Journey of Transformation model, a vaccine to toxic masculinity in Rwanda

Since 2006, Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre initiated Men Engage as a unique approach through which the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment has taken place with positive masculinity philosophy at the center of all interventions. This short article, is a personal reflection on GEWEP achievement, after my 5 years with Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre” RWAMREC” (August 2014-August 2019)

RWAMREC’s distinctive and innovative mission is to promote gender equality through reconstruction of a non-violent identity of men, adoption of healthy masculine behaviors and men’s empowerment to be positive and supportive partners, role models for other men and change agents in promoting healthy families and women’s socio-economic development, eradication of sexual and gender-based violence, positive fatherhood and men’s health in Rwanda.

According to the patriarchal system that most of societies including Rwanda are part of, the place of women has been insignificant since long ago, and men are seen as a dominant group whereby all great decisions, powers, favors, opportunities, are to be for and from them.

The consequences of this status have absolutely impacted on the lives of most families, as women occupying 52%(DHS2014) most of them couldn’t enjoy their rights as much as their fellow brothers do.

In Rwandan context like in many other cultures, based on cultural norms that condemn a woman to be submissive towards her husband, when there is conflict, the husband being false or not, it is not easy for him to approach his wife to handle any issue. A very few cases may be observed among civilized couples who may organize a safe space outside household and reflect back on the source of their conflict, but if the husband doesn’t initiate any action, never think it will happen. However, this is not the case for those not socially advanced. For them to keep living together, the time is a tool to do a so-called arrangement. A few neighbors will be worried about the threat faced by a wife, and the quality of relationship will likely be a way of judging woman’s level of patience as it’s said “Niko zubakwa” or in other words” threat to wives by their husbands is a common issue of which every woman is supposed to be coping with”.

Naturally, the disparities existing between partners’ power relations determine type of communication that characterizes their relationship. When communication is usually aggressive, it hurts the listener and it affects the ability to receive and to share feedback.

1Gender based violence being triggered by excessive alcohol abuse (by men), jealousy and disagreement about income or property, for it to be addressed it requires much about

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1RWAMREC, Indashyikirwa couple curriculum, p 94
communication, but more importantly creating space for challenging some gendered norms taken as status quo, and help both men and women reflect on their effects to their own lives.

Based on the baseline study on men engagement in VSL programs of CARE Rwanda, the study shows that majority of men have final decision about spending money: on food and clothes around 46.7% men and 53.3% of women, and 63.3% of men decides about large investments; Drinking in bar: 37.9% of men drink several times a week, and 79.3% spend less than half of income in bars. Also, the figures indicate that 93.1% of women don’t know what is their husband’s income; and 46.7% of male and 64.3% of female confirmed that most conflicts in a family are related to money.

In addition, IMAGES-Rwanda data indicated that:

- More than 95% of women were taught to carry out household duties as children, while just 49% of men were.
- 73% of Rwandan men and 82% of women said that a woman’s most important role is to take care of her family.
- 40% of women are dissatisfied with their sexual relationships with their partners, compared to 14% of men who report they are sexually dissatisfied with their partners.
- Three-fourths of Rwandan women interviewed said that their husbands dominated household decision-making, while 57% of men interviewed said they dominated household decision-making.
- 46% of Rwandan men and 54% of women said that a woman must respect and accept her husband’s decisions in everything.
- About 17% of men regularly abuse alcohol.

From this situation which I may also call of toxic masculinity, in the perspective of addressing inequalities that exist between men and women, with the purpose of building and sustain women’s empowerment and gender justice, as per indicated in the baseline survey recommendation to include male engagement component, RWAMREC and CARE Rwanda entered into partnership to promote positive masculinities among program beneficiaries. From this recommendation, the Journeys of Transformation model (JoT) has been adopted.

Throughout JoT, 2700 couples thus 80% identified as those known to be living in GBV and 20% known as role models (at least one of partner being member of VSL scheme) from Southern Province of Rwanda have been enrolled in training (with 30 couples in each of 89 sectors out of 101 sectors of the province). A 17-week training (1-day session per week) enabled couples (wife and a husband seated side by side) to reflect on three main components: 1) Economic block which discussed attitudes and power relations among partners with regard to economic planning and property management, income management and decision making about asset management. 2) Health block focused on men’s attitudes vis a vis alcohol and drugs consumption and their role

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2 Baseline Research Men Engagement in VSL Promundo June-August 2011
3 Journeys of Transformation: A Training Manual for Engaging Men as Allies in Women’s Economic Empowerment, p10
in family planning. 3) The third block considered the awareness raising about existing laws and policies governing Gender and Gender Based Violence. In every session, a practical take home was an opportunity to each couple to discover the reality of man’s place in household but more specifically his role in both household vulnerability and recovery.

4 JoT module package

- What is the men’s role in VSL and how can they support their partners in the economic empowerment/VSL?
- Obstacles and challenges in „doing business“ with your partner in VSL
- How to manage business with your partner including roles in business, necessary skills, money management and decision-making
- Sexuality: practices, norms and meaning of sexuality
- Alcohol Use and Men’s Health
- Violence: perceptions and knowledge about different forms of violence
- Gender-based violence - what is it and how to prevent it?
- Perceptions and implications of the laws (Men)

Key take home exercises throughout the training

- Discussing at home how the husband could support his wife/partner to make VSL
- Men to identify activities that they do at home or outside in the community, but which traditionally have been done by their wives/female partners.
- Partner to make together a budget plan for one week (this is to exercise the ability to share decisions with a partner, in particular regarding money.
- The wife and husband make “plan of action” to support each other (how men can support his wife in the VSL – for example when the wife is at the VSL meeting man can do some work at home; wife can discuss with the husband and request him to do some actions at home e.g. cook that evening/prepare a meal; while the wife on the way back home from the VSL can visit field of cassava or run an errand normally assigned to the husband).
- The couples to discuss with each other the ways they should practice family planning.
- Each husband should try to discuss his drinking behavior with his wife/female partners at home (and ask her opinion about the quantity and frequency of his use in her eyes) and make a plan to control (change) his drinking behavior (if not applicable or difficult: have one meeting with a friend, neighbor etc., and discuss his drinking behavior and offer the knowledge, help/advice learnt in this session).

4 Journeys of Transformation: A Training Manual for Engaging Men as Allies in Women’s Economic Empowerment, p10
Impact of take-home exercises

- The take home exercises have been very effective, as from practice, most of men understood the importance of VSL, are supporting their wives to have shares, and are currently taking care of their children and household tasks, which enables their wives to be more active in VSL activities and in other income generating activities.
- Along with communication and sharing, decision making is benefiting both men and women, and the families are becoming more prosperous because of equal planning and positive management of family property.
- A number of men understood the importance of family planning, and men become more responsible of their wives’ life, whereby some of them have taken decision to practice vasectomy, and others became aware of their wives’ consent before having sex and discuss on consequences once not protected.
- Alcohol management has been taken as every man’s responsibility, to take care of their own health, but also to manage their income for the best their family.

JoT model and Men Engage clubs

To ensure the process of change is continued to other community members especially men, those who were trained, were grouped themselves into Men Engage clubs, with at least one club per sector. From there, every month they gather through their men spaces to discuss on how to keep up their change and prevent backlashes, they organize home visits to couples living in GBV, and they spread message using songs, sketches and testimonies through existing community forums (communal work” umuganda”, “Parent evening forum or Umugoroba w’ababyeyi”, community meetings, etc. From the messages, those men who were known as most drunkards, beating up their wives, cheating, becoming a burden to local authorities and their families, got opportunity to become aware and apologized towards their wives and they share testimonies with their neighbors, what generate an opportunity for other men to reflect on their attitudes and to ask for support, despite some cases resistance.

GEWEP achievements

Based on the findings from the GEWEP endline, from all interventions, RWAMREC has noted a huge achievement. For instance, the GEWEP endline indicates that 61.20% of men respondents strongly support that a wife should not tolerate being beaten by her husband/partner in order to keep the family together. This percentage has significantly increased (by 32%) compared to the baseline (38.4%). However, 14% men strongly agree that the women should tolerated being beaten in order to keep the family in harmony. 88.5% of the men respondents support that a

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5 GEWEP II Endline report, 2019
wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband/partner when she is tired or not psychologically ready.

The findings establish that 33% of the women participants are member of decision-making bodies in their communities which is a little bit higher than the standard quota of 30%. Among them 84.84% stated that they are influencing decisions.

The end line average score (4.53) on men’s attitudes towards women economic security indicates a significant positive change compared to the baseline findings (3.59). This is interlinked with the increased percentage 29% of women who have the right to sell at least one asset compared to 24 % at the baseline. 97% of men respondents support that women should be able to inherit and keep property or assets from their husbands, fathers, mothers, or other relatives. GEWEP II program contributed to the production of simplified and user-friendly guides in local language which facilitated the awareness raising on the law among the program beneficiaries using cascading model in collaboration with local opinions leaders, Men Engage club members as male champions and community activists trained and coached by RWAMREC with CARE International support.

Key highlights from men and women members of Men Engage clubs

- **Mr. Damascene from Nyamagabe district** has followed the training in 2013 and he said: Before training I used to go home very late around 2:00AM, and my wife had a warning not to close the window of our room before I am back from the bar. To wake up my wife when I was back, I used to beat her up with a steak”. Every time I reflect back on my behavior, I feel upset and always ask for forgiveness.
- Five years later after training, **Mr. Hasan from Huye District has noted**: “I was a very dangerous man, my wife had no value before me, and I felt confident to beat her up every time she’s not in order with my will, misusing family property but the project made a new creation”.
- Four years later after training, **Mrs. UWIMANA from Gisagara District** has said: “Before the training, the punch by my husband was a daily portion and my eyes were destroyed due to that, but I am currently enjoying the shift and as he changed I feel as if I live in Paradise!!”
- **Mr. Evariste is from Nyanza District** and has followed the training in 2013. After 6 years of training on JOT he noted:” Before training I sold our 2 cows without my wife’s consent, I misused money and I remained the poorest of my community; but now that I changed my attitude, I can enjoy my life with my family and we managed to build a big house, and we bought other cattles as we work and plan together”.
- **Mrs. Donatille from Muhanga District** after five years of training has said: “Before training my husband was a drunkard man, and we couldn’t save anything, but now that he changed his attitude, we live peacefully and we managed to buy 2 cows, pigs and goats. When I drink milk I every time say this is a gift from RWAMREC due to its contribution to make our life better than ever”.
From the JOT training, tremendous immediate outcomes were noted: Legalization of marriage, men improved their way of managing alcohol, men supported women’s participation in the VSL activities, improved decision making and improvement of family welfare.

**Journey of Transformation a reference to various GEWEP interventions**

As way of sustaining positive change, and with the fact that negative use of power between men and women is the source of Gender Based Violence (GBV) another model named: Community activism was equally introduced in GEWEP, and it built its intervention on the existing JOT model. Along with the model, 320 CAs were trained and supported to challenge negative use of power among communities, 160 Male Community Dialogue Facilitators were engaged from Men Engage clubs to address prevailing masculinities, and all this led to an improved men’s attitude towards GBV prevention. To enable the working environment, the same training was also given to 320 opinion Leaders, (members of national women councils, security forces dealing with GBV, businessmen, local leaders from village to sector level...) and 200 Religious Leaders were equally engaged to foster the initiatives from community.

**JoT model results went beyond target group**

Being RWAMREC staff working with men and women to promote Gender Equality, my personal motivation has also been highlighted through GEWEP. Though I was aware of what gender equality is, and the significance of human right, but my understanding has increasingly shifted from theory to practice.

My commitment then, goes along with not only my personal involvement in household tasks, but also in decision-making process, increased awareness on certain attitudes, and be a **NOW activist** who speaks out every form of violence and who knows to deconstruct prevailing masculinities.

Although tremendous achievements have been reported about JoT, but in each sector with more than 20,000 population only 30 couples have been trained, and in many cases are covering one side of the sector to support their fellow neighbors. Therefore, training for more couples in every sector should be more fruitful. In addition, as indicated above from research, 14% of men have strongly agreed that the women should tolerated being beaten in order to keep the family in harmony. This is an evidence that there is still a lot to be done to address gender-based violence. As strategy to foster positive change, men intellectuals and leaders in all spheres should be more engaged, and mainstream the model in early age education curriculum.

*By Jean Bosco RUDASINGWA, Project Coordinator*
*Rwanda Men’s resource Centre, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Project (GEWEP)*
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