Building on positive findings from an impact evaluation of the IRC's Economic and Social Empowerment (EA$E) program in Burundi, the IRC modified the program and launched a second evaluation in Côte d'Ivoire in partnership with Yale University and Innovations for Poverty Action.

### Policy Issue

Despite the pervasiveness of gender-based violence (GBV) and international calls for its reduction, rigorous data on the effectiveness of programs combating gender-based violence are woefully lacking. Existing studies indicate that challenging inequitable gender norms can lead to a decrease in violence, and that economic empowerment and health interventions are also important components to address intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

Preliminary results from a recent evaluation of an IRC program underscore the importance of addressing both economic well-being and gender norms in increasing women’s decision making in the home as well as reducing violence against women.\(^1\) Though promising interventions such as these have been implemented, there is still a gap in our understanding of what specific elements (such as microfinance for women, engaging men, and/or both) are required for an economic empowerment intervention that will prevent violence against women. Moreover, large-scale evaluations of such programming in conflict-affected settings such as Côte d'Ivoire are extremely scarce.

### The Context

Women and girls in Côte d'Ivoire have experienced years of conflict, and global studies focusing on conflict-affected populations indicate high levels of gender-based violence against women.\(^2\) While data from nationally drawn samples document a lifetime prevalence of physical domestic violence greater than 20%,\(^3\) a recent survey in Côte d'Ivoire underscores the pervasiveness of GBV against women and girls, with 60% of women reporting experiencing violence perpetrated by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.\(^4\)

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The Intervention
In response to the problem of women experiencing violence in the home, the IRC is implementing a socioeconomic intervention to combat GBV in Côte d’Ivoire. The IRC is using a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) methodology along with business skills training as the economic component to increase savings opportunities and capital acquisition. Gender dialogue groups that include the women’s spouses form the social component. The gender dialogue groups challenge participants to reflect on the characteristics of a successful household and walk participants through steps to develop mutually respectful and nonviolent spousal dynamics.

The Impact Evaluation
To help inform current knowledge regarding the specific components that are needed to successfully reduce intimate partner violence, a randomized community trial that is currently underway will answer the following questions:

- What is the incremental impact of Gender Dialogue Groups added to the VSLA program on (a) economic independence; (b) experiences of physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner; (c) household decision-making; and (d) gender attitudes?

- What is the process and potential pathways by which the different programmatic approaches (VSLA + Gender Dialogue Group/VSLA only) might influence levels of violence, economic independence and decision-making?

The study is a 2 year, 2-armed randomized community intervention trial involving 48 groups within 24 villages. These locations are spread across three regions of Cote d’Ivoire, including villages in the north and south. Groups within villages will be randomized to receive either 1) VSLA only or 2) VSLA+Gender Dialogue Groups.

Findings to Date
In October 2010, a baseline survey was conducted with 1271 women who were enrolled in the study (96% of participants). Partner violence against women was a widespread occurrence with 2 out of 3 (66.8%) women reporting having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence in their lifetime. Over 6 in 10 (62%) partnered women who experienced physical or sexual violence in the past year reported seeking help from another person (mostly family, friends, community members); only 7.2% reported seeking formal services such as medical or legal services. Women’s responses indicate that most household financial decisions are made by their partner. Though half of all women reported discussing financial disagreements with their partner, some 30-40% of women also reported yielding to their partners’ decision\(^5\).

Results of the full impact evaluation are expected in 2012.