

Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons

Sector Brief: Conflict and Post-Conflict Humanitarian Assistance

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most widespread form of abuse worldwide, affecting one third of all women in their lifetime [1]. It is widely acknowledged that men and boys have a key role to play in eliminating VAWG. However, not only does ending VAWG require the engagement of men and boys, but it also requires coordinated work with men and boys across multiple sectors [2, 3].

Such approaches are grounded in understanding the links between social constructions of masculinity and men's use of violence. Social constructions of gender almost always confer a higher social value on men than women, and privilege the masculine over the feminine. Male VAWG is born of this privilege. The term "positive masculinities" has emerged in recent years as a way to characterize the values, norms and practices that gender-based work with men and boys seeks to promote in order to end VAWG.

Background and Methodology

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned a literature review to investigate documentation of work with men and boys on VAWG outside the health sector in the Global South; and to identify promising approaches to, and emerging lessons from, this work that can guide future funding priorities and program development. The review covered the following five sectors:

- 1- Economic Growth, Trade, and Agriculture
- 2- Education
- 3- Governance, Law Enforcement, and Justice

Systems

4- Conflict and Post-Conflict Humanitarian Assistance

5- Social Development

Search Methods. A broad definition of violence was used, including physical and sexual violence against intimate partners and non-partners as well as harmful traditional practices such as child marriage, bride abduction, honor killing, acid throwing, burning, and female genital mutilation. The review conducted a search of general online sources, published literature databases, and relevant organizational websites and research platforms. Email queries to select key informants were also used to gather information.

Inclusion Criteria. The review focused on interventions that seek to be "gender transformative," in that they seek to transform gender norms and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women. Programs were included in the review on the basis of evaluated impact, lessons learned documentation in the absence of evaluated impact, and/or innovative program design that can guide future programming.

This brief summarizes the findings from the **conflict and post-conflict humanitarian assistance** sector.

Conflict and Post-Conflict Humanitarian Assistance

Ideals and images of masculinity are often used to motivate and pressure men into military combat. Many factors, such as men's need to live up to

social accomplishments, their frustrations with not fulfilling these accomplishments, the protection and income that may result from membership in an armed force or possession of a weapon, can also contribute to why men engage in violent conflicts [4]. Addressing the links between masculinity, militarism, and sexual violence is an important aspect of male engagement programming for this sector. The report identified **three** approaches under this sector to working with men to end VAW: **1)** security sector reform (SSR), **2)** social and economic reintegration of combatants, and **3)** peace building initiatives.

Under each approach, this brief highlights the context within which male engagement work is conducted, identifies the areas of work with men and boys used to address VAWG, touches on select program examples, and summarizes relevant evidence base findings for the areas. The brief concludes with a list of key challenges and lessons learned to help guide future programming and implementation.

Approach 1 – Security Sector Reform

Areas of Work
(1) Training initiatives

There is an urgent need to identify and scale up SSR work with men on preventing and responding to gender based violence (GBV) in military and paramilitary institutions and conflict-affected communities.

Training initiatives in GBV prevention and response for UN peacekeepers in Sub-Saharan Africa by UN Action serve as a promising area of work in SSR. A training curriculum helped male uniformed personnel examine the links between gender norms and conflict related GBV. The dissemination of a Code of Conduct on VAWG issues and guidelines on compliance with UN polices addressing sexual and gender based

violence (SGBV) also helped institutionalize anti-GBV concepts in policies and procedures.

The evidence base for supporting gender sensitive SSR is mixed [5]. On one hand, widespread sexual harassment of female officers and SGBV in peacekeeping missions still occurs with impunity. On the other hand, there are opportunities for accountability mechanisms since many armed groups do effectively limit their perpetration of rape, suggesting that commanders can prevent sexual violence if they choose to do so [6].

Approach 2 – Social and Economic Reintegration of Combatants

Areas of Work
(1) Male engagement in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes

Disarming militias and armed groups and transitioning men to civilian life can include challenges with navigating shifting gender norms, internalization of violent norms of masculinity, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, and the trauma associated with sexual violence potentially experienced during conflict [4].

Male engagement in DDR processes addressing these challenges surfaced as a key area of work. A documented program in South Sudan involved the roll out of a One Man Can (OMC) campaign in war-affected areas. Key components included workshops where men in DDR programs reflected on GBV, positive masculinities, and gender inequalities in their communities, and a campaign using drama, music and education sessions.

There is as yet no evidence base for this work since a formal program evaluation has not been done. However, anecdotal evidence points to an increased knowledge and understanding among men about and their role in addressing VAW.

Approach 3 – Peace Building Initiatives

Areas of Work

- (1) Psychosocial group-work and support
- (2) Gender education groups for men in post conflict communities
- (3) Peace building through mobilizing men for women's economic empowerment (WEE)

In addition to DDR approaches, there is the longer term challenge of working within peace building initiatives to engage men to prevent VAW and promote greater gender equality [7-9].

Psychosocial group-work and support focused on engaging men to develop and sustain nonviolent masculinities and community norms supportive of peace building. A program in Burundi and the DRC and one in Uganda used therapeutic and psychosocial education tools to address the psychosocial needs of community members. Key components included weekly discussions that sought to reconstruct healthy relationship bonds between men and women, conflict resolution skills building within families, and counseling and mental health services for community members.

Gender education groups for men in post-conflict communities are a common part of peace building efforts. Examples from Cote D'Ivoire and Thailand used group-based gender education and discussion methodologies to influence men's attitudes and norms linked to VAW and to respond to a high incidence of domestic violence among refugees. A third program used groups to reduce GBV and improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes among adolescents in Northern Uganda. A complementary serial radio drama helped catalyze discussion and reflection about these issues at scale, as did supportive work with community leaders, improved youth friendly health services and public recognition of people who demonstrated commitment to gender equitable behaviors.

An evaluation of the Ivorian program is contributing to an emerging evidence base.

Results suggest that the discussion groups played a positive role in helping men examine their gender biases and modify their behavior towards their partners. Similarly, a project review of the Thai program concluded that men must have time and space to reflect on and internalize concepts related to gender roles and violence.

Peace building through mobilizing men for WEE often improves economic outcomes for women, addresses men's needs for income generation, and creates opportunities to improve couple relations [10]. The review found an example from Uganda where role model men (RMM) committed to denouncing VAW and sharing household chores and decision making with their partners. Key components included training RMM to promote positive masculinities, organizing couple seminars, and encouraging male decision makers to advocate for changes in women's status.

A qualitative midterm review contributes to the evidence base for this work. Results showed that the RMM's non-confrontational approach to engaging men was effective in opening up dialogue about gender relations. The project helped reduce conflict and violence and strengthened women's decision making position at the household and community levels.

Challenges Faced

The review identified the following challenges faced by the broad array of programs:

- Looking beyond workshops to institutionalize gender in day-to-day reform processes
- Reforming DDR programs to institutionalize work on gender justice
- Recognizing the power and limits of 'role model' approaches to promote positive masculinities

Lessons Learned

It is clear that engaging men and boys is crucial to ending VAWG in conflict and post-conflict

settings. Although more research and evaluation is necessary to better understand actual impact, applying the following lessons learned may prove beneficial from programs working in the conflict and post-conflict humanitarian assistance sector to address gender inequality, change violent forms of masculinity, and end VAWG:

- Question gender binary stereotypes about perpetrators and victims of violence
- Understand the complex links between men's gender identities and violent behaviors
- Use psychosocial and service linked approaches to support men in embracing positive masculinities

- Link men's material interests with positive masculinities
- Synchronize work with men and women in peace building
- Focus on family care giving as a key to nonviolent masculinities
- Broaden the concept of gender justice within peace building

To read the full report—*Working with Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Approaches, Challenges, and Lessons*—please visit [<http://www.usaid.gov/engaging>].

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