

FIDELITY BRIEF

for adapting Indashyikirwa
Couples Curriculum

BACKGROUND

Indashyikirwa (Agents for Change) was a collaboration between CARE Rwanda, Rwandan Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) and the Rwanda Women's Network (RWN), funded by DFID-Rwanda.

The programme aimed to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence (IPV) and was implemented in 7 districts, across 14 sectors in Eastern, Northern and Western provinces of rural Rwanda from August 2014–2018, which included a 14-month inception period.

Indashyikirwa consists of four major components:

1

A 21-session participatory curriculum with male-female couples that had been married or living together for at least 6 months drawn from CARE Rwanda's micro-finance village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) to support equitable, non-violent relationships.

2

Supporting a sub-set of trained couples to engage in community activism for an additional two years.

3

Establishment of women's safe spaces for dedicated support and referral of IPV survivors.

4

Training and engagement of opinion leaders to support an enabling environment for IPV prevention and response.

This brief supports the adaptation of Indashyikirwa, with specific focus on the first component (Couples Curriculum) because:

- coherent evidence confirms its effectiveness
- various organizations have expressed an interest in adapting and implementing it
- it has strong potential to be integrated into other multi-component programmes

There is no current evidence that all four components are needed to achieve the benefits demonstrated through the Couples Curriculum, which was implemented first and evaluated separately. However, certain elements of the entire model support the integrity of the intervention and it is valuable to consider these for adaptation of this approach.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This brief highlights essentials for implementing the Indashyikirwa Couples Curriculum based on the experience in Rwanda, to guide organizations to make informed decisions when refining the programme to be more appropriate for their given contexts and target populations. It can be used by organizations who are planning to adapt or are currently implementing the Indashyikirwa Couples Curriculum. It can also be used by donors to analyze the fidelity to the Indashyikirwa Couples Curriculum of grant applicants proposing to use this model, or grantee reports of implementation.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS OF INDASHYIKIRWA COUPLES CURRICULUM

An [impact evaluation](#) of Indashyikirwa was conducted between 2015 to 2018 by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council as part of the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Programme.

The evaluation included a randomized controlled trial and longitudinal, qualitative data. The Couples Curriculum was found to have dramatic effects on individual level outcomes including:



55%
↓

Among women, a 55% reduction in the odds of reporting physical and/or sexual IPV



47%
↓

Among men, a 47% reduction in the odds of reporting having perpetrated physical and/or sexual IPV

- Being one of the few programmes to date to demonstrate such a large impact in reducing forced or coerced sexual activity (50% reduced odds of experience for women, 50% reduced odds of perpetration for men)
- Among women and men, a significant reduced endorsement of physical discipline in raising children and reduced frequency of using corporal punishment in the home
- Effects on hypothesized pathways to reduce IPV including improved relationship quality, better communication, greater trust, improved conflict management, reductions in the number of reasons endorsed to justify wife beating, reduced depressive symptoms, improvements in self-rated health and improvements in household food security
- Strong consistency of impact found between quantitative and qualitative findings

WHAT MAKES THE INDASHYIKIRWA COUPLES CURRICULUM WORK?

The [Indashyikirwa Couples Curriculum](#) is designed as a sequential journey of change for both participants and facilitators, with each session building on the next.

Organizations are encouraged to adapt and refine the curriculum content based on their context, including to consider existing social and gender norms, frame the content within national laws and rights, and ensure appropriate and comprehensive translation if needed.

Visuals and contextual cues within the curriculum such as case studies, scenarios, and names should also be adapted for relevance to the target population. It is not recommended to cut any of the curriculum sessions since they all are connected and support the overall change process. The curriculum is designed for groups of up to 30 participants; beyond this is not optimal for learning.

It is valuable to lead the adaptation process in partnership with local organizations working on IPV prevention and response. The local Indashyikirwa partners with experience addressing IPV (RWAMREC and RWN), helped tailor and contextualize the Couples Curriculum.



Quality adaptation should consider design and implementation elements that were key to the success of the programme. Both components are equally important for assuring implementation fidelity and are highlighted below:



KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

1

Intensive Work with Couples

- It is fundamental to the process of change of Indashyikirwa to intensively work with male-female, co-habiting couples together
- It may be difficult to involve men and women together in all curriculum sessions due to contextual differences and sensitivities, however there should be some efforts to bring couples together regularly, in order to be a couples programme
- Facilitators should be encouraged to be aware of and sensitive to participation dynamics among couples, strive to ensure a safe space for women and encourage equitable participation from both partners of couples
- Carefully consider how to make it work for couples to be regularly engaged (i.e. consider timing and location of sessions, stipend)
- VSLAs worked well as a platform to recruit and retain couples, as this entailed some level of economic empowerment among ready-made groups where trust had already been fostered within groups, and with the implementing NGO (CARE Rwanda)
- The core content and exercises could be relevant to other types of couples including same-sex partners, although additional content or further adaptations of the approach and content would be needed

EXAMPLE: In Rwanda, there was 99% retention of both partners of couples to the entire curriculum. This was supported by having the training at venues within participants' communities, hosting the sessions in the mornings, and that each participant was given 2000 RWF (approximately 2 USD) per session

2

Maintain the Power Framework

- The positive types of power (power within, power to, power with) and negative types of power (power over) helped couples identify multiple forms of IPV, and move beyond the typical binary of men as solely perpetrators and women as victims of IPV
- The concept of 'power within' was said to improve women's self-confidence, and the concepts of 'power with' and 'power to' supported couples to prevent and respond to IPV in their communities
- As the power framework is fundamental to the programme, adaptation processes should consider effective translation of this concept into another language if needed

EXAMPLE: The pre-test of the Couples Curriculum indicated that the power framework did not translate well into Kinyarwanda and it took significant efforts to translate and communicate this concept effectively

3

Emphasize Learning, Applying and Practicing Skills

- In line with behaviour change theory, the curriculum includes activities to influence knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors
- It is critical to teach couples skills to mitigate IPV and support healthy, equitable relationships including through recognising common triggers of IPV, teaching elements of cognitive re-structuring and emotional regulation, constructive communication and conflict resolution skills
- It is important to encourage couples to apply and practice skills through take home activities related to each session and provide an opportunity for couples to share their experiences with the take home activities at the beginning of each session
- The group dynamic of the curriculum supported couples to draw on support from each other to apply and practice new skills



4

Use a Benefits Based Approach

- The curriculum content and approach emphasize the benefits of non-violent, healthy and equitable relationships rather than solely emphasizing the consequences of violence and gender inequality
- A benefits-based approach can be more motivating to sign up for the programme, to continue to be engaged with the programme, and to change attitudes/behaviours
- Sessions focused on benefiting relationships including spending quality time together and positive sexuality were some of the most popular sessions among couples

5

Maintain Sexuality Content and focus on Sexual Consent

- In many settings, it can be difficult or taboo to discuss sexuality among couples including women initiating sex, sexual pleasure, and sexual consent in marriage
- Yet this content was critical for the effects seen on reduced sexual IPV and coercion so if this content is cut, the adapted programme may not have similar impacts

6

Have an Explicit Next Step after the Curriculum Ends

- This does not necessarily have to be community activism, but it is important to provide couples with skills to support other couples, and diffuse what they have learned to their wider communities
- This is valuable to support accountability and sustainability of change among couples, and foster a more enabling environment within couples' communities
- The Couples Curriculum fosters individual level changes, and efforts to support social norms change and broader gender equality will require additional programming elements
- If an adapted programme includes activism or diffusion, lessons learned through the entire model suggest the importance of engaging opinion leaders, including government leaders, service providers and/or religious leaders as key gatekeepers

EXAMPLE: Content from the [Indashyikirwa Activism Curriculum](#) is especially relevant, particularly Session 3 (Providing Empowering, Support and Essential Communication Skills)

1

Appropriate Timing to allow for Journey of Change

- It is necessary to ensure appropriate time for the Couples Curriculum to support attitude and behaviour changes among couples
- It worked well to have the Couples Curriculum once a week, at the same scheduled time, place and day of the week, yet this can be modified within parameters
- For instance, it would not be recommended to have a session every day as this would limit the time for take home activities or the content to be reflected upon, and would likely not be feasible for participants' retention
- It is also not recommended to have sessions more than a month apart as it is important to continue the curriculum process sequentially whereby topics build on each other and to avoid participants forgetting some of the content reviewed
- Each session is designed to be a maximum of 3-4 hours and should not be shortened. The length is in order to allow Part 1 to set the foundation for the given topic, Part 2 that goes deeper into the topic, and the take home exercise to apply the session learning

2

Ensure Quality, Supported Facilitators

- As is the case for any participatory curriculum, quality, well trained and supported facilitators are fundamental to the quality and effectiveness of the programme
- Facilitators were hired through a competitive recruitment process, and the majority had some experience with gender transformative facilitation
- It is extremely useful to involve facilitators in the adaptation process where possible; many facilitators were actively involved in designing the Couples Curriculum content

TRAINING OF FACILITATORS

- Indashyikirwa facilitators were intensively trained over 10 full days by a master trainer, which was important to allow time and space for facilitators to personally reflect on the content, including gender and power dynamics in their own lives, and to foster commitment to social justice and gender equality principles
- Facilitators were given the opportunity to practice facilitating and discuss challenges; the training and pre-test of the Couples Curriculum allowed facilitators to practice facilitating the sessions and receive constructive feedback
- It is recommended that curriculum facilitators are trained in basic skills to respond to disclosure of violence and to offer referrals to participants if needed

ONGOING SUPPORT OF FACILITATORS

- It was important that Indashyikirwa supervisors observed facilitators and offered ongoing support, guidance and constructive feedback throughout implementation and met on a regular basis to discuss challenges and experiences with facilitation
- It is critical to consider the emotional impact of the programme on facilitators and provide opportunities for facilitators to debrief and be supported if they experience any vicarious trauma
- Indashyikirwa facilitators were also brought together on an annual basis for self-care retreats and to share common implementation challenges and successes



3

Support and Monitor for Safety of Couples

- With Indashyikirwa, it was important that couples were recruited firstly through VLSA partners, the majority of whom were women, to ensure their safety and willingness to participate
- Couples were not recruited based on known experiences of IPV (as is typical for couples counselling) which can be stigmatizing or risky; rather all couples were informed that they could benefit from the programme to support healthy relationships
- It was important to have a male and female facilitator to model gender equality in the curriculum sessions, and in case individuals got upset during the sessions and would prefer to speak privately to a facilitator of the same sex
- Prior to implementation, IPV response services in implementation areas should be mapped, including location, hours, cost, and key contacts
- Ensure there are clear referral pathways for additional support for IPV survivors and that facilitators are aware of available services

4

Pilot the Adapted Curriculum

- Indashyikirwa drew on existing models including SASA! and Journeys of Transformation
- Organizations are strongly encouraged to pre-test this curriculum after adapting to a new context or population, and make adjustments as per the testing results
- A pre-test of the Couples Curriculum was conducted daily over one month with couples similar to the target population of the programme, which allowed for input from couples and facilitators to the curriculum content and approach
- Throughout implementation, organizations should be flexible to ongoing, adaptive programming and make adjustments as needed