

SCALING UP A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING PROGRAMME: A CASE STUDY FROM INVESTING IN CHILDREN AND THEIR SOCIETIES (ICS-SP), KENYA

OVERVIEW

This case study examines how Investing in Children and their Societies (ICS-SP) integrated a gender-transformative approach to its parenting programme and scaled it nationally in Kenya. An [accompanying video](#) features the ICS-SP team discussing key steps, learnings, and reflections on the process.

In 2019, ICS-SP partnered with Prevention Collaborative to integrate a gender-transformative approach into its **‘Skilful Parenting’** programme. The resulting integrated curriculum and programmatic approach are now implemented in ICS-SP programmes in Kenya, Tanzania, and Cote d’Ivoire. Concurrently, the Kenya National Prevention and Response Plan recognised positive parenting programmes as an evidence-based intervention to reduce violence against children (VAC). ICS-SP collaborated with UNICEF and the Government of Kenya to design the Kenya National Positive Parenting Programme (NPPP) and is now supporting its nationwide rollout. Notably, at the 1st Global Ministerial Conference to End VAC in November 2024, the Government of Kenya (GoK) pledged Ksh 2.6 billion to reach 2 million families by 2027.¹



This case study:

- ▶ **Examines the rationale and evidence for gender-transformative parenting approaches, particularly in Kenya.**
- ▶ **Outlines key steps and practical examples for adapting and scaling a gender-transformative parenting approach.**
- ▶ **Provides reflections for practitioners, donors, and strategic partners involved in developing and/or scaling gender-transformative programming.**

EVIDENCE AND CONTEXT

WHY A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING APPROACH?

Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Children (VAC) are significant human rights issues affecting billions of women and children globally.² These forms of violence frequently co-occur in the same household, have intergenerational consequences, and share common risk factors.³ Multiple forms of violence in the families reinforce each other. Children who witness these forms of violence are more likely to experience or perpetrate violence as adults.

In Kenya,

- ▶ The 2022 Demographic Health Survey found that 34 percent of women had experienced physical violence from an intimate partner since age 15.⁴
- ▶ The 2019 National Violence Against Children Survey reported that nearly 50 percent of children (45.9 percent of girls and 56.1 percent of boys) had experienced childhood violence.⁵

Initiatives to prevent VAW and VAC have traditionally followed two separate trajectories, with distinct research agendas and programmatic approaches associated with each.⁶ However, there is increased global interest in interventions that address the intersections of VAW and VAC. Parenting programmes, in particular, have demonstrated the potential to reduce both VAW and VAC within households, with current evidence supporting the effectiveness of these approaches.⁷

Evidence also demonstrates that the most effective violence prevention strategies are carefully designed with deep knowledge of the local context.⁸ Investing in Children and their Societies (ICS-SP), an African NGO has collaborated with children, families, and communities for over 30 years, developing Africa-centred approaches to VAC prevention, including the 'Skilful Parenting' programme.

Evaluations of 'Skilful Parenting'⁹ have demonstrated positive impacts, such as:

- ▶ Reduced child maltreatment.
- ▶ Improved family relationships.
- ▶ Enhanced (early) child development.
- ▶ Increased service uptake.
- ▶ Better parent-child communication.
- ▶ Better sharing of roles within families.¹⁰

However, the findings also highlighted some gaps:

- ▶ The programme was less effective for at-risk families already experiencing violence.
- ▶ Staff and frontline facilitators observed that VAW-related questions were frequently asked within ‘Skilful Parenting’ sessions.
- ▶ Unequal relationships impacted application of key skills learnt in the sessions at home. For example, women reported feeling unable to discuss the session topics with their partner at home.

Recognising these challenges, ICS-SP saw the need for a more intentional approach to addressing the VAW/VAC intersection and started considering how to integrate a gender-transformative approach into its programming.

WHY A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING PROGRAMMES?

- ▶ VAW and VAC frequently co-occur in the same households, have intergenerational effects, and share common risk factors, including marital conflict, economic stress, alcohol and substance abuse, and unequal gender norms.
- ▶ Children who witness violence at home are at higher risk of experiencing and/or perpetrating violence in adulthood, and children in households with intimate partner violence (IPV) are at higher risk of experiencing harsh discipline and punishment.
- ▶ Gender-transformative parenting programmes have shown promising evidence of reducing both VAW and VAC and improving children and their parents/caregivers’ health and wellbeing.

WHAT IS A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING PROGRAMMES?

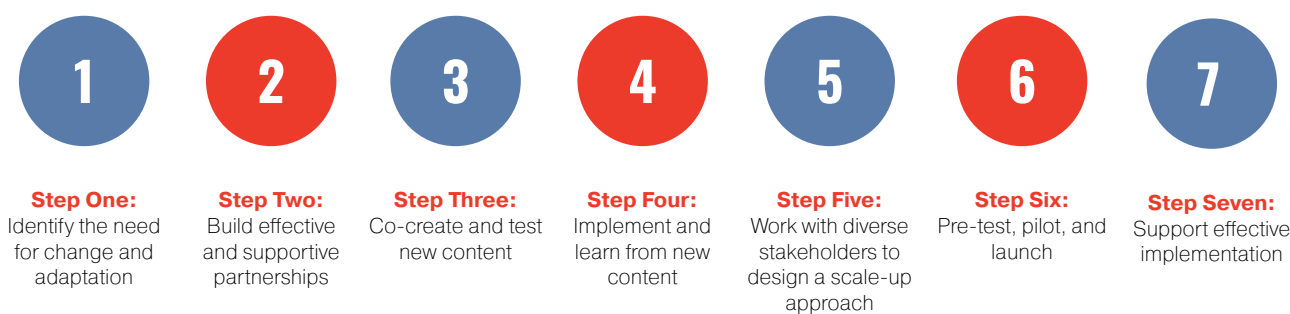
- ▶ Encourages reflection and change regarding gender inequality and power dynamics within families.
- ▶ Builds critical skills for building positive, nurturing relationships between parents/caregivers and their children, as well as between partners.
- ▶ Supports positive communication between parents/caregivers and their children and between partners.
- ▶ Engages both women and men as participants and facilitators.

Further information can be found in: [Parenting programmes to reduce violence against children and women: What gender-transformative programmes look like](#)

KEY STEPS

ICS-SP collaborated with Prevention Collaborative, frontline facilitators, and communities to integrate a gender-transformative approach into the original ‘Skilful Parenting’ programme. They then partnered with a wide range of stakeholders to support the Kenyan Government in developing and rolling out the National Positive Parenting Programme. This process required time, patience, diverse partnerships, managing relationships, and a clear vision for change.

Key steps taken to integrate and scale up a gender-transformative approach to parenting:



STEP ONE: IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR CHANGE AND ADAPTATION

2016 - 2018

IN OUR VOICES

"They did not have a structured way of dealing with it [VAW], and the information that parents were receiving would incline towards their own beliefs and individual perceptions [of VAW]."

Moureen Ochieng
Programmes Coordinator,
ICS-SP

IN OUR VOICES

"We knew we had a good programme, with great potential, but also that we could increase the impact. Evidence on the intersections of VAC and VAW was just starting to come into the fore, but it was not really documented in our context."

Beatrice Ogutu
Director, ICS-SP

- ▶ Evaluations of the ‘Skilful Parenting’ approach demonstrated a number of positive impacts on children and their families. They also highlighted that for at-risk families, where violence in the family was already occurring, the programme was less effective.
- ▶ Frontline facilitators reported that cases of IPV and gender dynamics within the household would come up regularly during ‘Skilful Parenting’ sessions and that they didn’t always know the best way to handle this.
- ▶ Due to feedback from frontline workers, staff experiences from direct programme implementation, and insights from the evaluation report, staff increasingly felt that it was important to look in a more systematic way at the intersection between VAW and VAC and to explicitly address gender norms in the curriculum. These insights were discussed during

programme meetings and shared with management. This led to an organisational decision to make this strategic shift to intentionally address gender norms and VAW/VAC intersections within initiatives.

STEP TWO: BUILD EFFECTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIP

October 2019 - February 2021

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- ▶ Prevention Collaborative and ICS-SP saw the potential for collaborating to address the root causes of both VAC and VAW. They agreed to partner on integrating a gender-transformative approach, and a series of online and in-person meetings, workshops, and content writing took place over 18 months.
 - ▶ Both organisations brought their individual expertise into the partnership. They also had a common donor who saw the potential of the organisations collaborating.
 - ▶ The first workshop was an important trust-building exercise. The ICS-SP and Prevention Collaborative teams learned about each other's work and their visions for the future.
 - ▶ The teams started with conversations about the co-occurrence of VAW and VAC and went into an analysis of the shared risk factors and root causes. They undertook a mapping of the harmful gender norms driving violence in their communities.
 - ▶ They also explored concepts about gender, power, socialisation, and violence – including their own values and beliefs - and how these related to family relationships. Experiential exercises were used to unpack beliefs and norms in a way that supported personal reflection and change.
 - ▶ The teams looked at examples of methodologies and evidence from other contexts, learning about what had been done successfully elsewhere and reflecting on what might be possible in Kenya and within the 'Skilful Parenting' approach.
- Start by **building trust**.
 - Be clear about everyone's **roles** and what each partner brings to the partnership, and intentional about balancing power within the partnership.
 - Use **experiential exercises** and open discussion to explore personal beliefs and values related to gender, power, socialisation and violence.
 - Clarify **values alignment and similarities**, and have honest conversations about differences and potential challenges.
 - Have a clear, **co-created vision** – even when the approach for getting there might be different, you can always come back to this vision for change.
 - Spend time understanding the **global evidence**, and then how it might apply (and/or need adapting) in your specific context.
 - Ensure sufficient **time and funding** – effective accompaniment requires the right investment of resources.

STEP THREE: CO-CREATE AND TEST NEW CONTENT

March 2020 - January 2022

- ▶ The teams considered two approaches to adapting the curriculum: integrating new ideas into existing modules or creating new modules. They decided to take a combined approach. They reviewed each module of the original curriculum to identify integration opportunities and added a new module on VAW prevention titled 'Balancing Power in Relationships'.
- ▶ The team tested potential new activities together and tested them with communities and frontline workers.
- ▶ At this stage, the team faced lot of decisions about what to keep and what to let go of to make room for the new content.

IN OUR VOICES

"There was a lot of deliberation! We had just evaluated the curriculum and we had confirmed it was working – so what does it mean to now start changing it? We were not yet completely convinced about these new topics, but we knew that what we had worked! We didn't realise how painful and how difficult it was going to be! We had to make those decisions slowly"

Moureen Ochieng
Programmes Coordinator,
ICS-SP

ADAPTING AND INTEGRATING GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CONTENT: 'THE HUMAN BOX' EXAMPLE

One of the activities adapted and integrated into the curriculum was the 'Man, Woman, Human Box' activity, commonly used across gender-transformative curricula.

The activity asks participants to categorise what activities, qualities, and characteristics they perceive belong to the 'woman box' or to the 'man box'. Participants then reflect on why certain characteristics are assigned to these boxes and consider whether more of these characteristics could belong in the 'human box'.

Initially tested during the team's workshop, the activity was later tested with communities and frontline workers. The feedback was good, and the team started adapting it to fit the curriculum. One key change they made was to use a physical box for participants to climb inside!

"We thought at first we would just draw the box, but we ended up using a physical box – so that they could sit in it, feel the discomfort of being in the box. It was important the methodology for delivery was well thought through"
– Moureen Ochieng, Programmes Coordinator, ICS-SP.

The activity was then integrated into one of the existing curriculum modules, 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Skilful Parent' – this helped to expand the focus of the module from being about parent/caregiver roles and responding to children's basic needs to how gender can impact roles in the family.

STEP FOUR: IMPLEMENT AND LEARN FROM THE NEW CONTENT

August 2021 - Present

- ▶ Once the integrated curriculum was written, ICS-SP began its implementation with existing funding, but further support was needed for the delivery team to use it effectively.
- ▶ ICS-SP follows a standard practice for all new facilitators, including initial training followed by a one-month practice period. After this period, facilitators take a certification exam. Those who qualify graduate and start delivering the curriculum.
- ▶ The rollout of the new integrated curriculum required intentionality, patience, regular monitoring, refresher training, and ongoing monthly support meetings. During these meetings, facilitators discussed the issues they faced and reflected on their own attitudes and beliefs around gender and social norms.

IN OUR VOICES

"A lot of times facilitators aren't quite there with the gender transformative approach – but they need to be willing to be those role models, they are the face of the programme! It takes regular check ins and an intentionality. Every time we do a refresher training - we ask what they found difficult to deliver, and what they found interesting? We look at some of the questions from the parents they were not able to answer"

Moureen Ochieng
Programmes Coordinator,
ICS-SP

STEP FIVE: WORK WITH DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS TO DESIGN A SCALE-UP APPROACH

October 2020-2021

- ▶ The Kenya National Prevention and Response Plan, developed following the national VAC survey, identified support for families and caregivers as an important preventative strategy for VAC.¹¹ During the development of the integrated curriculum, discussions started on developing a national parenting programme. The first national stakeholders meeting occurred in October 2021, and the multisectoral technical working group for the National Positive Parenting Programme (NPPP) was established in January 2021. The group included representatives from government, faith-based actors, academia, and NGOs, including ICS-SP.
- ▶ The group began identifying evidence-based curricula from Kenya and the wider region that could inform the new national programme. Whilst several approaches were being used across Kenya, many had not been fully documented or evaluated.



- ▶ The ‘Skilful Parenting’ curriculum, already being implemented in Kenya, was highlighted as an evidence-based approach. In a government report on child protection, this programme was identified as one of the effective strategies providing parent and caregiver support.¹² The gender-transformative, integrated ‘Skilful Parenting’ curriculum became foundational material for the NPPP.
- ▶ Parenting requires a highly contextualised approach. There were concerns about importing content that might not be relevant to the needs and cultures of Kenyan parents and caregivers. There was a need to build consensus on what topics would make up the curriculum and a common language and shared understanding of key definitions and core concepts. For example, there were differing definitions of acceptable types of child discipline and different levels of understanding about the intersections of VAC and VAW.
- ▶ At the same time, some of the same gender norms and power dynamics unpacked within the curriculum were being worked out within the group. For example, there was pushback against including issues related specifically to violence against women, gender roles, and communicating with children about sexuality.

IN OUR VOICES

“Over the longest time, there has been a lot of back and forth about how we talk to our children about sexuality – many groups have been saying ‘no’ to comprehensive sexuality education. We had to fight to include this, to give parents the skills to talk to children about these things. It’s not a curriculum to teach children, it’s a way of communicating with your child”

Beatrice Ogutu
Director, ICS-SP

STEP SIX: PRE-TEST, PILOT AND LAUNCH

February 2022 - May 2023

- ▶ The draft NPPP curriculum was pre-tested in five counties to assess the materials, asking questions such as ‘Is the content contextualised enough?’ and ‘Is the language really understood?’
- ▶ Pre-testing revealed the need to revise certain language to ensure key messages could be communicated effectively. For example, the session called ‘Balancing Power in Relationships’ became ‘Creating Peaceful Homes Together.’
- ▶ The piloting of the NPPP curriculum in real-life settings started in May 2022 in Kilifi and Garissa counties.

- ▶ Overall, feedback from parents and caregivers was very positive, including for sessions that initially faced pushback during the development process. For example, parents expressed they needed the topic of communicating about sexuality with their children. This feedback helped build a case for retaining some gender-specific content, and the pilot became an important opportunity to build trust in that content.
- ▶ As an official government programme, the validation of each programme document was required, a process that took time and involved some challenging conversations and processes.
- ▶ The national programme was officially launched in May 2023, on the International Day of the Family.

IN OUR VOICES

"Sometimes we had to change the language – from balancing power in relationships to creating peaceful homes. We had to find language that people were comfortable with"

Dennis Kitsao
Project Coordinator,
ICS-SP

STEP SEVEN: SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

May 2023 - Present

- ▶ Following the official launch of the programme, ICS-SP continued to work alongside the government to support effective implementation and rollout.
- ▶ There was significant interest from various government departments to be involved, and so a coordination mechanism was needed for effective implementation. This also included considering the workforce and the key delivery platforms – where and how sessions would happen and who would deliver them.
- ▶ Facilitators needed training to deliver quality content. Over 80 'master trainers' have been trained by the ICS-SP team. These trainers have come from the government, NGOs, and faith-based institutions.
- ▶ Ongoing support is required to ensure quality implementation and address emerging issues. Currently, ICS-SP has been providing bilateral support, and there are potential future plans for a community of practice that will continue to support quality implementation and provide a space for reflections on practice.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TRAINING OF TRAINERS (ToT)

- ▶ **Foundational Preparation:** Participants completed Prevention Collaborative’s online preparation courses on [Prevention Essentials](#) and [Working at the Intersections of Violence against Women and Children](#). These courses provided a grounding in foundational topics and were a prerequisite for joining the ToT.
- ▶ **Experiencing the Curriculum:** Trainers first engaged with the curriculum as participants, going through each module to understand the content.
- ▶ **Facilitation Skills Development:** Trainers attended sessions designed to build their facilitation skills, focusing on:
 - ▶ Summarising key content
 - ▶ Using an interactive and transformative approach to training
 - ▶ Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- ▶ **Practice and Peer Feedback:** Trainers practised delivering the content and provided constructive feedback to each other.
- ▶ **Guided Reflection:** Each participant used a guided reflection journal to document their own learnings.

COMPARISON OF THE THREE PARENTING PROGRAMMES ITERATIONS

The original ‘Skilful Parenting’ programme was adapted to integrate a **gender-transformative approach**, which was then used as foundational material for the **National Positive Parenting Programme (NPPP)**. Currently, ICS-SP delivers both the integrated curriculum and the NPPP curriculum, depending on the context and the needs of the groups they are working with. The NPPP is also being delivered by government agencies, NGOs, and faith-based organisations across Kenya, with **technical support from ICS-SP**.

THE ORIGINAL SKILFUL PARENTING CURRICULUM	Part 1: Skilful Parenting	Part 2: The Child Protection Toolkit	Part 3: Family Budgeting Toolkit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Becoming a parenting facilitator• Family relations• Roles of and responsibilities of skilful parents• Self-esteem and self-care• Values and discipline• Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding child abuse and neglect• Preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial First Aid• Reducing debt burden• From emergency to long-term saving• Money within the family

*Delivered in weekly 2.5 hour sessions, alongside other programme components including linking families to services and economic strengthening.

<div>THE INTEGRATED CURRICULUM</div>	Module 1: Introduction session Module 2: Family relationships Module 3: Roles and responsibilities of a skilful parent Module 4: The importance of stimulation and strong and secure attachment	Module 5: Mental health, self-esteem and self-care Module 6: Values and positive discipline Module 7: Communication Module 8: Balancing power in relationships Module 9: Understanding violence against children, abuse and neglect	Module 10: Preventing and responding to violence, abuse and neglect Module 11: Graduation ceremony.
	Other materials: two optional add-on modules on family budgeting and nutrition.		

*Delivered in weekly 2.5-hour sessions, alongside other programme components including linking families to services and economic strengthening.

<div>THE NATIONAL POSITIVE PARENTING CURRICULUM</div>	Module 1: Introduction session Module 2: Family relationships Module 3: The role of a parent or caregiver in child development Module 4: Strong and secure attachments Module 5: Caring for yourself and caring for others	Module 6: Positive communication Module 7: Positive play and preparing to learn Module 8: Values and positive discipline Module 9: Positive male involvement in parenting Module 10: Creating peaceful homes together	Module 11: Keeping children and families safe Module 12: Positive and protective communities Module 13: Positive family helath and nutrition Module 14: Family financial planning Module 15: Graduation
	Other materials: The NPPP picture cards, containing illustrations and key messages, used by Community Health Promoters (CHPs) and frontline facilitators. There is also an implementation guide, guidelines, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for referrals		

*Delivered in weekly 2.5-hour sessions. The programme is layered with other government Social Protection programmes such as Nutrition Improvement through Cash and Health Education (NICHE) and Cash Transfer for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC).

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Adapting to a Gender-Transformative Approach

► **Find a Common Vision and a Common Ground between VAC and VAW Approaches:** identify the common risk factors that lead to VAC and VAW, the common impacts that you are aiming for, and the vision you have for violence-free families and communities. This vision can serve as an anchor when disagreements arise over how to get there.

► **Ensure Sufficient Commitment and Resources:** Integrating a gender-transformative approach is often not straightforward. It requires time, patience and flexibility from everyone involved. For example, staff teams will need enough time in their schedules to participate fully, and partners should be prepared to accommodate changes to the schedule and process.

► **Support and Invest in Skilled and Diverse Facilitators:** Frontline facilitators deliver the programme to parents and caregivers, and the quality of their facilitation has a significant impact on the programme's success. Investing in training and ongoing support for the facilitators is essential. It is also important to maintain a gender balance between male and female facilitators and to ensure that the facilitators represent the diversity of the communities they will be working with.

► **Don't Underestimate the Importance of Getting the Language Right:** Some terms might not be easily understood or could create misunderstanding. Choose simple and effective language to get the overall message across, even if it means moving away from NGO-specific terms. For example, while this is a 'gender-transformative' programme, this is not a term that frontline facilitators use with communities.

► **Make Referrals with Other Services and Leverage Existing Programmes:** One major success of the pilot programme was increasing access to services and support for parents and caregivers. Map the services and support available in the local area, and ensure facilitators are trained on how to effectively refer parents and caregivers to these services and support.

► **It Takes Sustained and Flexible Funding:** The process of designing and testing new content and then integrating it into the existing programme was complex. Flexible support and understanding from funders to see the project through and

accommodate unexpected changes are essential.

"Patience was so important. It was a new field, new concepts, we needed to start conversing between two different fields, we need both fields to learn a bit more about each other."

Dr. Lina Digolo
VAW/C Lead, Prevention Collaborative



"We need to find ways to continue doing this work [on approaches that can transform unequal gender and power relations] in unapologetic ways, but also finding common ground – we all want family wellbeing and good health. No one wants to suffer and experience harm. We can use these concepts and visions and then link gender equality to the broader goals of living in safe, just and non-violent communities."

Clara Alemann
Prevention Collaborative Mentor

Planning for Scale

► **Establish a Context-Specific Evidence Base:** Document the programme's approach and different types of evidence that it works in specific contexts. This evidence will help to build a compelling case for scaling the programme.

► **Support Stakeholders' Understanding:** When you bring different stakeholders together, there will be various levels of understanding of key concepts. There may be questions

about the validity of evidence and how and whether that evidence applies in a particular context. Building a shared understanding and being prepared to keep answering questions are important parts of the process.

- ▶ **Prepare for Power Dynamics and Dealing with Backlash:** Any process that challenges established norms and seeks to equalise power will experience some backlash. Be prepared for this. Think about how to support teams through it by building networks of supportive and like-minded allies, taking breaks when needed, and staying focused on the end goal.
- ▶ **Consider the Available Workforce and Invest in Ongoing Training and Support:** In order to scale, you need access to a large workforce to facilitate and support the programme. Think about which platforms can provide this, what their limitations might be, and what training

"It's a costly project – especially when you are doing the trainings, but after you have trained everyone it's not as costly. So, if you do it over only one year it becomes more costly – you spend a lot equipping the workforce, and that might take 4 months. But if you do it for three years then it starts to make financial sense"

Dennis Kitsao
Project Coordinator, ICS-SP

and support the workforce would need to deliver the programme effectively. Ensure that the process is carefully monitored so any emerging issues can be addressed.

- ▶ **Look for Opportunities to Integrate and Collaborate with Other Sectors:** For example, the health sector has integrated the NPPP, and Community Health Workers are now using the flipbook (which contains illustrations and key messages from the programme) in their day-to-day work.
- ▶ **Funding for Scaling Needs to be Flexible and Long-Term:** This is long-term and political work. It carries risks to implement a scaling-up process and subsequently withdraw support: it may lead to poor quality of implementation and potentially put communities at risk. Donors and strategic partners wishing to support scaling-up must be ready to invest in a long-term approach.

"The scale-up road is messy and complex – you must be ready for the backlash - all the technical guides to scale up do not tell you this! When you break it down, that it's about balancing power in relationships, what does that mean, how does patriarchy push back?"

Beatrice Ogutu
Director, ICS-SP



A FINAL CALL TO ACTION

The evidence on what works to tackle the intersections of violence against women and violence against children continues to grow. VAW and VAC are preventable, but to do this at scale, we must commit, collaborate and invest across diverse sectors and stakeholders.

“Donors need to be advocating for these ideas in the larger spaces and communities that they are already funding and acting as the brokers – they hold power! – so use that power to make the links and advocate for integrating gender transformative approaches across multiple sectors.”

Clara Alemann
Prevention Collaborative Mentor

“One takeaway message I want to share is that tackling the root causes of violence against women and violence against children is a smart investment - and gender- transformative parenting is one pathway to do this in a context where resources are limited. We need to be advocating for these approaches across research, funding, programming and policy - working together to scale up the approaches that we know are having an impact.

Beatrice Ogutu
Director, ICS-SP

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