

**Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality Series:
Lessons Learnt**

BRIEF 2





Lessons Learnt

Taking a step back to reflect on experiences, this section highlights how we understand each element of CARE’s engaging men and boys for gender equality work and lessons learnt across each element:

1. CONSCIENTIZATION

2. INTIMATE DIALOGUES

3. BUILDING THE BASE

4. STEPPING OUT, STEPPING UP

5. ALLIANCES FOR ADVOCACY

AND CROSS-CUTTING THESE:

6. SYNCHRONIZATION

Insights draw from country office reflections, learning documentation and discussions on engaging men for gender equality at CARE.

“Synchronization”

Synchronizing approaches refers to: *the intentional intersection of gender-transformative efforts reaching both men and boys and women and girls of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They engage people in challenging harmful and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity that drive gender-related vulnerabilities and inequalities* (Interagency Gender Working Group, 2010)

This brings attention to gender relations, as noted by the International Women’s Development Agency (2012): *It provides a way of focusing on the relational nature of gender work, and on the value of working with men and women together, as well as separately, in transforming the social norms and power structures that root gender inequality deep in all cultures.*



**FIGURE 1:
PROGRAMMING
ELEMENTS**

Synchronization is about being thoughtful to coordinate the sequencing and intersections of different kinds of interventions. It aims to ensure that programming creates spaces that take into account privilege and power relations based on gender and other characteristics so that individuals can participate in a genuine way and to reflect on those very same power relations. Synchronization however also involves a focus on changing social norms, which requires separate as well as mixed gender spaces. Looking at intentional intersections of programming, synchronization urges us to ensure all work with men for gender equality is linked with feminist movements to ensure accountability.

Such approaches can occur simultaneously or sequentially, under the same “programmatic umbrella” or in a coordinated way with other organizations. Synchronizing or coordinating work around gender equality is meant to ensure that we do not focus on just “one part of the puzzle” e.g. on empowering women economically with increased access to loans, without addressing husbands and influential people at community levels who keep women from engaging in markets or that keep men from assuming household responsibilities. Similarly, engaging men for gender equality work cannot happen only with men, apart from other kinds of activities. Programming efforts with men and boys must be carefully considered in the context of other gender equality activities ongoing in the communities to ensure that change is maximized. Ensuring this work aligns with broader efforts for gender equality, and directly engages with women’s and mixed gender groups, is a cornerstone of CARE’s approach to engaging men.

First, it ensures that work with men and boys stays focused on accountability to transforming power relations with women, girls, and LGBTQ+ communities. When work with men does not link with gender equality work, it can lose its gender transformative aspects and run the risk of slipping into reflections that focus only on men’s constraints in society. In this same vein, by keeping the focus on power relationships and on gender norms, men can be better positioned to

join as allies with various gender equality movements. Secondly, some reflections naturally happen best in certain kinds of spaces, and programming needs to plan for this to ensure sustainability of personal changes.

For example, men may need to first reflect on domestic violence only amongst men, in order to be truly honest and open about their own feelings, relationships and behaviors in relation to violence in the home. Women may need to first discuss this topic amongst women in order to feel safe to express their experiences and to challenge each other about the “normalcy” of domestic violence, and to gain confidence to speak about the harms they have suffered. Mixed gender spaces can help men and women learn from each other and genuinely witness how domestic violence harms members of the household in different ways. Such spaces can enable men and women to plan together on how to end violence in their own families and reach others to stop violence. Finally, linking such men and women and their children with community and national level advocacy efforts ensures they can continue mobilizing and advocating against domestic violence.



Conscientization

As frequently quoted in social change mobilizing, “The Personal is Political”. In CARE’s experiences, a key first step in addressing this field of work means creating structured space for reflection on personal values, perceptions and power among key groups engaged in this work (e.g. youth clubs, women’s groups, men’s groups, local leaders, etc.). This is an important opportunity for men and boys to surface their own pressures and fears, and the impact it has on themselves and others; as well as articulate their hopes and dreams, to consider alternatives and ways forward. To prepare staff to facilitate this work, it is essential to foster ongoing reflections and dialogues among staff to explore gender relations in personal and professional lives. This includes discussions on how society defines what it means to be a man or a woman, and the influence of expectations on values, attitudes, behaviors and practices.

SYNCHRONIZING APPROACHES:

Consciousness raising work may align with similar dialogues taking place with women only groups, girls’ clubs or boys’ clubs in separate spaces. At strategic moments, it may make sense to bring separate groups together to deepen mutual understanding.

KEY LEARNING BASED ON EXPERIENCES WITH CONSCIENTIZATION INCLUDE:

- 1. Strong facilitation is key to success.** Facilitators must establish safe spaces for people to explore gender in their lives, ensure non-judgmental atmosphere and reflect on sensitive topics such as power and privilege, sexuality, gender-based violence, discrimination and rights. This requires commitment to support staff reflection on these topics and build their skills to facilitate reflection and dialogue with communities.
- 2. Reflection and dialogue can be a first step** to encourage men to step out of ‘the man box’, embody egalitarian notions of masculinities, and to support others (e.g. women, peers, LGBTQ+ people) who are already regularly crossing traditional gender expectations. It is important that individuals feel support to leave restrictive gender roles and expectations.
- 3. Participatory approaches based on experiential learning** offer powerful avenues for reflection, awareness, action and change. These approaches can explore how unequal gender relations interact with other forms of inequality (economic, class, caste, etc.)
- 4. Be careful not to problematize men through exercises.** Rigid gender norms and values affect men and boys’ relationships and choices in different ways. Projects should be sensitive to this and work with men and boys to reflect on their own

experiences in the face of gender pressures, while balancing these reflections with others around broader issues of gender equity. Projects sometimes fall short of the potential impact of this work when men are only engaged to mitigate risks to women, which offers limited opportunity or ownership for men's involvement in gender equality efforts. On the other hand, failure to link work with men to feminist approaches risks missing opportunities to go beyond discussion on how hegemonic masculinities affect their lives toward gender equality.

Intimate Dialogues

A key component of effective facilitation is also to promote non-violent communication for effective dialogue and negotiation among intimate and household relationships. Key household relationships that projects engage include work among intimate partners, between wives and in-laws, and between adolescents and parents (and more!).

This element requires specific conflict resolution, psycho-social and counseling skills for staff and partners taking on this work.

LESSONS TO DATE INCLUDE:

- 1. Entry point topics are important to establish safe spaces for open dialogues.** For example, some teams begin to discuss gender relations through the lens of women's economic empowerment and fatherhood. With trust, teams often advance to touch on more sensitive topics like decision-making dynamics, gendered division of labor and gender-based violence.
- 2. Effective dialogues require a foundation in active listening and respect across participants and facilitators.**
- 3. Teams require clear ethical and legal responsibilities and support** when cases of intimate partner violence, child abuse and other forms of violence and exploitation affecting participants arise. This requires clear referrals systems when working directly with families and couples, and discussions on how to respond to risks without alienating individuals within groups.
- 4. Topics often emphasize how more equal relationships built on cooperation and respect benefit all.** It is important to recognize that power is not a zero-sum game, and rigid expectations that limit one's potential to explore their capabilities and aspirations create environments where all lose.

SYNCHRONIZING APPROACHES:

Bridging communication gaps often requires a sequenced strategy for members of a group to discuss issues separately (e.g. in women-only and men-only spaces), balanced with dialogues across groups (e.g. across intimate partners). In discussions, facilitators must pay careful attention to power relations among participants and maintain safe spaces to promote effective dialogue.



Building The Base

Crossing gender boundaries is not easy. Across experiences reported in engaging men and boys work, men and boys who have begun to challenge gender norms and relations through their words and actions often face backlash and rejection among peers and others within the community. To counteract these trends, offices have engaged one on one outreach and network-building among male allies. Networks among men and boys committed to change can provide



important social support to overcome these pressures, build solidarity and accompany sustained personal change. Groups can also be important to monitor and respond to risks men and boys may face as they publicly cross gender norms.

LESSONS TO DATE INCLUDE:

1. At the outset, it can be difficult to identify men to get involved in this work. As a starting point, women programming participants can help **identify already supportive men** within communities who can then be engaged as allies for equality.
2. It can also be strategic to **start initiatives with existing groups and networks**. Many projects reported making use of different groups – village savings and loans groups, mother or father groups, agricultural laborer groups, girls’ or boys’ clubs, etc. to begin dialogues on masculinities.
3. **Regular meetings of men’s groups and individual outreach with peers** in the community can support sustainability by linking engaged men and expanding support for their work.

SYNCHRONIZING APPROACHES:

Using work with women’s groups can be an effective avenue for men to get involved in activities, as well as engage with couples and ensure accountability of the men’s engagement work. Couples dialogues and household engagement can also be important to overcome backlash men sometimes face within their homes when crossing gender roles.

SYNCHRONIZING APPROACHES:

This work should pay attention to who are key influencers – for men and for women – to identify powerful allies for gender change. These individuals are important to catalyze gender norms change in society.

Stepping Out, Stepping Up

It is important to seek men and boys with explicit commitment to rights and change who take ownership over mobilizing for gender justice – as a fundamental issue affecting their lives, opportunities and relationships, as well as a fundamental rights issue.

WAYS FORWARD IN SUPPORTING MEN AND BOYS

AS AGENTS OF CHANGE INCLUDE:

1. **Fostering allies among influential actors and elites** who have broader social influence – religious leaders and political officials. This can

be important for promoting broader change in norms but require careful selection, training and support to local power holders to align their lives and work toward gender equality.

- 2. Supporting youth activism** has also been an important strategy for promoting norms change and gender equality. Youth organizing can build strong solidarity platforms to motivate action (e.g. through youth groups and clubs), with potential to trigger inter-generational change in gender norms, perceptions and relations.
- 3. Celebrating role models for change** - or people who may go against the grain in choosing alternative roles and maintaining more equitable relationships – can be a powerful tool to recognize positive shifts toward more equal and inclusive gender relations. This is especially important as household change is not always apparent at community levels. Publicly celebrating change raises awareness of more equitable practices taking place in personal/private spaces.

Alliances for Advocacy

This remains a nascent area for CARE, though many recognize advocacy linkages as critical for impact at scale.

CURRENT LESSONS ON LINKING WITH ADVOCACY INCLUDE:

- It is important to build trust and support **strong partnerships with civil society platforms and feminist movements**. This requires time and relationship building to establish CARE as an ally to these groups, who may be mistrustful of both collaborations with male allies and with international NGOs. Though forging coalitions may be difficult, they are critical to ensure accountability of our work, and leverage impact of advocacy efforts
- Work with media** to share testimonies of male allies and change, and to reinforce messages for non-violence and more gender equitable relationships through the arts.
- Invest in **research and learning** for evidence-based advocacy.

In addition to these lessons, more reflection and testing can shed light on the 'mix' of elements used across strategies and implementation, and benefits and trade-offs of these choices.

Leveraging Impact

Given the long-term nature of change in norms, program approaches require strong organizational commitment to leverage impact of work with men and boys for gender equality. Offices highlight:

- Strong leadership** to support masculinities programming, which includes supporting male allies within CARE, ensuring strong partnerships and collaboration across teams to “synchronize” programming effectively and a strong commitment to retaining talent within the organization.
- Opportunities for staff to gain trainings, capacities and technical support** for engaging men and boys for gender equality.
- A theory, strategy and target for social change**, and systems in place to support learning.
- Ongoing reflections with staff and partners** on gender values and perceptions
- Integrated components to **monitor, prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence**

Continued commitment is essential for advancing engaging men and boys for gender equality across CARE, as well as to foster effective co-learning around this field of practice. As we – as an organization in partnership with others – continue to work and learn around this field of work, it will be important to return to these reflections and continue to add to it, adapt it, and evolve our understanding of what it takes to work effectively with men and boys for gender equality.

SYNCHRONIZING APPROACHES:

It is important to join with others advancing gender justice from an early stage. This positions men and boys as allies to the broader spectrum of feminist organizations and networks. It requires investment in trust-building and support, to establish strong partnerships to align strategies to advance common goals.





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Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year CARE worked in 87 countries and reached 82 million people around the world. To learn more, visit www.care.org.