



LEARNING SUMMARY

Regional Learning Workshop Engaging Young Boys

Bujumbura, 8-10 November 2016

INTRODUCTION

From 8 to 10 November, CARE and partner staff from the Balkans, Burundi, DRC, the Netherlands, Norway, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda came together to share experiences and lessons on their Engaging Men and Boys programming. The initiative was organized by the teams of Sisi Vijana project in Burundi and DRC. This document presents some key lessons that emerged from the workshop, related to the three key themes: mobilizing youth, youth activism and advocacy, as well as some participants' gender equality vision.

Youth mobilization

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AS AN ENTRY POINT

It has not always been easy to interest the youth participating in EMB projects to talk about 'intangible' topics like gender equality. Often, they are quickly discouraged when they realize that the project does not bring any material support. Sisi Vijana project engaged out-of-school youth in **Voluntary Savings and Loans**

Associations (VSLAs) that allowed them to save, take credit and invest in their small enterprises. The same groups were the entry points for discussions on gender equality, power, positive masculinity, GBV prevention, etc.

In the beginning, the economic aspect attracted youth to participate, but over time, participants saw increasing value in the discussions on gender. The project noted increased understanding on the topics discussed and members reported more positive behavior. The economic aspect is expected to contribute to the groups' sustainability after the project's support ends.

However, workshop participants also noticed the risk that economic aspects of the project **take up the space** of the discussions related to gender equality. Social norms change needs to continue to receive lots of attention over the whole life span of the project in order to have an impact. It is important that all staff, partners and community-level stakeholders have a joint understanding on the role of the economic empowerment pillar of the project.

Workshop participants shared their **vision on gender equality**.

"I dream that, 15 years from now, every person can choose their own partner, and there will be no more forced marriages"

INVOLVING THE ADULTS WHO INFLUENCE YOUTH

Youth are influenced by many different actors. Workshop participants noted the importance to include these actors in the project to increase the sustainability of youth's participation. **Parents, teachers, local authorities and religious leaders** all play an important role in supporting and encouraging youth to change their behavior to support gender equality and sexual and reproductive health. They will however only do so if they understand and agree with the project, and do not feel threatened in their own position. Therefore, projects should have a specific component that builds their awareness and engagement.

TRANSPARENCY ABOUT THE GROUPS' MOTIVES

Both Burundi and DRC experienced politically unstable periods during Sisi Vijana's implementation period. When the project mobilized youth to form groups, this led to fear that these groups were **politically motivated**. Transparency about the groups' motives and intensive communication about the project with (local) authorities contributed to solving this, but nevertheless some activities had to be adapted. The project team decided to not organize national-level campaigns due to the risk that they might be misunderstood.

I dream that, 15 years from now...

"All youth (boys and girls) discuss what consent regarding having sex really means as part of school curriculum"

"Boys and girls share the same tasks in the household"

"Speaking out against injustice does not mean that you have to live in fear"

Youth Activism

STRENGTH OF PEER EDUCATION

Young people prefer learning from other young people. Workshop participants noted the strength of peer education. When youth shared their **testimonies** about

I dream that, 15 years from now...

"Men take into account the sexual pleasure of women and respect their body"

"A girl can discuss her academic future with her parents, based on her competencies and interests, in the same way as her brothers"

"There is freedom of expression, irrespective of sex and appearance"

their own changing attitudes and behavior, this inspired other youth to start questioning their own gender norms. Testimonies were shared through simple face-to-face conversations, but also through theatre, movies, music and social media.

Where youth come together, they have the opportunity to not just talk but to **experiment with their new behavior** – testing this out in safe spaces has sometimes helped them to overcome their skepticism. Examples are the teamwork that boys and girls in Tanzania's school clubs engage in and sports activities in mixed teams.

LINKING YOUTH WITH ADULT ROLE MODELS

To be effective peer educators, **youth need support from adults in their communities**. This is especially important in the cultures where Sisi Vijana operates, as youth are hierarchically placed lower than adults and are not supposed to speak up or challenge the status quo. So, while they are a group normally considered more open to change, they also face specific challenges because of their age.

Linking them to adult role model men or for example local authorities who support gender equality has a significant effect on the likelihood that they will become and remain **active change agents** in their communities. In Sisi Vijana, some local authorities are also Abatangamuco (role model men) and they have been found to actively support the youth participating in the project to share their messages on gender equality. Continued support from partner organizations is equally an important support for youth to continue their activism.



I dream that, 15 years from now...

“All youth can develop to their full potential, without being socially conditioned”

“All children grow up feeling that equality is a normal thing”

“Women and girls have control of their own sexuality with access to accurate information”

INFLUENCING BEYOND PEERS

In multiple occasions in Burundi and DRC, youth have been able to inspire more gender equitable behavior in older generations. This cuts across the cultural barriers that exist in the two countries for youth to influence adults. It shows that the combination of showing changed behavior and having the skills to explain the rationale behind them is a powerful combination in challenging norms that promote inequality. Youth have indicated however that they would benefit from more support to acquire skills to engage their parents and other adults in conversations about gender equality, as the capacity building that they receive focuses on facilitating discussions with their peers.

TEACHING WOMEN’S RIGHTS

One challenge with engaging boys to challenge negative gender norms is that some boys have interpreted their

role as teaching girls about women’s rights. This risks to underline certain norms (boys as more powerful than girls, thus needing to educate and protect them) rather than challenge them. Also, it ignores the fact that rigid gender norms have negative consequences for boys as well. This is an area that seems to require more attention in our work.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

A lot of project participants and community members in Burundi mentioned the **potential of the youth groups to contribute to conflict prevention**. Groups intentionally include youth of different political affiliation and allow members to find common ground and work together on a joint objective. In addition, youth have gained skills such as

I dream that, 15 years from now...

“People are judged based on their knowledge and capacities and not on their gender”

“Women and girls have confidence in decision making”

“All youth can borrow money to develop their income generating activities”

joint objective. In addition, youth have gained skills such as facilitation and non-violent communication through the project, which they use to mediate conflicts in their households or between neighbors.

REACHING OTHER COMMUNITIES

Experience has shown that the VSLA component of the project easily **spreads to other locations** – without support from CARE or its partners. These new VSLAs however only focused on the economic empowerment objective and did not include discussions on gender norms. Future projects could explore how youth can be supported to incorporate gender transformative elements in their self-supported VSLAs.

Advocacy

YOUTH'S ROLE IN ADVOCACY

Different projects that were represented had used different approaches to advocacy. While some advocated (together with partners) **on behalf of youth**, others focused on facilitating direct advocacy by youth to decision makers. Overall, participants experienced that the latter was harder than expected. However, this approach becomes more feasible as decision makers are more closely located to the project. For example, in DRC, the project targeted mainly provincial decision makers in its advocacy and was successful in enabling youth to share their messages with provincial ministries.

A PROGRAM APPROACH TO ADVOCACY

Influencing policy and policy implementation requires a long term investment. Participants discussed the importance of a particular advocacy agenda **not being dependent on one time-bound project** to avoid that initial progress cannot be built upon because a grant is ending. Program-level advocacy agendas (rather than project-level) and joining alliances were cited as examples to avoid this.

I dream that, 15 years from now...

“Science subjects at school not dominated by boys”

“Women and girls are heading institutions”

“All people know the rights of others”

“There will be female bus drivers

“Girls and boys have the same freedom of expression”

“Girls and boys have free and respected relationships”

“Women decide whether they are ready for sexual relationships or not”

“Girls grow up to their full potential in an environment where they are considered and respected and have the same opportunities as boys”

“Girls and boys no longer have preferences about sharing tasks”

“Women and girls have control of their own sexuality with access to accurate information”

“Youth will no longer be blocked by socio-cultural norms”

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