

# Effective Responses for Gender Based Violence: Engaging Men to end Gender Based Violence

## Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence<sup>i</sup>

LEARNING BRIEF NO.3

### **Learning Brief on Engaging Men to End Gender Based Violence**

*This Learning Brief is based on experience which emerged at a Gender Based Violence Learning Day: Effective Responses to GBV organised by the Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, June 2009<sup>ii</sup>.*

## 1. Introduction

Gender Based Violence (GBV) must be understood within the context of men's and women's relative social and economic disadvantage and discrimination. Addressing GBV requires understanding and challenging gender inequality, promoting women's equal rights and creating social, political and economic environments in which everyone is empowered to enjoy those rights.

Experience has demonstrated that women are significantly more likely to experience GBV than men. It has also shown that working with men, as partners, is critical to the prevention of and response to GBV.

The challenge is to find ways of working with men as well as women within a community context, and within all development programmes. Working with men to address GBV is important in order to change behaviour, to get men's assistance in strengthening community institutions that can address GBV, and to get men involved in promoting women's equality and leadership.

This briefing paper specifically focuses on issues to be considered when designing programmes in order to engage with men at the community level. The paper should be read in conjunction with the Consortium's *Learning Brief on Developing a Community Based Approach to Gender Based Violence*. The paper should also be considered as a 'work in progress' and as a contribution to developing a body of knowledge on developing effective responses to GBV.

## 2. Design Issues

**Why Engage Men?** The reasons for engaging men are several: it reduces violence, women frequently ask for the programme to involve men as well as women; their participation helps to avoid a backlash against a violence against women programme, from men; because men often hold more power and influence in a home or community they can be more effective change agents; it supports the social reintegration of survivors who are often ostracised by their husbands/families e.g. in conflict situations where women have endured rape; and critically, if social change is to be sustained it is essential to engage the whole community (not only one half, namely women) including the most influential power brokers.

<sup>i</sup> The GBV Consortium understands Gender-based Violence to be any act or threat of harm inflicted on a person because of their gender and is any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender based violence encompasses sexual violence, domestic violence, sex trafficking, harmful practices, forced / early marriage, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation, to name but a few.

<sup>ii</sup> Speakers at the event included Heidi Lehmann, International Rescue Committee; Kanwal Ahluwalia, Womankind UK; Tina Musuya, Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention, Kampala; Julius Kiseembo, Community Worker, Kampala, Mairead Dunne, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Workshop input from Michael Dillon of 'Men Ending Domestic Abuse Network' also informed this briefing paper.

When designing programmes, the following issues should be considered:

- (i) The objectives should aim to bring about changes **for** women and girls; engagement of men is an instrument to achieve these objectives.
- (ii) Even though it may be necessary to specifically target men for engagement in a programme, address the issue of GBV itself as a community and a development issue, even in a humanitarian context
- (iii) Men are likely to engage easily with other men. Men can be influential agents of change at different levels:
  - a) as husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, sons promoting more equitable gender relationships in the home;
  - b) as peer educators whereby men talk to men and challenge men on the acceptability of GBV;
  - c) as supporters and carers of women experiencing violence and working to promote a safe environment so that women can report violence;
  - d) as accountable government officials such as police, judiciary and legislators;
  - e) as religious leaders with a responsibility to and influence over their community.
  - f) men in their role as community leaders – in many communities it is necessary to go through men to access members of the community, both men and women.
- (iv) The approach must be a constructive one and may necessitate male leaders being to the fore to encourage other men to participate, but all the while working closely with women.

An approach to working with men is likely to include the following elements:

- Multiple strategies to reach a cross section of community members including women, men, children and adolescents, police, health care providers, local leaders. The messages should be reinforced from several sources, from the media, the church, community elders etc.

- Analysis and discussion. Programme analysis should allow for a clear understanding of and approach to addressing GBV as a systemic or endemic problem in a community as opposed to a pathological behavioural pattern in an individual.
- Local Activism e.g. drama, community conversations, health chats, soap operas, video shows, community action groups.
- Formation and training of men's groups.
- Behaviour change curriculum – looks at gender, sexuality, power.
- Awareness raising and community mobilisation.
- Partnership with women's groups for action.
- Communication Materials e.g. games, comics, posters, information sheets, picture cards
- Working with the media and playing an advocacy role e.g. fact sheets, presentations, story ideas, soap operas, videos.

### **3. Creating Awareness among Men of how Violence Affects the Community and the Household.**

Gender based violence is related to issues of power and control; thus it is important to identify the incentives and motivations for perpetrators to change their behaviour, and, where GBV is endemic in a community, it is important that the community changes also to support new behavioural patterns.

Approaches should examine the issue of male violence generally in the society; it will be more effective to focus on how they can play their part in improving society - not to make men feel guilty. Experience has shown that GBV interventions are more effective when care has been taken to ensure that approaches identify the acts, not the perpetrators, of GBV as being 'bad'.

Creating awareness among men of the negative consequences of violence, while not in itself an instrument of change, is an important first step towards developing a safer community.

The following are some ideas on *how* to initially engage men; (the same approach can also be used for engaging women):

- Seek to reach all men in the community, not only those who are directly affected by GBV. Identify positive role models for men and engage them in the process of change.
- Meet men where they feel safe and accepted e.g. drinking places; at football; at newspaper outlets; in the market. Mix and spend time with them so that they are open to discussion - not prey for a project that wants to capture them. Men need a space where men can give time to each other, not hassle each other.
- Ensure that staff or partners have good listening, communication and negotiation skills.
- Disaggregate different types of 'men's groups' e.g. self-selecting groups, youth groups, religious leaders, elders, and try to work with these.
- The language and messages that are used should be persuasive rather than intimidating. Avoid blame, stigma or shame, instead talk about opportunities and rights. Role plays are an effective, non-threatening way of raising anti-violence messages.
- Men may worry about their identity as men and fear they are not respected within the household. Look at the issue of the dominance as family head i.e. if a person wants to be respected they must reciprocate that respect. Talk about respecting the rights of men, of women, of children. Work towards collective decisions within the household (sharing power) but avoid undermining men's sense of identity.
- Focus on the benefits of reduced violence and how negative behaviour affects the family e.g. the consequences of children being afraid of fathers. Seek to promote better husbands, fathers and sons – e.g. men who have daughters will respond as they want a safe environment for their daughters.
- Discuss the personal and societal impact of violence on a woman and relate this to their wives, daughters, sisters or mothers. Question whether, because of their attitude and behaviour, they are in practice promoting a network of violence.

- Discuss how to handle anger/violence - who can they talk to, elders or other men?
- While separate discussions may be required at certain stages, seek to create an open environment to discuss violence and exchange views. Go door to door, talk to women, to children, to men.

## 4. Community strategies for working with men

Awareness raising on its own is not sufficient to bring about sustained behavioural change. Communities must know that GBV is a health and human rights issue, and that there are benefits for all in eliminating GBV. The community should be helped to come up with practical steps to encourage members to be good husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. Some examples include the following:

- Peer to peer talking as men listen to what other men are saying. Peer *pressure* can be key to engaging men.
- Use multiple channels to raise the issue.
- Find mechanisms to generate peer pressure; for example, local drinking groups hold members accountable or require men to leave adequate money for the family food before drinking.
- Facilitate men and women to talk together in community groups.
- Encourage men to create a safe family and community environment for their sisters, daughters, wives.
- Encourage men to move towards collective ownership in the household, for example, give a value to what others in the household are contributing e.g. unpaid workload of wives and children.
- Encourage the community to prepare for safer families into which girls marry.
- Try to tackle gender stereotypes e.g. girls riding bicycles, men doing some household tasks that are currently done by women, sharing responsibility within the household.

## 5. Work at Multiple Levels

No one sector, organisation or project can bring an end to GBV so it will be necessary to work at different levels, some of which include the following:

- Network with leaders, police, judiciary, church on GBV, and provide training on their roles.
- Work with women to promote their self-esteem, communication and negotiation skills.
- Encourage the education system to create awareness of violence.
- Establish a domestic violence group across civil society groups working in the area.
- Seek to bring issues to national policy and structural levels.
- Seek to engage female and male parliamentarians as leaders.

## 6. Resistance and Challenges

Men's use of power over women is often perceived to be natural and cultural, and is a recurrent challenge that requires a long-term commitment both by donors and community members. An inherent natural resistance to change will also need to be tackled, particularly around such issues as equality, rights and power. Moreover sometimes staff, especially women staff, are resistant to working with men and there is need to build in time to discuss and talk with staff about this. Other challenges that are likely to be encountered are:

- Lack of comprehensive legislation and services to address GBV issues.
- Keeping the focus on women and girls – not the involvement of men as an end in itself.
- Motivating men to support women – not just supporting men.
- Connecting men's and women's agendas.
- Men supporting women to be leaders
- Monitoring and measuring individual behavior change

### References

Strategies and tools for working with men and boys to end violence against girls, boys, women and other men by UNIFEM /Save the Children 2005 at

<http://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/50-strategies-and-tools-for-working-with-men-and-boys-to-end-violence-against-girls-boys-women-and-other-men.pdf>

Various resources relating to engaging men be found at:

[http://www.menengage.org/resource\\_publications.asp](http://www.menengage.org/resource_publications.asp)

The Irish Joint Consortium on GBV comprises Irish Human Rights, humanitarian and development organisations together with Irish Aid and the Irish Defence Forces working together to tackle gender based violence. For more information on the Consortium please go to [www.gbv.ie](http://www.gbv.ie)

### The current members include:

