

Country Consultation Meeting on Establishing a MenEngage Network in Rwanda

Background:

The Government of Rwanda has shown strong commitment to the promotion of gender equality and equity, the HIV response and family planning. This is evidenced by the establishment of the Ministry of Gender and Women's Development, the enactment of the law on matrimonial regimes, liberalities and succession to promote women's rights, and gender budgeting in all development programs. In addition, in 2004, the Government of Rwanda officially established a gender desk within the police to focus on the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and assistance to victims. For the HIV response, the government has made significant progress in growing the response and expanding prevention efforts and access to treatment, care and support. This demonstrates that the Government of Rwanda is very committed to promoting gender equality and equity, prevention of GBV and HIV, and the promotion of family planning and human rights, especially women and children's rights for equitable and sustainable development as it is reflected in its commitment to implementing international conventions and achieving the MDGs and the Vision 2020.

GBV and HIV are pervasive issues throughout the world and in Rwanda this is especially so due to the impact of 1994 genocide and the physical and sexual violence that occurred during and after. Rwandan cultural values portray a respectable man as one with integrity, taking care of the weaker and vulnerable (especially women and children), and protector of the family and community. Unfortunately, this identity has been eroded and violence against women and children is a critical problem. According to the Rwanda 2005 Demographic and Health survey, nearly one-third of women (31 percent) in Rwanda have suffered from physical violence since 15 years of age and in 19 percent of the cases, women suffered these acts of violence were during the last 12 months. In 47 percent of the cases, the perpetrator of these acts of violence was the husband or partner.¹ In 2007, the rape cases reported to the national police revealed that each day on average 10 women or girls were raped in Rwanda, with approximately 75% of the victims under 18 years old.

Reversing the HIV epidemic and reducing population growth are key priorities of the government. The Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) has identified the slowing of population growth as one of the four key priorities. Thus, family planning and reproductive health are crucial priorities and in the EDPRS the family planning target is to increase the proportion of women in the 15-49 who use modern contraception from 10% to 70%. As for the HIV response, though Rwanda has made considerable achievements, much work still needs to be done to reach the EDPRS target of reducing the prevalence rate among youth 15-24 from 1% to .5% by 2012.

The engagement of men in these issues is crucial as there is growing evidence that among young men and women violence and HIV risk is linked to early socialization which promotes certain gender norms as the norm.² For example, gender norms have been proven to be among the key underlying social factors influencing sexual behaviour and the norms related to masculinity are also linked to various forms of violence including GBV and ethnic-based violence. Given the unequal balance of power between young men and women, young men play a key role shaping the future of the HIV epidemic, prevention of GBV as well as

¹ Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2005.

² *Promoting More Gender-equitable Norms and Behaviors Among Young Men as an HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy*. Horizons Program/Instituto Promundo, 2006.

population growth.³ However, interventions that do incorporate a gender perspective tend to be mainly geared towards women and girls and fail to engage men and boys. In Rwanda, as well as other countries, interventions often only address men as the root of the problem—perpetrating violence and spreading HIV—but more needs to be done to proactively engage them as partners in the fight against HIV and GBV and the promotion of human rights, reproductive health and gender equality.

The engagement of men in these issues and in promotion of more equitable gender norms and positive forms of masculinity has proven very effective in many contexts, with strong research to support this. In order to link and promote this work across these areas a MenEngage Network has been established internationally. MenEngage is envisaged to be a global alliance of organizations and institutions that are involved in an array of research, interventions, and policy initiatives seeking to engage men and boys in effective ways to reduce gender inequalities and violence, and promote health and the well-being of women, men, and children. The alliance includes various government institutions, international organizations involved in this area, as well as local and national organizations which are in strategic positions to influence men and boys for full and effective engagement in gender equality and reducing violence. The goal of MenEngage is to increase the number of men and boys reached by interventions that promote and engage them in gender equality, health and prevention of violence and HIV.

Objectives:

Within Rwanda there are already some promising activities engaging men and in order to promote and grow this initiative within the Rwandan context, a country consultation meeting and two follow up meetings will be organized with the overall objective of building a sustainable action network for advocacy and mobilization strategies in an effort to effectively engage men and boys in GBV and HIV prevention and the promotion of family planning/reproductive health, gender equality, human rights, and conflict prevention. The specific objectives of the country consultation meeting are to:

- Bring together strategic partners, organizations, donors and experts in order to inform them about the various types of programming which has been successful in engaging men in gender equality, HIV, GBV, reproductive health, human rights and conflict resolution and present the strong research which has illustrated the positive impact of such programming;
- Strategize on how to incorporate within the Rwandan context different approaches to engaging men into existing activities and encourage networking;
- Determine how activities can reach out to as many people as possible in a sustainable manner;
- Engage various actors in policy advocacy, program development and management at all levels; and,
- Discuss strategies for mobilizing funds for programming engaging men in nationwide interventions.

The country consultation meeting will bring together 80 representatives from different organizations in one day country consultation meeting on 12 June 2008, with 2 follow up meetings in July and September 2008.⁴ The meetings will be coordinated by the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) in collaboration with UNDP. A steering committee has been engaged to provide input and ensure a participatory process including representatives from:

³ Barker, G., C. Ricardo. *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence*. World Bank, 2005.

⁴ See Annex1 for Participant List

- MIGEPROF
- CNLS
- UNDP
- UNIFEM
- UNFPA
- CARE International
- RWAMREC
- FACT Rwanda
- Imbuto Foundation
- PSI
- National Police
- Rwanda Defense Force

Presenters and facilitators will consist of both local organizations with activities engaging men as well as representatives from the region with expertise in this area.

Expected Outcomes of the workshop:

- Inventory of organizations working with men and boys for gender perspectives in Rwanda
- Commitment of different partners to support the MenEngage Network
- Formation of a MenEngage national steering committee
- Development of MenEngage operationalization strategy and action plan and validation by stakeholders

Time period:

1. Country consultation meeting to be held on 12 June 2008
2. Strategy and action plan draft completed and shared with stakeholders by July 2008
3. Follow up meetings in July and September 2008