

the ripple effect: making waves for gender and sexuality



the facts

- Cultural and societal norms define our expectations of how women and men behave ranging from who fetches the water to who eats first and who manages the family finances.
- Even in communities where women have access to education and jobs, many women and girls say they lack the basic right to make fundamental life choices, such as if, when and whom to marry and if, when and with whom to have children.
- Social expectations about gender also impact men and boys, who lack access to reproductive health services and information tailored to their needs.
- Many men feel validated when they father many children, especially sons, because it demonstrates manhood and virility.
- Women often say that in their households, the men believe they must make the decisions about sex and reproduction including decisions about children and family planning.



CARE's Response

To be healthy, people depend on high-quality health services and information about how to care for themselves. But cultural norms for how men, women and adolescents behave also influence healthy pregnancy outcomes, use of contraceptives and prevention of infections, because these norms control who has

power and opportunities to make a difference in their own lives. CARE works with women and men to explore, reflect, and understand the ways that restrictive gender and sexuality norms lead to inequalities and discrimination which negatively affect their sexual and reproductive health and their lives. CARE has found that promoting social change in conjunction with the availability of health information and services is crucial to **ensuring health for all**.

Catalyzing the Change

CARE's programming demonstrates that improvements in sexual and reproductive health can be more powerfully achieved if program staff and community participants are actively assessing these cultural expectations for themselves. To initiate the ripple effect, staff and participants start by evaluating themselves and their personal experiences.

CARE provides tools for critical thinking by helping create safe spaces for reflection and dialogue among couples, families, and community members. CARE helps people explore their understanding of cultural norms related to gender and sexuality, consider how these norms positively or negatively impact both women and men, and identify more empowering and healthy practices and behaviors for themselves. Once people identify for themselves what they might choose to change, CARE builds the skills of individuals and groups who are champions for positive transformation in their own communities to make those changes happen.

Program Highlights

In India, the Inner Spaces, Outer Faces Initiative (ISOFI) uses creative exercises to train staff and local health care providers to think about their own assumptions and the program interventions or services in a new way. In addition to talking about healthy diets, health providers learn new skills in counseling pregnant women and their families about why pregnant women typically eat last and lack the right to walk about freely by themselves. To push the ripples of change further, local partner agencies work in collaboration with CARE to promote public discussions on topics such as the common belief that women should not step out of the house unaccompanied through theater, puppet shows and film screenings. CARE is working in partnership with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to test the impact of addressing these social constructions of gender and sexuality on the health of poor rural families.

In the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, in a rural community near the coast of the Black Sea, CARE and two local partners are improving the community's support for family planning services for young people. In addition to helping doctors and nurses provide youth-friendly services, the project builds capacity of community peer educators to promote the idea that young people deserve a chance to know more about their bodies and prevent unwanted pregnancies. The young people write theater scripts about discriminatory attitudes towards young people that are common in the community, and use an interactive theater technique that invites volunteers up to the stage to exchange places with the actors. This allows community members to embody positive change in front of the whole community, to wide applause and approval.

Nearly 100,000 workers in 45 factories in Cambodia have improved access to contraception, nutrition and antenatal care through a project that brings accurate and confidential information and services to the workplace. CARE staff and partners are working to help women and men identify and address barriers to good health including working directly with urban men to reflect on gender norms and help young men make responsible, safe and protective choices.



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