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‘I can do women’s work’: reflections on engaging men as allies in women’s economic empowerment in Rwanda

Henny Slegh, Gary Barker, Augustin Kimonyo, Prudence Ndolimana and Matt Bannerman

The benefits of women’s economic empowerment are well-known and documented in the development literature. Few studies and interventions, however, have explored how men react or can be engaged to enhance such interventions. This article presents an evaluation of a pilot project in Rwanda in collaboration with CARE Rwanda’s Village Savings and Loan (VSL) programme that deliberately engaged men as partners of women beneficiaries of the micro-credit programme. Preliminary results affirm the importance of engaging men in a deliberate questioning of gender norms and power dynamics, so that they can embrace better co-operation and sharing of activities at the household level; and that a ‘do-no-harm’ approach to women’s economic empowerment should involve activities to engage men at the community level in questioning and ending gender-based violence – building on those interventions that have shown evidence of changes in men’s attitudes and behaviours related to gender-based violence.

Les avantages de l’autonomisation économique des femmes sont bien connus et documentés dans les écrits sur le développement. Rares sont les études et interventions, toutefois, qui ont examiné la manière dont les hommes réagissent ou peuvent être mobilisés pour améliorer ce type d’interventions. Cet article présente une évaluation d’un projet pilote mené au Rwanda en collaboration avec le programme Village Savings and Loans (VSL) (Épargne et prêts villageois) de CARE-Rwanda, qui a délibérément mobilisé les hommes en tant que partenaires des femmes bénéficiaires du programme de micro-crédit. Les résultats préliminaires confirment l’importance de la mobilisation des hommes dans une remise en cause délibérée des normes et de la dynamique de pouvoir liées au genre, pour qu’ils puissent adhérer à une meilleure coopération et au partage des activités au niveau du foyer familial; et qu’une approche « ne pas faire de mal » (de l’anglais « do no harm ») de l’autonomisation économique des femmes devrait englober des activités visant à mobiliser les hommes au niveau communautaire pour qu’ils mettent en cause et que la cessation de la violence basée sur le genre devrait faire partie de toutes les activités axées sur les femmes – en

développant les interventions qui ont fait ressortir des preuves du changement d'attitudes et de comportements parmi les hommes en ce qui concerne la violence basée sur le genre.

Los beneficios que emanan del empoderamiento económico de las mujeres son ampliamente conocidos y se encuentran abundantemente documentados en los estudios sobre desarrollo. Sin embargo, existen pocos estudios que hayan investigado cómo reaccionan los hombres o de qué manera pueden ser alentados a mejorar tales acciones. El presente artículo presenta los resultados de una evaluación realizada en torno a un proyecto piloto implementado en Ruanda, en colaboración con CARE y con el programa Ahorro y Crédito de Aldeas (ACA). Este último, intencionalmente incorpora a los hombres como socios de las mujeres beneficiarias de dicho programa de microcréditos. Los resultados preliminares demuestran la importancia de involucrar a los hombres, así como la relevancia de cuestionar deliberadamente las normas de género y las dinámicas de poder, con el fin de que éstos acepten con mayor facilidad cooperar y compartir las tareas del hogar. Asimismo, concluye que, el enfoque de “no hacer daño” del empoderamiento económico de las mujeres, debería incluir actividades que contribuyan a que los hombres se comprometan a nivel comunitario para cuestionar y poner fin a la violencia basada en el género y que dicho enfoque debería sustentar cualquier actividad centrada en las mujeres. Se recomienda fortalecer este tipo de programas, tomando como base aquellas acciones que han demostrado producir cambios en las actitudes y en el comportamiento de los hombres respecto a la violencia basada en el género.

Key words: women's economic empowerment; household gender dynamics; engaging men; Rwanda

Introduction

Most livelihood and 'economic empowerment' initiatives in the global South currently focus on women, and with good reason. At the global level, achieving income parity for women is one of the urgent, unachieved goals of gender equality. The recent *World Development Report* affirmed that women now represent 40 per cent of the world's paid workforce, and 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force (World Bank 2012, 3). While there have been significant gains in women's employment and earnings in the past 20 years, women's income continues to lag behind those of men everywhere in the world, even when women perform the same tasks or functions. In addition, women typically find that only a limited number of alternative means of earning income are open to them.

Women's 'economic empowerment' also brings benefits to their families and wider society. Numerous studies have shown that increased female control over income and

spending decisions in the household translates into better outcomes for children and households (Bruce *et al.* 1995). Increased control over material resources can lead on to women having an enhanced ability to act and choose (Kabeer 2009). The idea is that greater female contribution to household income can result in women having stronger bargaining power within marital relationships and the family. In this way, 'economic empowerment' has been linked to women having a stronger voice in negotiating sexual relations and hence reducing their risk of HIV infection; to reductions in violence from male partners; and to increased social status and mobility outside the home. Awareness of these links has led development policymakers and practitioners to target women widely as beneficiaries of interventions including microfinance initiatives.

However, research in various contexts focusing on low-income couples in the global South has shown that links between women's greater role in productive activities outside the household, their 'economic empowerment', and the wider project of women's rights and gender equality, cannot be assumed. Some of this research has highlighted the fact that men react in very diverse ways when their wives are beneficiaries of microcredit programmes (e.g. Ahmed 2008). Men do not uniformly 'fall into line' and accept gender equality when their female partners gain more income.

Some interventions have found that women's risk of violence decreases as a result of participation in such groups as they are able to renegotiate power dynamics in their interactions with men in the household, or that stress on the household reduces as women's incomes rise (Hadi 2005; Schuler *et al.* 1996). For example, individual interviews and focus group discussions with men and women in 20 savings and credit groups in rural Bangladesh suggested reduced levels of domestic violence (Kelkar *et al.* 2004). Research in South Africa showed that women who participated in microcredit programmes together with group social support activities experienced 52 per cent less violence than women in a control group who did not participate in such activities (Kim *et al.* 2008).

However, other researchers have found that increases or decreases in violence against women as a result of programmes aiming to empower them economically are very context-specific (Koenig *et al.* 2003). Some research has suggested that violence may escalate soon after women receive credit but reduce as women participate in skills training and employment, and as some male partners see that they also benefit from improved household income (Ahmed 2005). Women's participation in economic empowerment activities often changes household dynamics and can result in increased gender-based violence or stress within couples, but these patterns are not uniform.

In spite of this diversity and complexity in men's reactions to their female partners' income gains, few efforts have been made to engage men as allies or partners in women's economic empowerment, to explore and promote co-operation between couples – and even fewer of these efforts have been evaluated. In settings where men have not fully accepted the principles of women's rights and gender equality, it may be

an illusion to think that men will embrace the new role that women take on as providers, and that this will translate into wider positive change in gender relations, unless development policymakers and practitioners also engage men in deliberate and targeted efforts to change their attitudes, and unless we understand women's participation in these initiatives in the context of their couple relationships (that is, their intimate relationships with men, including marital relationships).

Care work, and the way it is divided between women and men, is a key issue which shows it is high time to engage with men as allies around women's economic empowerment initiatives. Women themselves affirm that as they do more paid work outside their home, their time burden of care work in the home often remains unchanged. Data from both low-income and upper-income settings find that as the gap between the time women and men spend on paid work has reduced, the gap between the time spent on unpaid care work has not reduced nearly as much (and in some places hardly at all) (World Bank 2012).

How can men be engaged as partners or allies in women's economic empowerment, and what kinds of interventions will work to engage them as allies for their female partners, so that economic empowerment becomes something wider and more socially transformative for women, both as individuals and collectively? This article presents findings from a pilot intervention with couples and men in Rwanda, including baseline research and an evaluation, aiming to explore the potential to develop a method of working which engages with the realities of male attitudes to women's economic empowerment, and couples' strategies for negotiating changes to their relationships, in the context of CARE Rwanda's Village Savings and Loan (VSL) programme.

Our message, in short, is that women participants in micro-credit programmes need to be supported by improved and better programming which engages with men in deliberate and structured ways, including promoting greater male involvement in care work. Our second key message is that in some settings, solely focusing on women may lead to negative effects for women, both in the short and long term.

CARE's work in Rwanda on women's economic empowerment

CARE Rwanda works to promote vulnerable women's access to the financial services and products they need, to build their skills in enterprise development, and to link women entrepreneurs to functioning markets and value-chains, enabling their enterprises to grow and prosper. It also works to promote women's awareness of their rights, and ensure they know of ways to gain access to information that enables them to exercise those rights.

CARE's VSL approach was pioneered in Niger in 1991, and is the cornerstone of CARE International's economic empowerment programming across the global South. CARE Rwanda began VSL in Rwanda in 1999, and is currently implementing VSL

activities in 23 districts, reaching more than 175,000 clients in 6,000 VSL associations. By the end of 2013, CARE Rwanda plans to reach 350,000 clients. CARE began to link VSL groups to formal financial institutions in 2003, and to private microfinance institutions in 2010. CARE has found that VSL groups meet the need for savings and credit at the very bottom rung of the economic ladder by creating a platform from which the poor can navigate the market for the more sophisticated financial services that they typically begin to demand as their resources, skills and confidence grow (Maes 2007).

VSL groups build their success entirely on member savings and interest from loans paid by members from the profits on their small business ventures; they receive no direct capital investment from CARE. Members receive a year of intensive training from CARE in group dynamics and governance, and in money-management. This training enables the groups to become self-supporting, to flourish, and even to establish and train other groups. The training package provided to VSL group members during the intensive period of mobilisation and group formation includes modules on financial literacy and on the selection, planning and management of income-generating activities. These training sessions aim to build VSL group members' basic skills in the identification and selection of economic activities and their management.

CARE's VSL programming in Rwanda has highlighted the importance of the kinds of social and cultural norms highlighted by the IMAGES-Rwanda research discussed later, in determining the extent to which women members of VSL groups can fully realise their potential as savers, investors and entrepreneurs. For example, views about women's and men's roles in the family are linked to culturally sanctioned differences between businesses thought suitable for women and those suitable for men: women tend to be involved in petty trading, which can be combined with caring for the family and home – at least in principle – while larger-scale businesses are considered the province of men as primary earners. Gendered divisions of domestic labour limit women's ability to invest time in their growing businesses.

In 2010, CARE Rwanda assessed men's attitudes about their female partners' participation in VSL groups, and found a mixture of responses from men. There were some indications of positive links between women's increasing role in income generation and wider change to marital relationships, with associated impact on patterns of decision-making. Some men were supportive of their wives' involvement, and appreciated the economic benefits to their wives and households, and some apparently reduced their use of gender-based violence, because of reduced economic stress. However, other men continued to dominate household decision-making. Some responded to their wives earning more by keeping more of their own income for personal use, arguing that they were the boss of the family and that women have to obey them. A number of men apparently increased the use of gender-based violence, as household dynamics and power balances shifted. Finally, some men said they

believed their wives had received the extra income through selling sex, in turn increasing conflict and violence (Barker and Schulte 2010).

Our research and intervention

These findings led CARE Rwanda to partner with Promundo¹ and Rwandan Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC), to explore ways to engage men in the hope of enhancing the confirmed benefits of VSL to empower women, reduce poverty and achieve gender equality at the household level. The pilot intervention aimed first to research what men thought about women's participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives;² second, to develop and test an intervention to engage men in a couple-focused process designed to respond to doubts and resistance; and thirdly, to evaluate the results.

First, we conducted baseline research with women and men in two rural settings in Rwanda where CARE implements VSL. In one of the sites – referred to as the intervention site – we then ran 16 weeks of group-education activities in one site where VSL is running – referred to as 'the training'. The intervention site was in Huye District in the Southern Province of Rwanda. Here, we identified 30 couples to participate from vulnerable households (the usual criteria for membership of VSL). We worked with men on their own, and with couples, to engage them in discussions about household dynamics, health and gender-based violence in one site. We developed a manual and training process for engaging men (in some men-only sessions and in couple sessions) in discussions about household dynamics, health and gender-based violence. In this site we also used a pre- and post-test questionnaire with 30 couples and men, to assess changes in their attitudes after the training.

Baseline research included a survey with 130 questions for males (aged 20–76) and females (aged 21–61); five focus group discussions (two men's groups, two women's groups, and one group with couples); and ten in-depth individual interviews with five women and five men. The majority of the survey questions were adopted from the 2010 IMAGES study in Rwanda. This was undertaken in 2010 as part of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES).³

The IMAGES-Rwanda study (a nationally representative household sample) had found traditional attitudes and perceptions prevailed among both men and women about gendered household and social roles (Slegh and Kimonyo 2010). At the same time, the study found that several major factors associated with the genocide and the post-genocide period have led to changes in men's and women's practices in Rwandan society. The IMAGES study affirmed that gender relations are undergoing a tremendous transformation in Rwanda, particularly in the aftermath of the genocide and the resulting migration, displacement and loss of livelihoods. With the loss of husbands and families, women have taken on new responsibilities. They have also gained more rights, thanks to new laws and policies. Even in the face of these changes,

however, the social norms transmitted through informal institutions (including family, school, and church) remain out of tune with the modernisation and new gender equality policies in place in Rwanda. It seems that much progress has been made in Rwanda on the empowerment of women from a legal and policy perspective, yet comparatively less appears to have changed in popular attitudes to gender roles and power relations.

IMAGES-Rwanda found that 73 per cent of Rwandan men, and 82 per cent of women, said that a woman's most important role is to take care of her family. More than 95 per cent of women were taught to carry out household duties as children, in contrast to just 49 per cent of men. More than 50 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men said that men *should* earn more than women. Seventy-five per cent of Rwandan women interviewed said that their husbands dominate household decision-making, while 57 per cent of men interviewed said they dominate household decision-making. About 17 per cent of men regularly abuse alcohol. Nearly 40 per cent of Rwandan men reported having carried out physical violence at least once in their lives against a female partner.

IMAGES-Rwanda found that men who witnessed or were directly affected by the genocide (which was nearly 80 per cent of all men) had higher rates of reported use of violence against their female partners, as did men who reported witnessing violence by their fathers against their mothers in their household of origin. The IMAGES research found that the vast majority of Rwandan men (more than 96 per cent) believe that the current Rwandan law on gender-based violence is too harsh toward men. This view suggests that men misunderstand the law, and perhaps also indicates that they know at some level that the law has reduced the impunity with which gender-based violence can be committed. In other words, Rwandan men may be defensive in knowing that some traditional male privileges have been taken away. These findings reflect the importance of understanding the roots of men's attitudes and practices, and in particular their resistance to gender equality, even as Rwandan law and public institutions have made major strides toward achieving gender equality.

Our own research drew on the IMAGES original questions as pre- and post-test questions with an emphasis on the impact of women's VSL participation on household management and partner relations. A baseline and follow-up study was also carried out with a comparison group in the Kirehe District, in the Eastern Province of Rwanda, to provide a control. In this site VSL was operating with women in the conventional way (with savings groups for women, and no involvement of husbands/partners). Here, a sample of 30 married couples – 30 men (aged 22–75) and 30 women (aged 21–53) – was studied using the same questionnaire for men and women; three focus group discussions: one with men, one with women and one with couples; and six individual in-depth interviews: three with women and three with men.

All the quotations in the article in the findings sections which follow come from research and programme participants.

The baseline study findings

Baseline study results found in both the experimental and comparison group that norms about traditional gender roles dominate the way VSL benefits are used. The women are 'instructed' by their husbands about the use of loans, and the husbands help to pay back the loans, with the majority of household financial decisions made by men.

The impact on gender-based violence

According to most men and women in the baseline, the VSL programmes as currently carried out (with no specific involvement of male partners/husbands) have contributed to a reduction of gender-based violence. However, these findings contradicted responses about family conflicts as well as the accounts of key informants among the CARE staff, who reported persistent use of multiple forms of gender-based violence by men, in the form of physical violence as well as economic and sexual violence.

These findings are interesting when compared against the previous IMAGES research into gender-based violence in Rwanda. Bearing in mind our concern about the relationship of gender-based violence to women's economic role as producers, IMAGES found that women who are more economically advantaged were more likely to experience gender-based violence. This suggested a complex relationship between women's income and experiences of intimate partner violence. Research in some settings has found that as women become more economically empowered, some men react negatively, and their use of violence increases (Rahman 1999). It is possible also that women who have relatively higher levels of material resources feel more able to disclose violence. IMAGES-Rwanda results did not find a correlation between men's income and their self-reported use of violence, which implies that men who commit violence against partners may be found at all income levels.

The main sources of conflict reported in our baseline research between partners were money, men's alcohol abuse and sexual relations. Women reported more couple conflicts than men did. Interestingly, men's general health was reported to be worse than women's, as reported by both men and women. Furthermore, men seem to cope differently with stress and problems – they reported drinking and talking with friends in bars – while women more frequently reported praying, talking to friends and seeking health services. Men said they would like more information about the VSL programme and income generation, reasoning that this would enable them to collaborate with their wives to increase family income. Women said they wanted their husbands to be better informed about their VSL work in order to make them more collaborative. The women also wanted their husbands to be educated about gender laws, family planning and gender-based violence.

As stated earlier, based on the findings of the baseline research, the authors designed a training manual that includes structured group discussion and training

activities on business skills (including sessions focusing on negotiation and decision-making between women and men); health and well-being (including practical information about general health, reproductive health, sexuality, alcohol consumption and coping strategies; and gender-based violence, including information on the relevant laws, in addition to wider laws and policies promoting gender equality in Rwanda).⁴ Ten sessions using the manual were carried out with men only in weekly group sessions lasting approximately two and a half hours, and the remaining were carried out with couples.

The impact of the training

The pilot study of the impact of the training was evaluated as outlined above. The findings provide evidence of the positive impact of the group educational training undertaken with couples and men, on both household-level poverty and on the incidence of partner relations and family dynamics.

Economic improvement of poor households

Interviews and focus group discussions with male and female participants in the experimental group indicated that the economic situation of participating families improved even more when the group sessions with men were combined with standard VSL activities (for women). The economic improvement is reflected in an income increase among the families with the lowest income levels – which was nearly double those of the gains achieved in the control group families.

In terms of qualitative results, several husbands in the experimental group said that they now acknowledge that their wives' activities in the VSL are valuable for bringing in additional income to the family, and have led to sharing of the role of breadwinner, which in turn changed their views of the worth of women's economic role and contribution to the family. Several men said they had started to collaborate with their wives to repay loans, seeing the loan as being their responsibility as well. One man commented: 'We divided the work: I sell bananas and she sells drinks. We could buy electricity in house and now we are charging phones. With that money, we bought goats and I bought a *panje* [skirt] for my wife'.

Care work

Patterns of sharing care work also changed. Men from the experimental group said they also collaborated more after the cycle of workshops in household activities. One man said, 'I learned that I can do women's work, and my wife can do man's work'. Participants in group sessions thought men were more positively engaged in sharing household activities and taking care of children, and had more positive relations with

their wives. A woman recalled: 'Yesterday, I was in VSL and my husband washed the clothes and prepared the food'.

A man who now does care work commented that he thought these individual changes were affecting general attitudes to the gender division of labour:

Our culture has changed. The assignment I got was to clean outside the house with a broom. But when the neighbours came, I was hiding the broom. They asked me what are you doing? I told them that I am not poisoned. And I kept on doing it.

Partner relations, decision-making, and family dynamics

Couples in the experimental group said that the basic knowledge on planning and budgeting provided in the workshops encouraged and enabled them to increase their incomes by thinking and planning as a couple within the 16-week period of the training. A woman described this change: 'Before, my husband took decisions and I could not say anything. Now we make decisions together. When husband sells a cow, we discuss how to spend that money. I am very happy, everything has changed'. Another woman stated: 'My husband always took VSL money and drank [it] all in the bar. Now he discusses what to do with the money. Now I take VSL loans and my husband helps to pay back the loans'. In comparison, in the control group, positive changes were seen in women's income generation, but the changes were not as extensive, were not owned as a couple or linked to men's input or activities, and did not seem to have an impact on as many areas or aspects of the women's lives as in the experimental group.

In addition to these changes, some men became more supportive of family planning and many men became more involved in child-care activities – changes that were not seen in the control group. One man commented, 'Family planning enables us to improve economically, and my wife made a good decision'.

Reported changes in family dynamics included a reduction in conflict between partners, which were reported by the women and men involved but were sometimes observed by neighbours also. A woman commented: 'My in-laws ask[ed], "what is happening in your house? Normally you always came to complain about violence and your husband, and now you don't come any more"'. The reduction in violence was reported to have a positive impact on children and family life. One father of four small children stated: 'My youngest son asked me last week: papa and mama are not fighting anymore: what happened?'

Both women and men showed greater knowledge about different forms of violence, and the laws related to gender equality. A father stated, 'I told my daughters that they have rights and that they should protect themselves when a boy wants to make sex'.

The training appeared to have raised men's awareness about acts that had not previously been considered as violent. A woman highlighted this in her comment, 'He

had sex with me as if he were a savage . . . now he is careful, saying nice words. We talk about family planning'.

Both men and women reported that men coped better with stress after the workshops, which in turn they related to men's reduced abuse of alcohol and reduced use of violence against women. One of the sessions for men included a presentation and discussion with a doctor about basic health issues – something that the men in particular reported they had never had before.

The new insights into gender equality that the workshops aimed to give men have, according to women and men participants, resulted in greater male acceptance and implementation of the laws in Rwanda that promote gender equality.

How did these changes happen? Pathways to change

Overall, these changes were considered by participants in the group sessions to be likely to lead households out of poverty and towards an improved family life. Men and women seem to be ready to discover alternative ways in managing their households and partner relations. They seem genuinely motivated to create greater peace at home and women realise that their male partners should collaborate more as the way to escape the daily hardship of extreme poverty. The control group did also report improved household dynamics, but the changes were not nearly as far-reaching as those in the experimental group.

Our evaluation of our pilot project does suggest the potential of scaling up the engagement of men as partners in women's economic empowerment in ways that bring benefits to children, women and men themselves. It also suggests that it is possible to maintain a focus on women's empowerment while also taking into account men's expressed needs (e.g. their health needs) in ways that do not have to be oppositional. In other words, women's and men's lives can improve at the same time.

The following quotes from men offer some overall insights on the pathways to change. First, the trainers offered a role model to the men of an alternative way to be, which in turn carried economic benefits:

The trainers made change possible; they facilitated the speed [of the change]. They told us how they do things at home; they clean and cook and wash children. Then I thought, they are rich, well doing well, why could I not do what they do? So I tried.

It is clear that change requires courage from individual men, but over time, and as more and more men join in, a tipping point is reached beyond which change becomes easier for individuals by seeing the same practices happening in other households:

It was like a war. When I started with women's activities the neighbours were laughing and joking. I kept on doing it, and now the neighbours don't joke anymore. They start to implement the changes in their own houses because they see we are doing well now.

Change was facilitated by training sessions which encouraged the active participation not only of men as individuals, but of couples, thus encouraging change at the couple or household level and not just men or women as individuals:

Change is also facilitated by the active participation in homework and exercises. In one of the sessions my wife had to lead me with my eyes closed. I had to trust her and she did it well. I realised that my wife can be a leader and now she is the manager of a banana beer shop and we are doing well.

At the same time, the results confirm the continuing challenge of changing deeply held gender norms. The quote that is used in the title of this article affirms that even when men take on care or domestic work, they often view this as a 'favour' to women and continue to classify domestic work or care work as women's work. Even couples that reported changes sometimes affirmed the limits of that change, as the following quotation illustrates:

One of my neighbours said that my wife had poisoned me [to make me do her work]. So, the problem is not the activity as such but rather what people think of you when they see you doing the activity.

There was also a question remaining about whether or not changes in the gender division of labour were connected in any substantive way to changes in ideas about leadership of the family and household headship. One man stated: 'To be honest I realise that the families of those men who are involved in VSL together with their wives are well off; they are bosses'.

A woman concurred, laughing, in one of the focus groups:

When I share the money and manage well the income, he is happy. But the husband is the boss. If you show him that you as a wife are the boss and gain money, he will mistreat you and take the money.

Fundamentally, change to gender relations is a long-term project. Participation in the VSL, even with the additional activities aiming at making men allies in this change, did not substantially always change people's ideas about gender relations, which are rooted deeply in culture and continue to support the patriarchal notion that men are in charge:

You have to respect a husband. He could sell the goat and eat all the money alone. For the security of the family, you have to accept. A woman has to be flexible and dynamic. This is also in the bible, as Eve came from the bone of Adam.

Conclusions

In this article, we have argued that there is an urgent need to understand men as gendered beings – that is, as shaped by social norms and institutions that influence

their perceptions of what it means to be men and their related behaviour. This diversity of men (and of couples) and men's responses to their partners' involvement in microfinance programmes must be our starting point in our attempts to ensure that these programmes are as empowering as possible to women as individuals, and as a collective marginalised group.

While results are too preliminary to confirm a reduction in intimate partner violence, the group education activities we designed and evaluated in our pilot programme were based on the same principles of participatory group education that have been used in other settings with women and men to change norms associated with violence. Some of these include Stepping Stones, Program H, Men As Partners (MAP), and others, that have been found in impact evaluation studies to change the attitudes of men related to gender-based violence (Peacock and Barker 2012). Evidence of reduced use of violence by men against women in such interventions is still lacking in such research, but the consistent attitude changes in the application of such interventions across settings are nonetheless promising. The conclusion then is that adding such evidence-based gender-based violence prevention activities – both in the form of group education and community-based campaign activism – can be relatively easily combined with women's economic empowerment activities when adequate resources and training for staff are available.

While we do not have enough evidence to affirm existing anecdotal reports, the other limited research that we do have suggests that, at the very least, programmes aiming to empower women economically should be attentive to the issue that men who perceive themselves to be economically vulnerable or marginalised are already, in some settings, more likely to commit gender-based violence. If economically marginalised men view their traditional roles as 'heads' of households being eroded by women's income-generating activities, there is a need to engage them in a deliberate questioning of such roles so that they can embrace better co-operation and sharing of activities at the household level. In sum, a do-no-harm approach to women's economic empowerment would suggest that activities to engage men at the community level in questioning and ending gender-based violence should be part of *all* women-focused activities – building on those interventions that have shown evidence of changes in men's attitudes and behaviours related to gender-based violence.

In addition to gender-based violence prevention, our experience also suggests that engaging men in activities that promote their roles as caregivers and in care work are also a necessary addition to efforts to engage men, and that both women and men (and children) perceive benefits when men take on more and different kinds of care work. This experience also suggests that men, understandably, were often more attracted to group discussions when issues that they perceived as interesting to them were included – such as their relationships with their children, better relationships with

their partners (including sexual relationships), their own health needs, and their needs in terms of income and employment.

Constant dialogue with women, engaging men as partners (and including men's own needs as appropriate) and listening to the voices of children all need to be part of such interventions. Furthermore, we need to move beyond a zero-sum approach and attitude that views women's increases as men's losses. Gender equality does mean that some men will have to give up a lot of privilege, and all men some kinds of privileges. But as this experience shows, there are men who fully appreciate the gains that come from gender equality, and from income gains achieved by their wives. As economic transitions occur, these men take on more caregiving, and they embrace, albeit slowly, the full potential of their female partners to be co-producers, co-workers, co-leaders, and full partners in family, political and economic life, and they see that their lives and their family's lives improve as a result.

Finally, other complementary possibilities exist for making men's involvement a common feature of women-focused economic empowerment, which should be explored. These include community campaigns targeting men, and the training of government and non-government organisation staff who currently implement micro-finance, conditional cash transfer programmes and other programmes focused on women, on ways to engage men as partners (and ways to promote a couple-based approach). Change is needed in policy formulation in the health and employment sectors also, to promote men's role as caregivers. Fauzia Ahmed (2008) argues that women's economic empowerment initiatives can 'use men to change other men', by identifying those men who are supportive of women's empowerment, and to empower those men as change agents to reach other men in the community and to change community norms. All these approaches, together with advocacy at the policy level, should be part of the mix to advance couple-based approaches to achieving gender equality and economic empowerment.

Henny Slegh, Gary Barker, and Augustin Kimonyo work with Promundo. Prudence Ndolimana and Matt Bannerman are with CARE Rwanda

Gary Barker, International Director, Promundo-US. Postal address: Promundo-US, 2121 Decatur Pl, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA. Email: g.barker@promundo.org.br

Henny Slegh, Regional Coordinator, Great Lakes Region, Promundo-US. Postal address: c/o Promundo-US (see above). Email: h.slegh@promundo.org.br

Augustin Kimonyo, Gender Consultant, Kigali, Rwanda. Postal address: c/o Promundo-US (see above). Email: akimonyo@yahoo.com

Prudence Ndolimana, CARE Rwanda. Postal address: c/o Promundo-US (see above). Email: prudencen.rw@co.care.org

Matt Bannerman, Assistant Country Director, CARE Rwanda. Postal address: c/o Promundo-US (see above). Email: mattb.rw@co.care.org

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Notes

- 1 Promundo is an international organisation with offices in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Washington, DC, USA; and Kigali, Rwanda, that carries out research, programme development and advocacy in men, masculinities and gender equality. For more information, see www.promundo.org.br/eng.
- 2 These include savings and credit, in addition to insurance, financial education and literacy.
- 3 IMAGES is a multi-country study of men's attitudes and practices related to gender equality – along with women's opinions and reports of men's practices. Topics included: gender-based violence; health and health-related practices; household division of labour; men's participation in caregiving and as fathers; men's and women's attitudes about gender and gender-related policies; transactional sex; men's reports of criminal behaviour; and quality of life. IMAGES was co-ordinated globally by Promundo, and the International Center for Research on Women (Barker *et al.* 2011). From 2009 to 2010, household surveys were administered to more than 8,000 men and 3,500 women aged 18–59 in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico, and Rwanda. For more information, see www.promundo.org.br/en/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Evolving-Men-IMAGES-1.pdf.
- 4 Such information could include sexual and reproductive health and rights, rights to life free of violence, understanding HIV and its prevention, the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, political rights, civic education, rights to information – budget plans, district development plans, and relevant policies.

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