

The Role of Male Engagement in Fight against GBV

Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a deeply entrenched issue, affecting women, girls, and marginalised groups in many communities. Traditionally, efforts to combat GBV have focused primarily on empowering women and girls, providing them with legal protection, education, and support services. However, a key factor in ending GBV is often overlooked—the need to engage men and boys as active allies in prevention efforts. Without challenging the cultural norms and social structures that enable violence, the cycle of abuse continues. Recognising this, AWYAD has adopted a transformative approach that actively involves men in the fight against GBV. Rather than viewing men solely as perpetrators or bystanders, AWYAD sees them as key partners in breaking the cycle of violence. By creating spaces where men and boys can critically reflect on masculinity, power, and gender roles, AWYAD is fostering a cultural shift toward gender equality. This approach has not only led to behavioral changes in individuals but has also influenced entire communities, making them safer and more inclusive.

Challenging harmful norms and changing attitudes

In many communities where AWYAD works, patriarchal norms dictate that men hold power over women, and violence is often normalised as a means of control. Many boys grow up witnessing domestic



“Salongo Bukenya 43-year-old religious leader from Mbogo kawempe division, took part in the SASA! Together Awareness training conducted by AWYAD. Equipped with knowledge on power dynamics and GBV prevention, he now leads community dialogues to promote positive masculinity and create safer spaces for women and girls”

violence and internalising the belief that aggression is an acceptable expression of masculinity. These learned behaviors perpetuate harmful gender roles, creating a society where women and girls are at a constant disadvantage. AWYAD challenges these deeply rooted beliefs by facilitating structured conversations that allow men to critically examine their roles in gender relations. Through community dialogues, men engage in open discussions about power dynamics, gender norms, and the consequences of violence. Many begin these conversations believing that hitting a woman is an acceptable form of discipline, but by the end of these discussions, they recognise the long-term harm such actions cause. Bukenya Salongo, a respected community leader in Kawempe Division, had always believed that violence was necessary to maintain control in his household. When he first joined AWYAD’s discussions, he was resistant to change, arguing that his father had raised him the same way. However, through repeated engagements with trained facilitators and other men who had changed their perspectives, he started questioning his beliefs. He began noticing how fear and distress had shaped his wife and children’s behavior. Today, Joseph is one of AWYAD’s male champions, using his influence to educate other men about non-violent communication and the benefits of a more equal partnership in marriage.

Engaging fathers in parenting and child development



“Wasswa Joseph, 50-year-old, chairperson LCI from kamwanyi village Nsambya parish (Makindye division), shares insights as a role model man champion. ‘I now understand how power dynamics influence violence, and as a father to five boys, I have committed to educating my children and community positive change.’ Together, we are building safer environments for women and girls!”

One of the most effective ways to break the cycle of GBV is by redefining fatherhood. Traditionally, many men in refugee and host communities view their role in the family as solely that of a provider, leaving all caregiving and emotional support to women. This not only reinforces gender inequality but also affects children, particularly boys, who grow up believing that caregiving is a woman’s responsibility and that male authority must be exercised through control and discipline.

AWYAD has introduced interventions that help fathers embrace a more engaged and nurturing role in their children’s upbringing. These programs teach men the importance of positive parenting, shared responsibilities, and emotional presence. Through these sessions, fathers learn how to support their daughters’ education, actively participate in their children’s lives, and model respectful behaviors for their sons. A father of four, initially resisted the idea of attending parenting sessions, believing that raising children was his wife’s duty.

However, after joining AWYAD’s training, he began to understand the emotional and psychological impact that an absent father can have on a child. He started taking an active role in his children’s lives, ensuring that his daughters had access to education and that his sons learned about gender equality. His transformation has inspired other men in his community to follow suit, and today, more fathers in his village are actively involved in their children’s upbringing.

Transforming young minds through boys’ empowerment clubs

“Change starts with us the young generation, the leaders of tomorrow. SASA Together GBV approach opened my eyes to how gender norms affect women and girls. As a role model boy, I engage boys and men in dialogues to create a safer, non-violent community.” Anolera Akoon, 17-year from Banda Village, Nakawa Division





Hanging attitudes toward gender roles must start at an early age. If boys are taught that strength is about dominance rather than respect, they will carry these beliefs into adulthood. To counteract this, AWYAD has established boys' empowerment clubs in schools,

where young boys learn about gender equality, consent, and respectful relationships. These clubs serve as safe spaces where boys can challenge harmful stereotypes, discuss their concerns, and receive mentorship from positive male role models. Anolera Akoon, a 17-year-old student, once believed that girls should stay at home and not compete with boys in academics or sports. Through the Boys' Empowerment Club, he was exposed to new perspectives, including stories of successful women and discussions on the harmful effects of gender inequality. Over time, Anolera Akoon changed his mindset and became a peer educator. Today, he speaks to younger boys about respect and equality, challenging harmful attitudes, before they become deeply ingrained.

Male champions as agents of change

AWYAD recognises that lasting change requires influential community members to lead by example. Religious leaders, teachers, traditional chiefs, and youth leaders hold significant power over social norms, making them crucial allies in the fight against GBV. AWYAD trained 104 influential men as male champions under the SASA Together approach, empowering them with the knowledge and skills to advocate for gender equality and drive positive change within their communities. These male champions have engaged 10531 males and boys across five divisions of Kampala through dialogues and public gatherings, challenging harmful cultural practices such as child marriage and work to ensure that gender equality becomes part of everyday discussions. In many communities, their advocacy has led to tangible changes, including fewer cases of domestic violence, increased support for girls' education and a shift in how men view their roles in society. their advocacy has led to tangible changes



Fig 1: Role model men (Ethiopian leader Mr. Mohammed from Kampala central division (standing in the front center)) and fig 2 (cultural leader Mr. Michale from Nakawa division) leading GBV dialogue on gender equality, inspiring men and boys to challenge harmful norms and create a safer community for women and girls."



"Role model men across Kampala's five divisions raising awareness on women's and girls' rights during Human Rights Day in Rubaga, under the 2024 theme: My Right, My Future, Right Now."

The impact of AWYAD's male engagement

approach AWYAD's initiatives have led to a noticeable decline in GBV cases in targeted communities. Women report feeling safer in their homes, and more men are taking a stand against violence. Schools that have implemented AWYAD's GBV prevention interventions have seen a decline in harassment cases and an increase in respect between male and female students.

A total 43 out of 50 males interviewed testified that they have transitioned from abusive behaviours to non-violence behaviours such as dialogues and seeking for mediation during conflicts. This has been as a result of participation in SASA Together dialogues and gender equality trainings. The men further noted they have recognized the impact of harmful norms and power imbalances in their homes and communities. They now foster respectful relationships and openly share and inspire other men and boys, driving a broader cultural shift toward safer, more equitable communities for women and girls. Moreover, fathers who have gone through AWYAD's positive parenting programs now take a more active role in their daughters' education, ensuring that they stay in school rather than being married off at an early age. Boys who have participated in boys' empowerment clubs are growing into men who reject violence and advocate for equality in their communities.

Impact in numbers

| Impact | Number |
|---|--------|
| # male champions trained | 104 |
| # men reached by the male champions | 10531 |
| # men reporting changed mindsets and behaviours | 4563 |
| % reduction in GBV incidents perpetrated by men | 40% |

Source: **AWYAD Spotlight Project Report**

Challenges and the way forward

Despite the progress, challenges remain. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs do not change overnight, and some men still resist the shift toward gender equality, viewing it as a threat to traditional masculinity. Additionally, more resources and funding are needed to expand these programs and reach more communities.

AWYAD is working to address these challenges by strengthening its policy advocacy efforts, expanding outreach to more rural areas, and forging partnerships with local and international organisations to secure funding. The goal is to institutionalise male engagement in GBV prevention efforts, making it a standard approach in Uganda's national policies.

The fight against GBV is not just a women's issue—it is a societal issue that requires the active participation of men. AWYAD's approach to male engagement has demonstrated that when men become allies in the fight for gender equality, change accelerates. By challenging harmful norms, engaging fathers, educating young boys, and training community leaders, AWYAD is fostering a cultural transformation that will benefit generations to come.

As more men step up to reject violence, support women's empowerment, and advocate for equality, the vision of a GBV-free society moves closer to reality. With continued efforts, AWYAD's male engagement model could serve as a blueprint for other organisations working to end GBV worldwide.