

HOW DO GROUP-BASED COUPLES' INTERVENTIONS REDUCE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE? INSIGHTS FROM SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMES

INTRODUCTION

Group-based programmes that work with couples to build more equitable and healthy relationships have resulted in significant reductions in intimate partner violence (IPV) against women in low- and middle-income countries.¹ Most IPV prevention curricula that engage participants in facilitated groups address the same core content—violence, gender, healthy relationships, power, and communication—and use similar participatory methods.²¹ These programmes work by fostering change within individuals and between partners, directly addressing the root causes of conflict and violence.

This evidence brief examines nine group-based interventions that work with couples, parents, or households to reduce IPV in eight low- and middle-income countries (Table 1). All included interventions:

1. Work with couples over time to examine beliefs, behaviours, roles, and power dynamics;
2. Have at least one group session that brings couples together to learn and reflect;
3. Demonstrate effectiveness in preventing male-perpetrated IPV against women; and
4. Have qualitative data exploring *how*, *why*, and *to what extent* couples change as a result of participating in these programmes.

Using a narrative analysis of the published qualitative data, this brief synthesises key design elements, mechanisms of change, and intermediate outcomes that support the prevention of IPV against women (Figure 1). Rather than capturing every pathway that contributes to IPV prevention, this brief focuses on those that emerge most commonly across the included interventions and offers programming recommendations based on these findings.

¹ A Prevention Collaborative scoping review found that ninety-one percent of IPV prevention curricula included content adapted from earlier programmes, with a large portion drawing from five resources. This suggests a few source materials have shaped much of curricula-based IPV prevention programming.



Table 1. Summary of programmesⁱⁱ



	Primary Population	Number of Group Sessions	Joint Sessions	Women-Only Sessions	Men-Only Sessions
Bandebereho³ Rwanda	Fathers	17	● Couple	●	●
Change Starts at Home⁴⁻⁶ Nepal	Couples	40	● Couple and Family	●	●
Gender Socialisation Training and Financial Literacy Education⁷ Nigeria	Couples	4-8	● Couple	●	●
Hindula a Kalomo (HIKA)⁸ⁱⁱⁱ Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Couples	22	● Couple	●	●
Indashyikirwa^{6, 9-13} Rwanda	Couples	21	● Couple	●	●
Khali Neghair¹⁴ⁱⁱⁱ Iraq	Couples	17	● Couple	●	●
M3an Akwa¹⁴ⁱⁱⁱ Lebanon	Couples	17	● Couple	●	●
REAL Fathers^{3, 15} Uganda	Fathers	8	● Couple	●	●
Zindagii Shoista¹¹ Tajikistan	Multigenerational Household	21	● Family	●	●

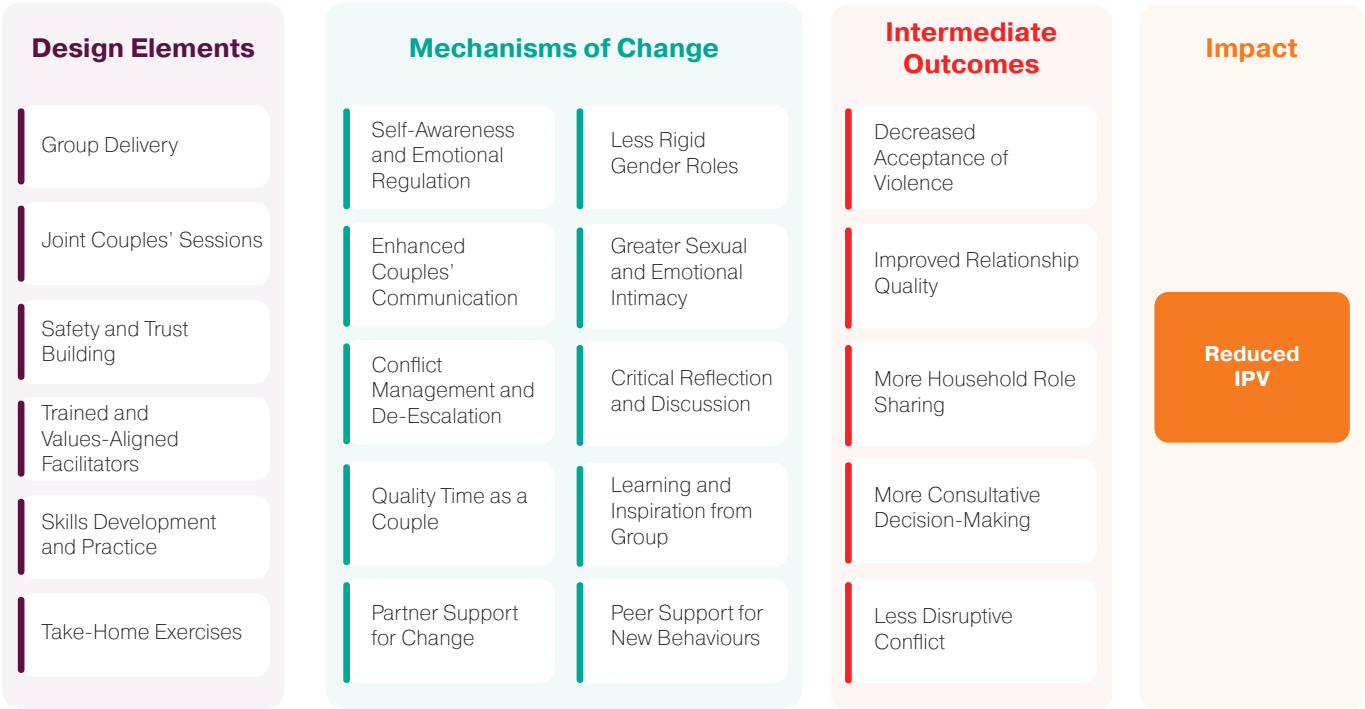
KEY

● Present ● Absent

ii Group-based couples' programmes like Family Dialogue in Mauritania, Healthy Couple and Family Relationship in China, and Unite for a Better Life in Ethiopia did not meet all our inclusion criteria but nonetheless found similar change processes.

iii HIKA, Khali Neghair, and M3an Akwa are adaptations of the Indashyikirwa programme. Adaptations of Indashyikirwa included changes in content, group delivery, and couples' sessions.

Figure 1. Common pathways to IPV reduction across nine group-based couples' interventions



This figure reflects common pathways of change identified across nine interventions. It does not represent all pathways known to reduce IPV — for example, addressing harmful alcohol use or economic insecurity.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Based on the qualitative studies, the interventions shared key programme design elements that contributed to IPV prevention.

Group Delivery

Participating in group sessions with other parents or couples facilitated processes of change. All nine interventions used this approach, with the number of group sessions ranging from 4 to 22, most commonly delivered weekly over periods spanning 6 weeks to 15 months. Participants highly valued this group-based approach, which enabled them to see that their peers faced similar issues, helped them build strong rapport, and encouraged them to share and learn from each other's thoughts, behaviours, and experiences. Through facilitated group sessions, participants critically examined and discussed gender norms, shared challenges, and supported each other to practise and sustain new attitudes and skills.

Joint Couples' Sessions

All nine interventions included at least one facilitated group session that brought partners together. These joint sessions were considered crucial for equipping couples to learn and reflect together, build skills, and commit to practising those skills in their lives. They also provided a rare, positive space for partners to spend time together and communicate openly. For **M3an Akwa in Lebanon** and **Khali Neghair in Iraq**, couples' sessions were a novel

approach, yet they were strongly appreciated by both men and women. Many couples welcomed the opportunity to talk and listen to each other, noting that it brought significant changes to their relationships.



‘We thought we would not have all sessions together for women and men, for example, sensitive sessions on sexuality, or triggers of GBV. However, once we started the sessions and saw their engagement together, we saw that bringing men and women together is an added value.’

— UNDP staff member, M3an Akwa, Lebanon

In **HIKA in DRC**, where all sessions are held jointly, participants felt that joint couples’ participation was key to both partners accepting the teachings.

Safety and Trust Building

Programmes had referral pathways to existing social, health, and legal services for survivors of violence in their settings and raised awareness of these services among participants. In some programmes, facilitators were also equipped with psychosocial support skills and encouraged to look for signs of harm or backlash and intervene where necessary.

To create a safe space for discussing more sensitive topics, several programmes offered gender-disaggregated group sessions, with facilitators emphasising the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the group.

Across gender-disaggregated, couples’, and family sessions, participants described supportive and safe spaces in which men and women could express themselves freely and talk openly with peers, partners, and family members, including about violence in their relationships and communities.



‘What motivated us to talk was the degree of confidence that we had with each other...we were a group, but it was like being one person. Freedom to express ourselves was respected, and it created space for dialogue and listening’

— Man, HIKA, DRC



‘A lot of women who were our participants, for the first time they are able to discuss such issues related to their marital status, their relationships, their sexuality [...] For the first time they have the capacity and courage to discuss this in front of others.’

— UNDP staff, Khali Neghair, Iraq

Trained and Values-Aligned Facilitators

Facilitators across the interventions received training to familiarise themselves with their programme curriculum and to reflect on and transform their own gendered beliefs and attitudes. This was critical to ensuring that they shared the values of their programmes. Training also prepared them to use participatory group methods and discuss sensitive topics. For example, facilitators and their partners participated in a four-day shortened version of **Bandebereho in Rwanda** to promote couples' communication and shared responsibility. Facilitators then received ten days of training on how to facilitate the **Bandebereho** curriculum.

Across programmes, facilitators were better able to guide participants through processes of change when they had undergone **personal transformation** themselves and were equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to deliver their curriculum. In **REAL Fathers in Uganda**, facilitators who did not experience personal transformation during the training were often described as lacking the knowledge and skills to guide participants.

Facilitators' personal qualities—such as humility, respect, and friendliness—fostered trust, while their facilitation skills helped create a safe space for discussion across genders. For example, men typically dominated group discussions at the start of **Indashyikirwa in Rwanda**, but careful facilitation enabled more balanced participation. Pairing male and female facilitators also modelled gender equality and allowed participants to seek support from a facilitator of the same gender when they preferred.

Skills Development and Practice

Programme curricula integrated activities to support couples to learn and practise new individual and interpersonal skills to improve relationship dynamics and mitigate and prevent violence in the home. These activities included information-sharing, participatory exercises, skills demonstration and practice, and take-home exercises. At the individual level, participants learned to recognise and manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours—including triggers for violence—and examine how their actions affect others. At the interpersonal level, they learned and practised more constructive communication and conflict-management skills. A recent global review supports this approach, showing that interventions that addressed relationship and conflict-management skills were significantly more likely to reduce violence against women.¹⁶

Take-Home Exercises

Some programmes included take-home exercises that asked participants to practise a skill between sessions and share their experiences at the beginning of the next session. These activities reinforced learning and encouraged participants to apply new skills and roles at home. Take-home exercises ranged from observing power and violence in their own lives to practising communication skills and making decisions together.

In **Indashyikirwa**, for example, one exercise asked men and women to each perform a household task traditionally done by the opposite gender for one week and observe how it felt. As a result, many men recognised the domestic workload their wives carried.



'He said: "You had really suffered! Now I will help you with housework"...Now when I am cooking and the baby cries he tells me, "Let me cook for you and you breastfeed the baby."'

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



'We didn't even have time to share ideas. But when we were studying the Indashyikirwa programme, they gave us a topic to discuss at home as homework and when we returned to the training, they asked us if we were able to discuss it. The homework involved telling one's feelings to each other; it was very useful for us.'

— Man, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE



These design elements activated several mechanisms of change at the individual, couple, and group levels.

INDIVIDUAL MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Self-awareness and emotional regulation

Participants learned to recognise their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and understand how these affect each other. They reported feeling better equipped to manage their own stress, frustration, and anger using calming strategies such as deep breathing, listening to music, walking, or taking a pause.

Participants also began to recognise how harmful behaviours, such as excessive alcohol consumption, affect their families through household conflict, economic insecurity, and family violence. This awareness helped participants develop greater empathy for their partners and children, acknowledge the consequences of their harmful behaviours, and become more receptive to using new non-violent skills and practices in their relationships.



'I used to have anger issues before the programme, now it's being lessened... As I went on listening to the programme, I knew the consequences and had change in myself. I realized that this kind of thing shouldn't be done.'

— Woman, Change Starts at Home, Nepal



'I understood that insulting your wife is a mistake. Calling her a dog means that I am also a dog. I understood that I was hurting her...When they told us this, my heart returned...I started to listen with a lot of attention because I understood that they were showing us how to live well.'

— Man, HIKA, DRC

COUPLE MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Enhanced couples' communication

Participants reported improved communication skills, including the ability to express their feelings, thoughts, and needs to their partners more constructively and to better listen to and understand their partners. Couples described engaging in open conversations with their partners more often, including talking about financial matters and sexual needs and preferences. Improved communication also supported more equitable decision-making. In **HIKA**, for example, men learned to share power by practising communication and joint problem-solving with their wives. Improved communication and conflict resolution between couples also strengthened **parent–child relationships** by fostering a positive home environment and improving how parents talk with their children.



'Before we didn't talk. And the kids did not speak with their father. But now I feel good because they speak, and it's beneficial. Because if we are (all) talking...we will have a better life.'

— Woman, HIKA, DRC



'I've said before that our communication now is different unlike before when it was about "I'm the man, I'll let you know only what you need to know," but now I can say I know almost everything. So, now is better than before.'

— Woman, Gender Socialisation Training and Financial Literacy Education, Nigeria

Conflict management and de-escalation

Participants improved their ability to de-escalate conflict before it turned violent by using safety strategies such as pausing, staying quiet, or stepping away. In calmer moments, they were able to use constructive communication—such as expressing their feelings and thoughts and inquiring about their partner with more curiosity—to work through disagreements productively. These changes contributed to conflict resolution and improved relationship quality.



'Every time he came home, the house felt cold because we knew he would be angry. If [the children and I] had been laughing, we would stop...and the children would hide. [...] I developed courage, and learned how to talk with [my husband]. Now, when he is acting mean, I wait. I can go up to him and say something to calm him. I am not scared anymore.'

— Woman, HIKA, DRC



'Sometimes there are disputes between us, then we don't take that matter further, or we don't talk on that topic for some time, and later when we calm down then we talk to each other and find its solution'

— Man, Change Starts at Home, Nepal

Quality time as a couple

Programmes taught the importance of quality time as a family and created opportunities for couples to spend more quality time together as part of their curricula. In Rwanda, one of **Indashyikirwa's** most popular sessions, and an area where participants reported change, focused on encouraging couples to spend quality time together. Across programmes, couples described quality time as sharing meals, going on picnics, taking walks, spending more time together at home, and even talking about a programme organically—practices that contrast with social norms in some communities. In **Change Starts at Home in Nepal** and **REAL Fathers in Uganda**, men began coming home earlier, allowing more time for quality family interactions. Spending more quality time together contributed to improvements in relationship quality.



'He usually wanted to eat together, so sometimes I used to wait. But while waiting it used to be 9-10 at night, and I used to get angry...But nowadays he doesn't come home late. He comes home at time.'

— Woman, Change Starts at Home, Nepal



'Now he shares some things with me. When he comes home from the class he tells me about the subject matter of the class. We both talk to each other. We go separately in the program (to group meetings). But we talk with each other after relating to things taught in the classes.'

— Woman, Change Starts at Home, Nepal

Partner support for change

Participating in a programme as a couple helped partners support each other, reinforce learning, and hold each other accountable for changing relationship practices. In **REAL Fathers**, women reminded their husbands to attend sessions, helped ensure they had transportation, and practised take-home exercises with them. In **Change Starts at Home**, when a partner missed a session, couples described recounting radio episodes and discussing the main themes together. These forms of support enabled couples to participate more fully in the programme and strengthened their shared commitment to positive behaviour change.



‘We have the same opinion about the curriculum. We understand sessions the same, we even revise or remind the other in case one of us goes wrong. This has helped us not to repeat the wrong.’

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



‘So after that such disputes haven’t occurred, because both of us have learned something. If we hadn’t learned anything then those disputes may have created fights, but we both have trained together. So when I say—this is what you have learned in this program? She also realizes and the dispute goes away. And when she does the same to me also I understand and the disputes fade away.’

— Man, Change Starts at Home, Nepal

Less rigid gender roles

Participants described shifts toward less rigid gender roles. Programme activities such as critical reflection and dialogue about power imbalances helped men recognise how women are treated unfairly, while take-home exercises in which women and men tried tasks traditionally done by the opposite gender helped them understand their partner’s domestic workload. These experiences helped participants understand that gender roles are learned rather than fixed. They also recognised that inequitable roles can strain relationships.

In particular, men became more willing and confident to take on care and domestic work. However, this involvement was often framed as ‘helping’ and remained situational, occurring mainly when their wives were tired, ill, or busy.



“I used to think there were tasks designed for men and others designed for women, but when Indashyikirwa came I realised that a man can do any task...I thought that a man could not make the bed but now we both make the bed...I thought that a man cannot wash children but now I wash them without any problem.’

— Man, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



‘Today...he even cooks food. But he cannot cook food when I am there doing nothing; he only cooks food when he knows that I am doing other work.’

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda

There were also notable shifts in gender roles related to sex and work outside the home. Open communication about sexual desire and consent led to greater acceptance of women initiating or refusing sex, challenging the norm of a man’s ‘right’ to sex regardless of his wife’s interest. Women working outside of the home also gained support from men and families when they witnessed the financial benefits.



‘My husband and my mother-in-law are not against my work before they used to be opposed to this idea. My mother-in-law now supports me; whenever I go to work, she takes care of my children, helps with daily chores. My husband supports me too.’

— Woman, Zindagii Shoista, Tajikistan

Greater sexual and emotional intimacy

A few programmes—**Change Starts at Home**, **HICA**, **Indashyikirwa**, and **REAL Fathers**—engaged couples in discussions about sex, a topic many participants had never discussed with their partners. As couples’ communication improved, many began openly discussing sexual desires, deepening their understanding of their partners’ preferences and their right to consent. Discussing desires and agreeing on sex supported more consensual and equitable sex, deepened both emotional and sexual intimacy, and increased mutual pleasure among some couples.



‘After joining the program, [I learned that] everyone has sexual desires and just because you are shy, it shouldn’t stop you from telling our husbands. [...] Once we start talking, we’d also start talking about our own [desire] [laughs]. Later, I started telling him when I wanted to and when I didn’t want to. He’d understand me as well.’

— Woman, Change Starts at Home, Nepal

Even as women reported improvement in sexual intimacy, some women described having to accommodate their husbands’ sexual desires. In **Change Starts at Home**, both husbands and wives felt able to say ‘no’ to sex, but wives generally felt less able than their husbands to express desire or initiate sex.

Alongside shifts in sexual intimacy, couples also described a broader emotional closeness, shaped by improved communication, more quality time spent together, and greater sense of safety in the relationship. Couples described feeling more able to be open, vulnerable, and affectionate with each other.



'I didn't like my wife as I do now. Sometimes, I would stay away from home for two days...but since the mentorship, we are closer. I only call her mama.'

— Man, REAL Fathers, Uganda

GROUP MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Critical reflection and discussion

Critical self-reflection and facilitated group discussions enabled programme participants to examine deeply embedded **gender norms, power imbalances, and justifications for violence** that affect their own lives and those of their families, motivating them to shift their mindsets and behaviours. Facilitated dialogue and group activities encouraged self-reflection and helped participants understand positive and negative forms of power and recognise inequitable decision-making, IPV, and harmful parenting practices as forms of unfair **'power over'** others. By applying a power lens and exploring the causes and consequences of negative forms of power, participants began to challenge the acceptability of violence in the home. In **Indashyikirwa**, for example, recognising physical IPV as a negative form of power, identifying its consequences, and examining how it can become progressively worse helped men shift attitudes that justified 'minor' forms of physical IPV.

Emphasising the tangible benefits of equitable, non-violent households for couples and their children further supported participants to reimagine their relationships and motivated them to try new behaviours and roles as they began to see their lives differently.



'We used to think that the man holds all the power, but...We saw that the power over is the power that oppresses others and commits violence. Therefore, I no longer use that type of power with my wife. Instead I use the power with...we first talk and we do things we agree on.'

— Man, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



'Now I openly speak out and I use the power that I have in me and I feel there is something that I can do to make my family developed. That is a very big thing.'

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda

Learning and inspiration from groups

New behaviours are more likely to take hold and continue when individuals see peers modelling those behaviours and when they witness or experience positive results from adopting them. In **Bandebereho** and **REAL Fathers**, for example, men observed new ways of being partners and fathers by witnessing other participants and hearing how making changes benefited them and their families. In turn, they were inspired to try new behaviours.

Once they experienced the benefits of change first-hand, some programme participants shared what they learned with others, inspiring their relatives, friends, and community members to adopt similar changes.



‘When in village if we ladies are sitting together, I have shared with them as well. I shared the learning with them, I tell them that after the training my relationship with my husband has improved and as a result my kids are also doing good. So, I tell them that harmony within family is important and tell them that once the behavior between the husband and wife is good, this will make the kids’ behavior also better.’

— *Woman, Change Starts at Home, Nepal*

Peer support for new behaviours

The group-based approach also fosters a peer support network, with participants forming a shared sense of identity, seeking advice, encouraging each other to try more equitable roles and skills, and collectively engaging in shifting harmful attitudes and behaviours. This support is particularly important for overcoming other peer or social pressures.

Participants valued being able to rely on each other for support, and in some cases, groups continued meeting after the programme ended to help each other achieve their goals. For example, in **REAL Fathers**, young fathers described lasting relationships with mentors, who continued to provide support and advice after the programme ended.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES



The mechanisms of change contributed to intermediate outcomes that support the prevention of IPV.

Decreased acceptance of violence

Across programmes, participants showed lower acceptance of violence, including forms of physical IPV that had previously been justified or normalised as legitimate ways for men to discipline women, as well as some forms of emotional and sexual IPV that had not previously been recognised as violence.



'Sometimes you thought that as a woman your husband had to give you orders, or a husband could always harass you but we found out that it is not right and now it has changed.'

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



'They told me "what you are doing is not good. You will kill your wife, and after killing her, you won't find another wife like her." So, I understood that it is a shame and until now it has never happened again.'

— Man, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda

However, acceptance of IPV among participants had not disappeared entirely. In some contexts, participants continued to believe that violence could be a legitimate way for men to discipline their wives, or that women bore responsibility for provoking it.



'[a man] has to have power over his wife...if he feels like he has to hit her, then he must because she is his wife'

— Man, HIKA, DRC

Improved relationship quality

Both the amount and quality of time couples spent together contributed to improvements in relationship quality. These included more open and constructive communication, conflict resolution, shared power and decision-making, and a stronger sense of unity and intimacy. In Nigeria, participants in **Gender Socialisation Training and Financial Literacy Education** described more joyful and happy experiences with their partners, with some referring to their partner as their 'best friend'. Across programmes, couples reported greater peace and harmony at home, which motivated them to continue engaging in non-violent, equitable behaviours to sustain these changes.

Improvements in relationship quality also extended to children. In **HIKA**, couples who spent more quality time with their children, listened to them, and offered guidance reported having happier, more engaged children and stronger parent–child relationships.



'When my wife and I used to fight and have disagreements, children would also have tensions. They used to frown all the time. But after participating in this program we live harmoniously and everyone is happy. It wasn't like that before.'

— Man, *Change Starts at Home*, Nepal



'My neighbor asked me why I am always together with my husband without any problem, I told her it is because of the REAL mentorship. My husband and I talk to them about living peacefully and I told her if they do it, they will also be like us.'

— Woman, *REAL Fathers*, Uganda

More household role sharing

Women and men reported sharing household roles as a result of participating in their respective programmes—an important pathway to preventing IPV. Men increasingly engaged in cooking, cleaning, and childcare tasks in ways they had not before, and couples recognised that sharing tasks they had not previously shared could strengthen their relationships.



'I would just sit and do nothing, but I changed after the mentorship. I now share domestic responsibilities with my wife. We collect firewood together and I cook whenever my wife is away in the garden.'

— Man, *REAL Fathers*, Uganda



'Sometimes when he is at home doing some work, I help him. If he is putting woods on the house that he is building, I lift the woods and give them to him and then he says 'people who do not love each other, don't they see that they have missed something good?' Receiving the training was so helpful for us.'

— Woman, *Indashyikirwa*, Rwanda

While this represents a meaningful shift towards gender-equitable household roles, it is still partial. Men's involvement in care and domestic work was often framed as 'helping' their wives, suggesting an increased but circumstantial awareness of their wives' contributions, rather than a fundamental shift in how responsibilities are distributed.^{5,8,9,15} Despite gradual changes, household work continued to be viewed primarily as a woman's responsibility. Women still faced difficulties persuading men to participate, and in some contexts, both partners reported experiencing social stigma when men performed domestic roles, leading some men not to take on these responsibilities fully.

More consultative decision-making

Household decision-making became more consultative among partners who participated in couples' programmes. Men were more likely to consult their wives about income and assets, listen to and value their opinions, and sometimes act on their suggestions. However, husbands typically retained final authority, reflecting the persistent norm of men as the ultimate heads of households.



'We decide together and agree on what to do. Although...being he is the head of the family he can make the final decision...The things we decide together are the things we both agree on...When he decides and I see it is true, I agree with it. But in that case, he already has made the decision.'

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda



'Before, I used to make all the decisions by myself and sometimes, it was really difficult for me...but now I have my mom, my wife and my two children... We all discuss together and managing the loan money and other resources has been easier through it.'

— Man, Change Starts at Home, Nepal

Less disruptive conflict

Couples across programmes reported quarrelling less frequently, and disagreements that did arise were less likely to become negative or violent. Conflict did not disappear altogether, but its consequences changed: couples described still disagreeing at times without these disagreements escalating into violence.



'Before we quarrel, argue, but now instead of quarrelling, we will rather sit down and talk about things to do in future.'

— Woman, Gender Socialisation Training and Financial Literacy Education, Nigeria

'Since the training my husband has not been violent to me. We may still disagree on something, but it is not always negative, and it doesn't lead to violence. Before, I used to experience violence as my husband and we never discussed our issues.'

— Woman, Indashyikirwa, Rwanda

GENDER NORMS AND POWER DYNAMICS

Intimate partner violence is preventable: evaluations of all nine interventions show significant reductions in male-perpetrated IPV against women, along with improvements in communication, relationship quality, conflict management, and intimacy. Participants also described gradual but meaningful shifts towards more equitable gender and power dynamics, including greater sharing of household roles, more consultative decision-making, growing acceptability of women initiating or refusing sex, and decreasing acceptability of IPV.

However, these shifts can occur without fully transforming deeply-held gender norms. Men's involvement in household tasks was often framed as 'helping' rather than shared responsibility, and men typically retained final decision-making authority as heads of household. This suggests that transforming gender norms and power dynamics is a gradual and complex process that may not be fully realised within typical programme timeframes. This underscores the need for sustained, longer-term reflection, practice, and support as well as wider structural-level change to complement group-based couples' programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the included interventions, this brief offers recommendations for group-based programmes working with couples to prevent IPV.

1. Develop a clear theory of change.

Define programme goals and the pathways for achieving them during the design process. Use the theory of change to guide programme design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

2. Provide quality training, supervision, and support.

Facilitators need support to undergo their own personal transformation process, deliver the programme as intended, and create a safe and constructive group environment. One way to support this transformation

and assess facilitators' qualities is to have facilitators and their partners take part in an accelerated or shortened version of the programme themselves.

3. Promote active and equitable participation among couples.

Identify and address barriers to participation and engagement. Ensure gender balance among facilitators and participants, and provide equitable opportunities for both women and men to engage actively in joint sessions.

4. Use group-based, participatory, and experiential methods that encourage critical reflection, peer sharing and learning, and practical skill-building related to gender, power, and violence. Reinforce learning through take-home exercises that allow couples to share reflections and practise new skills and roles between sessions.

5. Frame the programme around healthy relationships and families.

Create opportunities for couples to spend quality time together and practise healthy relationship skills within sessions and at home. Help them see, experience, and share with others in the group how greater intimacy, communication, shared responsibility, and non-violence can benefit their relationships and families.

6. Prepare to address inequitable gender norms and power dynamics.

Proactively monitor for and mitigate messages and behaviours that reinforce inequality—for example, misinterpreting conflict management as women's responsibility to prevent violence. Facilitators can use self-reflection and group discussion to learn from different perspectives and question these norms and dynamics.

7. Strengthen the evidence base on programmatic processes of change.

Pair qualitative research with quantitative studies to identify key programme elements and mechanisms of change that shift gender and power dynamics and reduce IPV. These findings can provide insight into how and to what extent programmes support change, as well as essential information to improve programme design, implementation, and scale, and strengthen action to sustain violence prevention.

8. Assess programme intensity and duration.

Conduct rigorous quantitative and qualitative research to determine the level of intensity and duration required for group-based couples' programmes to produce sustained changes in gender norms, power imbalances, and violence outcomes.

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