

STRENGTHENING PARENTING PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENT VIOLENCE

Insights from the Sugira Muryango
Accompaniment Programme

OVERVIEW

This brief examines how FXB Rwanda integrated a gender-transformative approach into its home-visiting early childhood development (ECD) programme, **Sugira Muryango**, with accompanying support from the Prevention Collaborative.

Parent and caregiver support programmes (hereafter referred to as 'parenting programmes') have enormous potential to prevent both violence against children (VAC) and violence against women (VAW), especially when they directly address harmful gender norms, power relations, and violence. Many parenting programmes already have strong delivery platforms; however, parenting practitioners may need support to adapt and strengthen these gender and power dimensions. From October 2024 to April 2026, FXB Rwanda engaged in the Prevention Collaborative's Accompaniment Programme to strengthen Sugira Muryango's gender-transformative approach and better address the intersections of VAC and VAW. Over this 18-month period, the accompaniment focused on integrating a gender-transformative lens across the Sugira Muryango curriculum, training manuals, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools, as well as strengthening staff capacity to deliver the adapted programme.



LEARN MORE

This [video](#) features Sugira Muryango team members from FXB Rwanda and Boston College reflecting on their experiences engaging in the Prevention Collaborative's Accompaniment Programme.

Through this Accompaniment Programme, partners achieved the following:

- ▶ Strengthened the capacity of 37 FXB Rwanda staff and government partners to integrate gender-transformative approaches into parenting programmes.
- ▶ Adapted the Sugira Muryango curriculum and Promoting Lasting Anthropometric Change and Young Children's Development (PLAY) Collaborative training materials to embed gender-transformative content.
- ▶ Revised M&E tools to capture gender-transformative outputs and outcomes.
- ▶ Conducted joint field visits to support staff during training, observe community-led programme implementation, and provide recommendations on how to strengthen the implementation of a gender-transformative lens.

SUGIRA MURYANGO PROGRAM

The Sugira Muryango (*Family Strengthening*) Program is an evidence-based, home-visiting intervention designed to support ECD, promote responsive caregiving, and prevent violence in the home among vulnerable families with children aged 0–36 months in Rwanda.

Sugira Muryango is implemented by FXB Rwanda, the Boston College School of Social Work's Research Program on Children and Adversity (RPCA), and the University of Rwanda Center for Mental Health, in close partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and the National Child Development Agency (NCDA). It is delivered by a well-trained child protection workforce known as Inshuti z'Umuryango (IZUs), a cadre of community-based volunteers who focus on strengthening family and child protection.

Core components include:

- ▶ Coaching on 'serve and return' interaction and playful parenting;
- ▶ Engaging fathers in caregiving;
- ▶ Creating safe, stimulating, and nurturing environments with an emphasis on nutrition, health, and hygiene;
- ▶ Developing a family narrative to foster hope and resilience;
- ▶ Strengthening problem-solving and the use of community resources; and
- ▶ Building skills in emotional regulation, conflict management, and non-violent discipline.

Sugira Muryango has successfully addressed VAC, but a 2022-2023 expansion and longitudinal study found it had limited effects on intimate partner violence (IPV).¹ In response, FXB Rwanda recognised a need to strengthen the intervention's gender-transformative and father engagement components. As Sugira Muryango scales up with the Rwandan government, partnering with the Prevention Collaborative provided an opportunity to critically assess and adapt the intervention to strengthen its impact at scale.

For more information, visit: [Sugira Muryango Family Strengthening Intervention for Early Childhood Development and Violence Reduction](#).²

WHY A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING?

- ▶ VAC and VAW 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 IPV are at higher risk of experiencing harsh discipline and punishment.
- ▶ Gender-transformative parenting programmes have shown promising evidence of reducing both VAC and VAW and improving children and their parents/caregivers' health and wellbeing.

WHAT IS A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING?

- ▶ 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](#).³

ABOUT THE ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMME

Partnerships are core to the Prevention Collaborative's work. The Accompaniment Programme is an 18-month learning journey with Learning Partners that aims to strengthen prevention programming capacity and explore global and local evidence contributing to programmes that work. Guided by one or more Prevention Mentors matched based on expertise and background, the main components of the Accompaniment Programme include:

- ▶ **Deep learning, dialogue, collaboration, and reflection**, both in person and virtually.
- ▶ **Tailored workshops, mentoring, and other activities** co-designed by the Learning Partner and Prevention Mentor.
- ▶ **Engagement** with the Prevention Collaborative's community of global experts on violence against women and their children.

- ▶ **Participation in webinars and online courses** in our [Learning Lab](#).
- ▶ **Guided access** to the most relevant resources in our [Knowledge Hub](#).

KEY STEPS IN THE ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMME

STEP 1: TEAM LEARNING ON THE INTERSECTIONS OF VAC, VAW, AND GENDER

The first step in the programme was to strengthen the foundational knowledge of FXB Rwanda and partners on gender-transformative parenting programming and the intersections of VAC and VAW. Between December 2024 and January 2025, 27 individuals from FXB Rwanda, Boston College, MIGEPROF, and NCDA completed three Prevention Collaborative Learning Lab courses. These self-paced online courses focused on preventing VAC, exploring the intersections between VAC and VAW, and supporting parents and caregivers as a violence prevention strategy. The self-paced courses were supplemented by four monthly facilitated virtual sessions designed to kick off the partnership, reinforce learning, and provide a space to reflect on gender experiences and the challenges of applying a gender-transformative approach in practice.

In a virtual session, FXB Rwanda staff and government partners shared their most impactful learning from the Learning Lab courses.

Key insights included:

- ▶ Recognising that Sugira Muryango's focus on addressing violence used a response lens, and that more prevention programming was needed.
- ▶ Using the socio-ecological model to better understand how violence can be addressed at multiple levels of society.
- ▶ Understanding the differences and connections between VAC and VAW, and that childhood experiences of violence have lifelong consequences for families.

Gender-transformative programming can be deeply personal as it requires individuals to reflect on and challenge deeply held gender norms and beliefs that perpetuate inequalities. It was important that programme staff closely align with positive principles of gender equality, so they could lead by example. To support this, a dedicated virtual session, titled 'Starting with Ourselves', was held. Here, participants reflected on and debated value statements such as, 'It is okay for boys and men to show emotions like grief and sadness in public.'

STEP 2: REVIEW OF PLAY COLLABORATIVE TRAINING MANUALS AND JOINT COLLABORATION ON CURRICULUM ADAPTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Accompaniment Programme also aimed to strengthen the Sugira Muryango curriculum to better address harmful gender norms, strengthen caregiver relationships, and introduce

new content to increase fathers' engagement in caregiving. This was a collaborative, iterative process led by FXB Rwanda and Boston College, with ongoing accompaniment from the Prevention Collaborative. Rather than a one-time revision, the process involved regular check-ins, joint reflection, and the progressive refinement of both curriculum content and implementation approaches.

The Prevention Collaborative reviewed all Sugira Muryango PLAY Collaborative materials, including the curriculum; training manuals for IZUs, supervisors, and local leaders; and a new Father Champions Group guide. The Prevention Collaborative provided detailed, module-by-module suggestions on how to embed a gender and violence prevention lens across topics—play, nutrition, communication, health—by strengthening the focus on caregiver relationships and shared caregiving, while making connections between VAC and VAW.

Key recommendations included:

- ▶ Encouraging programme facilitators to move beyond 'gender neutrality' and providing practical guidance on how they can sensitively challenge power inequalities between caregivers—a driver of IPV (for example, by highlighting the benefits for children and caregivers when power is shared more equitably).
- ▶ Refining the Father Champions Group guide by building empathy among group members, recognising the societal pressures on fathers, and promoting positive alternatives to managing anger and other emotions. This included adapting messaging to start from the perspective of the child and using personal reflection questions, such as recalling participants' own childhood experiences.

FXB Rwanda and Boston College led the revision process, informed by the programme's research findings, the Prevention Collaborative's recommendations, new insights from participating in the Prevention Collaborative courses and virtual sessions, and government guidelines on ECD and gender equality.

During this process, the partners did not always agree on how much gender-transformative content could be integrated. Navigating these discussions was a key learning experience in itself. For example, while the Prevention Collaborative recommended including more discussion and experiential learning activities on gender and power throughout the Sugira Muryango home-visiting modules, FXB Rwanda and Boston College had to balance this with practical constraints. They had to ensure the framing was relevant for diverse family structures (not only couples), that key messaging was made through an ECD lens, and that changes were appropriate for the existing curriculum structure. They did this by embedding key messages about shared decision-making, gender equality, and other topics within existing stories and activities, rather than adding new content.

There was also disagreement at times between the partners over where to include focused male engagement content. For example, the Prevention Collaborative advocated for this content to be woven directly into the home-visiting modules, while FXB Rwanda ultimately decided to incorporate it in a different component of the programme: the Father Champions Group guide.

Partner negotiation and disagreement are completely normal and healthy parts of the Accompaniment Programme, and these discussions were underpinned by a shared sense of continuous learning, adaptation, and most of all, respect. While the Prevention Collaborative acted as a technical partner—offering guidance and encouragement—it was ultimately up to FXB Rwanda and Boston College, as the stewards of Sugira Muryango, to decide how best to apply recommendations to the overall programme.

STEP 3: IN-PERSON TRAINING OF TRAINERS AND FIELD VISITS

In-Person Training of Trainers

The Prevention Collaborative led an in-person training in Kigali with 37 FXB Rwanda/Sugira Muryango staff and government partners, equipping them to train IZUs to implement the gender-transformative and violence prevention curriculum content and Father Champions Groups. Most of the training of trainers focused on four core components of gender-transformative facilitation.

Pillar 1: Have gender and power consciousness.

Pillar 2: Create safe and inclusive spaces.

Pillar 3: Promote critical reflection and dialogue.

Pillar 4: Model gender equity.

By practising select sessions from the Father Champions Groups, training participants roleplayed how to put these pillars into practice and received feedback from colleagues and the Prevention Collaborative.

One notable area that was not fully resolved during the in-person training of trainers concerned how the Father Champions Group content frames men's roles. The FXB Rwanda team advocated for retaining the language of men as 'head of the family,' while redefining the role of men to emphasise loving partnership, shared caregiving, and non-violence. While this approach had merit as a culturally familiar entry point, it generated discussion among the partners about whether it ultimately reinforced or transformed unequal gender norms. The question of how to frame men's positionality in the family is still an ongoing discussion internally. Parenting practitioners who wish to engage men as caregivers should closely examine the benefits of cultural accessibility against the risk of inadvertently legitimising patriarchal framings.

Ultimately, the training provided an opportunity for participants and trainers to learn from each other's experiences and deepen their understanding of how to practically implement a gender-transformative approach in parenting programmes. Staff feedback on the training was strongly positive:

'I realised the importance of being a role model for gender equality—not by using power or force, but through respectful behaviour that inspires others to change.'

—FXB Rwanda staff member

Self-reflection activities supported staff to rethink their own journeys of behaviour change and their commitment to work on issues like IPV. As another participant noted:

‘I understood that if a woman is violated, it leads to violence on her children. You can’t prevent violence against children when there is violence against women. Knowing this is helpful to my work because I will support the community through IZUs to protect children from violence by not leaving behind a woman.’

—FXB Rwanda staff member

Joint Field Visits

As a follow-up to the in-person training of trainers, the Prevention Collaborative and Sugira Muryango teams organised joint field visits to observe the training of IZUs and provide feedback and support to strengthen the capacities of trainers and facilitators to deliver gender and violence prevention content.

During these visits, the Prevention Collaborative observed that trainers—pressed for time—were not always providing IZUs with enough space to engage in self-reflection and group discussions on how to shift harmful behaviours. However, while acknowledging that one day is not enough, FXB Rwanda viewed this as a success given that previous trainings on gender had been limited to only four hours. As a result of these field observations, FXB Rwanda advised the broader training team to include more self-reflection discussions on gender-related topics, shared additional facilitation tips, and incorporated additional supervision support on gender for IZUs. Reflecting on the training, one participant concluded:

‘The training has been a tremendous opportunity for staff. We will use the knowledge and skills learned in reinforcing the IZUs’ capacity to deliver the curriculum focusing on gender transformation in the households. We will continue working with other stakeholders to build strong families engaging both women and men to prevent violence in home. The training will support in reinforcing the operationalisation of Father Champion Groups.’

—FXB Rwanda staff member

STEP 4: MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PARENTING

The Accompaniment Programme was initially planned for 12 months, but was extended by an additional six months so that the Prevention Collaborative and FXB Rwanda could work together to revise the programme's M&E tools and continue to collect lessons learned and insights from implementing a more gender-transformative parenting approach.

The aim of the Prevention Collaborative's M&E support was to strengthen tools to better capture data on gender-transformative outputs and outcomes. To achieve this, the Prevention Collaborative facilitated virtual learning sessions with Sugira Muryango staff and conducted a detailed technical review of their existing M&E tools.

During the virtual learning session, staff raised key questions and concerns about how to measure gender-transformative change in practice.

These included:

- ▶ How to capture changes within families, especially shifts in relationships, norms, and behaviours.
- ▶ How cultural resistance might influence both implementation and results.
- ▶ How to track whether IZUs are delivering gender-transformative content as intended.
- ▶ Whether and how the programme could demonstrate impact on violence reduction, gender equality, and family wellbeing.

FXB Rwanda staff noted that while their existing M&E systems were already capturing participation (e.g. attendance) and some outcome data (e.g. through pre/post assessments), they were less equipped to measure relational and gendered changes, or to link data across separate programme components such as home visits and Fathers Champions Groups.

The Prevention Collaborative emphasised that monitoring is especially critical early on when implementing adapted programmes, when testing new approaches, and when timely data is needed to adapt and improve. The Prevention Collaborative also reinforced that measuring gender-transformative change requires looking beyond individual knowledge to capture shifts in:

- ▶ Attitudes and beliefs about gender and violence.
- ▶ Couple dynamics and power relations (e.g. communication, decision-making).
- ▶ Caregiving practices and behaviours, including fathers' engagement.
- ▶ Violence-related outcomes and shared risk factors (e.g. stress, alcohol use).

Following the virtual sessions, the Prevention Collaborative reviewed several M&E tools shared by FXB Rwanda. These included the supervisor monitoring tool, research and evaluation tools, Father Champions Group observation forms, and implementation tracking forms. The Prevention Collaborative focused on providing recommendations to strengthen monitoring tools because the outcome measurement tools were already very strong on gender and violence.

Six monitoring recommendations emerged from this process:

1. Prioritise monitoring of implementation quality and fidelity:

In addition to monitoring whether a session has occurred, include questions that document facilitator interactions, engagement of male vs female caregivers, and whether key messages are being communicated effectively.

2. Strengthen measurement of couple dynamics and shared caregiving:

Include items that ask how caregiving and household tasks are shared between partners, how couples communicate and make decisions together, and the extent of men's participation in caregiving. This includes revising survey questions to move beyond 'who does what' to understanding how responsibilities are divided and experienced.

3. Measure facilitator capacity and change over time:

Given the central role of IZUs, the Prevention Collaborative recommended tracking their confidence and skills in delivering gender-transformative content, changes in their own personal attitudes and beliefs about gender and violence, and differences in experiences between male and female facilitators.

4. Capture programme acceptability and resistance:

Recognising concerns raised by FXB Rwanda staff, it was recommended to strengthen tools to better monitor whether caregivers and facilitators accept or resist new gender messaging, which topics may generate pushback or discomfort by participants and why, and how this could affect participation, attendance, and engagement.

5. Link data across programme components:

With the new Fathers Champions Group component, the Prevention Collaborative encouraged FXB Rwanda to explore linking participation and outcomes across the traditional Sugira Muryango home visits and Fathers Champions Groups to better understand the added value of different programme components.

6. Use mixed methods to understand change:

In addition to quantitative indicators, the importance of qualitative data (e.g. reflection sessions, observations) was emphasised to capture the more nuanced, relational aspects of gender-transformative change.

The Sugira Muryango team revised their M&E tools to integrate many of the recommended revisions. The changes enable the programme to track interactions and participation in Father Champions Groups, assess facilitator ability to communicate gender-transformative content effectively, and capture how the gender equality content is received by programme participants. In addition, the FXB Rwanda team gained a new appreciation for the importance of collecting qualitative information to better understand gender dynamics in family relationships and caregiving. They decided to include these perspectives in future designs of qualitative tools.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

FXB Rwanda and the Prevention Collaborative identified key lessons learned from their 18-month accompaniment journey.

- ▶ **Addressing resistance openly and finding points of common ground are important early steps in a partnership:** The process of integrating a gender-transformative approach includes challenging deeply held beliefs and practices, not only changing content. There were early discussions about the importance of moving beyond 'gender neutrality.' Some in FXB Rwanda initially preferred a neutral approach to avoid 'scaring men away' or isolating single mothers. However, through open dialogue and critical reflection among staff, common ground was found to integrate this approach in more sensitive ways.
- ▶ **Addressing deeply rooted gender inequitable norms (e.g. the acceptance of men's use of violence) remains a long-term journey.** Shifting norms requires continuous training and self-reflection rather than one-off sessions. As a result of continuous training and support through the Accompaniment Programme, many participants highlighted the value of experiential learning exercises and ongoing support from the Prevention Collaborative, which helped them personally reflect on gender socialisation and power imbalances in their own lives as well as the communities where they work.
- ▶ **Integrating new content is a balancing act:** Integrating gender-transformative content without making training guides and session modules too lengthy and appropriate for low literacy populations requires careful prioritisation. While there were limitations as to how 'in-depth' the content changes could be, Sugira Muryango now more intentionally includes a focus on the quality of family caregiver dynamics, including couple dynamics, and IPV, alongside child maltreatment. The Father Champions Groups are a welcome addition to further encourage men's gender equitable involvement in caregiving.

Reflecting on this journey, the FXB Rwanda team offers key recommendations for other organisations embarking on a similar process:

- ▶ **Align gender interventions directly with the programme's goals:** Programme designers should analyse how gender dimensions can have implications on each programme goal and tailor gender interventions to the specific goal. Sugira Muryango has learned that integrating a gender-transformative approach across all its components has contributed not only to mindset change and increased understanding of gender equality but also to enhanced male and female participation in caregiving, improved child wellbeing, stronger family relationships and violence prevention.
- ▶ **Consider the whole programme ecosystem and integrate gender-transformative approaches at each level, with all actors starting with themselves:** FXB Rwanda has built the capacity of its staff, local leaders, and ECD

programme implementers (IZUs) on using a gender-transformative approach. This has helped to ensure a common understanding of how gender crosscuts programme components, and has encouraged staff, local leaders, and IZUs to reflect on their own gender beliefs and community norms that may interfere with programme goals and outcomes.

- ▶ **Invest in strengthening the knowledge and skills of staff and frontline workers at the community level:** FXB Rwanda has learned that when programme implementers receive enough training to improve their understanding of and attitudes toward gender equality, they can more easily and effectively deliver gender-transformative messages to families and model gender-equitable attitudes and practices.
- ▶ **Gender transformation is a journey of unpacking gender socialisation and power dynamics for all men and women—not just men:** FXB Rwanda has learned that the gender-transformative journey requires simultaneous mindset changes for both women and men, and they have adapted the Father Champion Group guide to include three sessions targeting couples. They believe that including couples' sessions in Father Champions Groups will bring greater transformation in participants' lives by creating more space for women and men to discuss the gender norms and beliefs that limit them from working together for the benefit of their children and their future.



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For more information on Sugira Muryango contact FXB Rwanda through info@fxbrwanda.org.

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