Region  
Zambia

Heartfelt thanks to gender, sexuality and rights consultants Peter Gordon, Pramada Menon and Patrick Welsh as well as graphic designer Kristin Tanis for their invaluable contributions, insights and support to this effort.

Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year CARE worked in 87 countries and reached 82 million people around the world. To learn more, visit [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).